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Social silence: a phenomenological study of the social experience of deaf students from hearing families in a mainstream educational setting

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SOCIAL SILENCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE SOCIAL
EXPERIENCE OF DEAF STUDENTS FROM HEARING FAMILIES IN A
MAINSTREAM EDUCATIONAL SETTING

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A DOCTORAL THESIS

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Education

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2011

Dedication and Acknowledgements

The culmination of my research and the completion of this project could not have come to fruition without the guidance and support of so many.

First, I would like to thank Northeastern University for providing me with the tools to understand the importance of sound, reliable research. Through the coursework in the College of Professional Studies, I was able to build and hone my skills as a researcher that allowed me to create and share this paper. Without Northeastern I would not have had the distinct pleasure of meeting and working with my advisor, Dr. John Caron. John, your endless guidance and undying support inspired me to work and focus at a level I was unaware I possessed. Your encouragement and gentle vote of confidence motivated me to investigate this topic with fervor and passion. I am forever grateful for your time as my mentor and friend.

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ABSTRACT**SOCIAL SILENCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE SOCIAL
EXPERIENCE OF DEAF STUDENTS FROM HEARING FAMILIES
IN A MAINSTREAM EDUCATIONAL SETTING**

For centuries past, children with a hearing loss were educated separately from their hearing peers. With the advent and passing of several legislative and Congressional mandates such as *The Rehabilitation Act*, *The Education for all Handicapped Children Act* and *No Child Left Behind*, children with a hearing loss are now being educated in classes surrounded by their hearing peers. Some believe the education of children with a hearing loss in a mainstream, academic setting will provide them with the tools they will need to be successful in a predominantly, hearing society. Unfortunately, the social and emotional consequences of this type of academic placement for children with a hearing loss can lead to feelings of loneliness, frustration and isolation.

Parental and family influence may have the potential to sway a child's belief as to the academic placement that is most suitable for them. The following is a phenomenological research study that shares the experiences of two adolescents from hearing families who attend school in the mainstream academic setting.

Nicolle Sisia

Dr. John V. Caron

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Chapter I: The Research Problem

In years past, students with a hearing loss were educated at Schools for the Deaf. The primary emphasis among educators of the deaf had been communication, with academic achievement receiving secondary attention (Moore, 2001). In recent years, Oliva (2004) suggests that these academic struggles have not been a result of deafness per se but rather of educators' and policymakers' decisions about how to teach children with a hearing loss (3). In 1973, an educational shift began to occur. Congress passed the *Rehabilitation Act*, protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities in programs and activities that receive federal funds. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act prohibited excluding students with special needs, such as those with a hearing loss, from learning in a mainstream academic setting. In 1975, President Gerald Ford signed into law the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, also known as Public Law 94-142, which extended equal opportunities to all children with disabilities (Oliva, 2004). Now, common practice is to educate children with disabilities in the same academic environment alongside children without disabilities. Teachers and school administrators in public K-12 education commonly refer to this practice as *mainstreaming*. In the years that followed the legislative changes, many students with a hearing loss began to be educated in mainstream, academic settings.

In a longitudinal research study spanning over 25 years, Moore (2001) followed the trend of the educational placements of deaf students (1973-1998). He initially found 54% of deaf children were educated in Schools for the Deaf and 42% were placed in mainstreamed settings. Twenty-five years later, these numbers have drastically changed. In 1998, the number of students being educated in Schools for the Deaf dropped from

54% to 29.9% while mainstream placements jumped from 42% to 64%. The philosophy of educating students with special needs in mainstream educational settings has several benefits. For example, special needs students are taught the same curriculum along side students without disabilities, receiving the accommodations needed to succeed. Another benefit has been the continuing emphasis on improved academic achievement and maintaining academic standards at the worldwide level (Moore, 2001). While including students with a hearing loss in a mainstream educational setting may foster stronger academic development, the communication barrier that these students experience has social and emotional consequences for the child. In addition, a successfully mainstreamed student has a significant advantage over a non-mainstreamed student, in that they have had more experience with the hearing world, they can operate more effectively in the job market, and their language skills are better developed. Mainstreamed children are often confident and are more prepared for life in a predominantly hearing world.

When a child with a hearing loss is placed in a mainstream educational setting, the problem of socialization emerges for these students. The social experience of students with a hearing loss in mainstream educational settings is often overlooked because instruction, resources, and teacher in service training are focused on academic outcomes. The new social order of mainstreaming, instead of introducing the Deaf world to deaf children, often leads them to a new kind of isolation (Oliva, 2004). Kral and O'Donoghue (2010) have noted psychological disorders are two to five times as common in deaf children than their hearing peers. In addition, they observed that many deaf teens have reduced self-esteem and uncertainty about their identity.

Problem

Access to federal funding has enabled public schools to educate students with a hearing loss within district by hiring educators who are specially trained to meet their individual needs. School districts in prosperous communities in particular are able to allocate additional resources and academic support to educate deaf students. One such secondary school in an affluent area on the east coast of the United States has been educating students with hearing loss for more than ten years. With 1,200 students in the entire district (K-12), families are close knit and very involved in the education of their children. Being that the majority of the residents in the area come from sizeable wealth, the district has been fortunate enough to pass annual budgets that allow for programs to be implemented and specialists to be hired as needed.

Within the district, there are two families who have children with a hearing loss. One of the children, *Chelsea, has a profound, bilateral hearing loss. Her loss is so severe that speech is minimal, and she relies on American Sign Language (ASL) to communicate with her parents, teachers and peers. She has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that requires the services of an on-staff interpreter, a Teacher of the Deaf and a Speech Pathologist. The other student, *Jake, also has a bilateral hearing loss; however, his hearing loss is much less severe than Chelsea's. For example, he does not rely on American Sign Language to communicate or require an interpreter in class. Chelsea and Jake both come from hearing families with no history of hearing loss, another factor that influences their social experience.

Chelsea's greatest struggle is her ability to socialize with her peers. She sits alone during lunch, is never asked to join teams or clubs and is often excluded from parties or social gatherings hosted by her peers. Her expressive language is poor and she cannot follow a conversation with multiple speakers. Chelsea's hearing loss has had a profound impact on her socialization experiences in high school. She is an isolated, linguistic minority who believes that she will never be "just like everyone else". Chelsea has an interpreter who attends classes with her throughout the school day. Aside from the Teacher of the Deaf who is also fluent in American Sign Language, all of Chelsea's teachers rely on the interpreter for communication assistance. When he is out, the teachers must write information for Chelsea or she will miss the lesson. Chelsea does her best to lip-read but when the teacher turns away from her, she is no longer able to follow the lesson.

Although Jake has a less significant hearing loss than Chelsea, he also struggles to socialize with his peers. He tries to show his self-confidence by speaking with his peers and attempting to involve himself in class projects. However, after careful observation in both classroom and social settings, I can see how his hearing loss impacts his ability to foster and develop significant friendships. Jake has an Individualized Education Plan that affords him accommodations such as a reader for his exams, preferential seating and extended time to complete classroom assignments and exams.

Teachers, school administrators and staff have been very welcoming of Chelsea and Jake. They diligently follow each and every one of the accommodations listed on their Individualized Education Plans. However, the teachers, administrators and staff lack an understanding of how Chelsea and Jake's hearing loss affects their social

experience. The impact of being from hearing families also contributes to a lack of understanding about the students' sense of self. Most teachers who teach in mainstreamed settings are not trained to meet the social and emotional needs of students like Chelsea and Jake, making the problem even more significant.

Significance

Tests for hearing loss are more precise than in years past. The rapid identification of hearing loss has resulted in children receiving intervention services far earlier than before. Detection of hearing loss, combined with educational interventions, leads to more deaf students being placed in mainstream settings. While deaf students in mainstream educational settings receive resources designed to support academic achievement, the social challenges these students face is often not understood. Moreover, the social experience of deaf students from hearing families is absent from the literature on students with special needs in mainstream academic settings.

Approximately 90% of deaf children come from hearing parents (Oliva, 2004). Thus, the majority of deaf adolescents are growing up in hearing households. It is within the home that values and culture are transmitted from generation to generation. "Culture is a set of behaviors, attitudes, values and traditions shared by a group of people transmitted from one generation to the next" (Meyers, 2008, p. 80). Norms and values are transmitted in the home. Family environment and parents' beliefs influence children's attitudes, values and faith (Meyers, 2008). Juang and Silbereisen's (2002) study found that adolescents whose parents exhibited high levels of warmth and involvement were more likely to have higher levels of personal competence and academic achievement. In

addition, Gottfried, Fleming and Gottfried (1998) reported that students whose home environments provided opportunities for learning were significantly more likely to develop an internal motivation for academic success. While the home may influence how a deaf child learns societal norms and views their education, many are placed in educational settings that are unfamiliar with deafness. Schools are not equipped to meet these students' social and emotional needs. These issues influenced the formation of my research questions for this study.

Research Questions

The major research questions this study examined are: What is the social experience of deaf students in a mainstream academic setting? What is the impact of having hearing parents on the deaf student's social experience in school? To gain a deeper understanding of these phenomena, I conducted a qualitative exploration of the experiences of two adolescent deaf students growing up in hearing families and attending a mainstream high school. Using a phenomenological approach, I explored the students' lived experiences in their high school setting.

By definition, phenomenology is the study of "phenomena": appearances of things, or how such things appear in our experience (Creswell, 2007). It encompasses the way we experience interactions or events and the meanings they have for us.

Phenomenology provides a framework for studying an individual's conscious experience from that individual's perspective (Smith, Flowes and Larkin 2009). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain an understanding of the formation of the deaf adolescents' identities through the lived experiences of deaf adolescents, their hearing

parents and mental health professionals who have worked with this population.

“Phenomenology enables researchers to examine everyday human experience in close, detailed ways” (DeMarris & Lapan, 2004, p.56). Using a phenomenological research design for this study was beneficial because it allowed me to better understand the social struggles of deaf adolescents in a mainstream educational setting.

Chapter II: Literature Review

There is considerable literature surrounding the educational experience of deaf children. My review of the literature synthesizes several themes that were relevant to my study. First, I provided a brief history of how deaf students were educated in the United States. The rules and principles that govern today's educational system were not the same in years past. To understand how the educational experience of deaf students has evolved to its present state, it is important to examine how we began.

Second, I examined the laws that have changed education for the deaf. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act-Public Law 94-142 (1975) have impacted how public schools educate deaf children. A review of the literature on legislation for students with special needs assisted in my understanding of the accommodations now granted to deaf children, their impact, how they are provided and whether or not they have helped. In addition, these laws are examined to determine if the accommodations schools are required to offer are academically based or whether they address the socialization needs of students with a hearing loss.

Third, I examined literature focused on the inclusive classroom. A century ago, students with disabilities were educated in separate schools and classrooms. It is important to understand how the educational system has shifted and the impact it has made on students with special needs in mainstream educational settings.

Fourth, my review of the literature examined research on socialization experience of deaf children, specifically, that of deaf children from hearing families. The literature on adolescent socialization provides insight into how a deaf student's ability to socialize

(in particular with hearing peers) differs from adolescents without a hearing loss. Many deaf children come from hearing parents and an understanding of how these children view their social experiences helped me capture the essence of the socialization experience of the students in my study.

A Brief History of Deaf Education

The earliest recorded information about the deaf dates back to the Bible where it states, “And they bring unto him (Jesus) one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech... And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain” (Mark 7:32-35 as cited by Camp, 2005). From early on, deafness was believed to be an act of God. In the years that followed, they were not allowed to attend religious services, own land, receive an education or marry others who were deaf. It was believed that parents who lived an impure life were being punished by God and given a deaf child. The deaf were placed in asylums, referred to as barbarians and cast out from society.

In 530 AD, Benedictine monks created a gestural system to be used to circumvent their vow of silence. While there is no steadfast proof, Camp (2005) stated that these gestures may have later been used to communicate with deaf children. During the Middle Ages, the deaf were still unaccepted by society. It was believed that deafness was a choice and those who could not hear were defying God’s teachings. The deaf were not allowed through the church doors. The philosophy towards deafness and its’ impact

on cognition began to change in the 16th century. Italian and Spanish educators did not believe the deaf to be incapable of thought. In 1620, Spanish educator Pablo Bonet taught the deaf sons of a nobleman to speak using a one handed alphabet. Bonet later wrote the first book on deaf education.

The greatest change for deaf education came in the 18th century. The establishment of the Institute for the Deaf in France was the culmination of thirty years work by two catholic priests, the Abbe Charles Michel de l'Epee and Abbe Roch-Ambroise Sicard (Mirzoeff, 1992). Together, l'Epee and Sicard developed a methodical sign language based on signs they had learned from deaf people. L'Epee opened the first School for the Deaf, affording an education to those whom it had been denied for centuries prior. Considered the, "Father of Sign Language", l'Epee continued to support equality for the deaf, establishing not only the first school but also the first religious and social associations for the deaf in Paris. In 1776, he wrote, *The Instruction of Deaf and Mute Persons Using Methodical Signs*, the first book advocating for the use of natural signs and in 1788, he penned the first dictionary of French signs learned from deaf informants (Camp, 2005).

Word of l'Epee and Sicard's success with deaf students quickly spread to the United States. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, a graduate from Yale University was studying to become a minister. Gallaudet's neighbor, a wealthy doctor, had a daughter who was deaf. Gallaudet tried to teach the young girl to read and write and he had some success. Impressed by this accomplishment, the doctor encouraged Gallaudet to consider opening the first School for Deaf children in America. The clergymen's association of Connecticut had reported years earlier that there were approximately 89 deaf people in

the state (Cokely & Baker-Shenk, 1980). Money was raised to send Gallaudet to Europe to examine the educational system and strategies used to teach the deaf.

While in Europe, Gallaudet met Sicard and his students. Gallaudet was most impressed with Laurent Clerc, a graduate of the school for the deaf opened by l'Epee and Sicard. During his stay, Gallaudet learned signs from Clerc and teaching methods from Sicard. Motivated to bring these signs and teachings back home, Gallaudet convinced Clerc to join him in America. On the 52-day voyage back to America, Clerc continued to teach Gallaudet sign language and in turn, he was taught spoken English. It was here that American Sign Language was born (Cokely, Baker-Shenk, 1980). On April 15, 1817, Clerc and Gallaudet opened the first School for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut. In the years that followed, Schools for the Deaf opened in New York, Kentucky, Virginia, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Quebec.

After centuries of isolation, communities of deaf individuals were beginning to emerge. A combination of newspaper publications, social gatherings, writers, philosophers and activists were proving that those with a hearing loss were self-sufficient. Sadly, many misinformed scientists, researchers and political figures believed in order to keep the life stream pure, deafness must be eradicated (Mirzoeff, 1992). An international campaign was launched to eliminate both sign language and deafness in order to maintain social control. At the Milan Congress of 1880, it was decided that sign language of any kind would be outlawed in deaf education and schools must educate children using an oral method of communication, relying solely on speech and lipreading. This time was considered, "The Dark Ages" of deaf education. The deaf were unable to communicate in a manner that was most natural to them. Anecdotal accounts reveal deaf

students would use speech during instructional hours but secretly sign in the dorms with their peers (Lane, 1984).

Through their research, Camp, (2005), Cokely & Baker-Shenk (1980), Lane (1984) and Mirzoeff (1992) analyzed the historical transformation of deaf education. Such forcible attempts to eliminate deafness have ceased, but the debate continues as to whether or not it is better to attempt to integrate deaf people into the mainstream through speech or to promote a distinct linguistic culture through sign language (Mirzoeff, 1992). As the literature illustrates, educational equality for the deaf has been an uphill battle. As a community, they have developed a language system that holds linguistic and syntactic features of a spoken language. The establishment of academic institutions continued to provide the deaf with opportunities to gain equality in a predominately, hearing society. While understanding the history of Deaf education is important, the legislative and legal aspects of educating students with a hearing loss should also be considered.

Legislative and Legal Mandates

The literature examining the history of deaf education is both comprehensive and detailed. While members of the Deaf community have endured centuries of educational inequality, a shift has occurred in the last 40 years. In the past, children with disabilities, including many deaf and hard of hearing children, were frequently left out of state and district level assessment and accountability systems (Gallaudet University, Clerc Center, 2011). In many cases, children with a hearing loss were not exposed to general education

curriculum, therefore not learning enough to attend college or be considered for competitive employment.

The Rehabilitation Act (Public Law 93-112) of 1973 supported and promoted the rights of individuals with disabilities. Reauthorized again in 2004, The Rehabilitation Act sought to:

- Empower individuals with disabilities to maximize employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence, inclusion and integration into society through state-sponsored vocational rehabilitation programs, community-based rehabilitation centers, independent living centers and client assistance programs (Title 1).
- Authorize the conduct of research and training activities in the field of disabilities (Title 2).
- Support the continued professional development of those who provide services to and the establishment of special projects and demonstration programs benefiting individuals with disabilities (Title 3).
- Justify the creation of the National Council on Disabilities to promote policies, programs, practices, and procedures as promulgated by this Act (Title 4).
- Ensure that the federal government leads the nation in providing employment opportunities to individuals with disabilities in its different agencies, and in programs receiving federal financial assistance, and prohibits the practice of discrimination on the basis of disability in all levels of the federal government (Title 5). (Retrieved from Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center, 2011).

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is separated into five titles (sections). For the purpose of this research, I examined Title 5, specifically Section 504, Nondiscrimination under Federal Grants and Programs. Title 5, Section 504 prohibits discrimination against “qualified” (he or she meets the academic and technical standards requisite to admission or participation in the recipients’ education program or activity) individuals with disabilities (Kaplin, & Lee, 2007). This gives students with a hearing loss the right to full access of academic and public activities, both during and after school hours. In this study, I can say without hesitation that Chelsea’s school district has made every academic accommodation necessary to support her educational success.

With regard to this study, there appears to be one caveat of The Rehabilitation Act. Without confusion, Title 5, Section 504 explicitly states the legal mandates now required of institutions and organizations that receive public funding. However, with the research for this study completed, I have yet to find documentation that these accommodations include social and emotional support for students with a hearing loss. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is not the only federal legislation that has had a significant impact on students with a hearing loss. Both the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) supported the immersion and equality of deaf children in public schools.

No Child Left Behind was authorized in 2002 as Public Law 107-110 with the ambition of raising the academic standards of all students, regardless of age, race or disability. Schools were now required to make every available and reasonable

accommodation for students with disabilities, including those with a hearing loss (National Education Association, n.d.). Much like the Rehabilitation Act, No Child Left Behind does not offer educators guidelines that will meet the social and emotional needs of deaf children.

The Education of All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) of 1975 was reauthorized in 2004 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Similar to No Child Left Behind, IDEA required that all children with disabilities be provided with free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center, 2011). For deaf students, this means they are no longer excluded from district and state assessments. In years prior, deaf students did not have access to the general education curriculum, thereby making them unable to participate in state and local assessment exams. Today, NCLB and IDEA work together to guarantee students with a hearing loss receive all of the academic supports necessary for them to succeed.

Many educators, parents and members of the Deaf community do not believe public schools are the least restrictive environment for deaf children. Claire Ramsey's (2007) year long study of deaf children in the mainstream setting supports the notion that children with a hearing loss are not receiving the emotional supports necessary to feel socially at ease with their peers. Ramsey, who is both hearing and fluent in American Sign Language, observed three deaf boys in a hearing classroom. She witnessed how they interacted with their teacher and their peers (both hearing and deaf). At the completion of her research, Ramsey's study revealed several important facts: First, she

concluded school professionals felt they were required by law, not by choice, to service the three deaf boys in the class. School professionals followed the laws as stated however several commented that they did not believe this was the best educational *or* social placement for these children. While the specific boys in this study were academically involved in class, their interactions with their hearing peers were highly constrained and not developmentally helpful (74). Ramsey's study appears to support my observations of students with a hearing loss in mainstream educational settings. One of the students I have observed over the last three years is academically equal to, if not somewhat above her classmates, but her ability to socialize with her hearing peers is weak. She cannot understand or provide information in the manner that is common of hearing adolescents. However, when I see her with others who are fluent in American Sign Language, she is socially appropriate. She is able to follow a conversation, ask questions, expand on thoughts, request clarification if the message is unclear and conclude a conversation in a suitable manner. Ramsey's study identifying the socialization struggles of the three deaf boys is remarkably similar to that of Chelsea's difficulty interacting with her hearing peers.

Work by other scholars continues to assert the belief that mainstreaming children with a hearing loss is not what is best. In her account of the history of special education, Winzer (1993) stated,

“Mainstreaming remains an unproven educational panacea; there seems to be no true answer as to whether regular class settings are superior for exceptional students. Most of the zeal for the practice has stemmed from its anticipated effects in the social and emotional domain, which includes removal of the stigma associated with special education classes, enhancement of the of the status of handicapped youngsters with their

non-handicapped peers [and] promotion of learning through modeling of appropriate behaviors by non-handicapped students (385).”

In essence, Winzer believes there is no steadfast proof that indicates mainstreaming as the best educational or social approach to use with students who have special needs (such as a hearing loss). To link Winzer’s philosophy to Chelsea, her placement in a hearing school appears to have had a somewhat opposite effect of its’ original intention. It is at school where Chelsea feels most isolated. This stems from her hearing loss, the one, albeit significant, detail that identifies her as different. While the legal mandates of the Rehabilitation Act, No Child Left Behind and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act believes she would be best educated in this academic setting, in no way does it account for the isolation, seclusion and loneliness that Chelsea experiences each day.

The literature reviewed provided me with the foundation necessary to understand how the legal system has influenced academic and social experiences of students with a hearing loss. In addition, research focused on deaf students in the mainstream setting questions if this type of placement is suitable for their social and emotional needs. I believed also exploring the history of inclusive classrooms and its’ place in educational system assisted in my understanding of how and why students who need academic support are placed in settings with those do not. The literature continued to put into perspective the present socialization and educational issues that remain unresolved.

The Inclusive Classroom

In years past children with disabilities received little, if any, formal education. “In 1975, Congress sought to alleviate the injustice then suffered by millions of handicapped children who were receiving inadequate or nonexistent education” (Large, 1980, p. 213). However, the tradition of educational segregation existed long before this time. During the middle to late 19th century, special schools for those with disabilities continued to be created (The Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, 2007). These schools claimed to educate children while also serving as residential facilities and institutions. As seen in 1817 with the establishment of The American School for the Deaf, schools were founded with the goal of separating students with special needs.

Between 1850 and 1950, special classes with people trained to care for individuals with disabilities began to develop as teachers noted differences among students. During these years, groups of parents of children with developmental disabilities started schools and programs. Although these developments were sporadic, they began to positively change ideas about teaching these children. Attitudes continued to change in the mid-1920s as educators began to see the value of education and community involvement for individuals with disabilities. Still, children continued being placed in institutions, as many parents believed these facilities offered the only educational opportunities. (The Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, 2007).

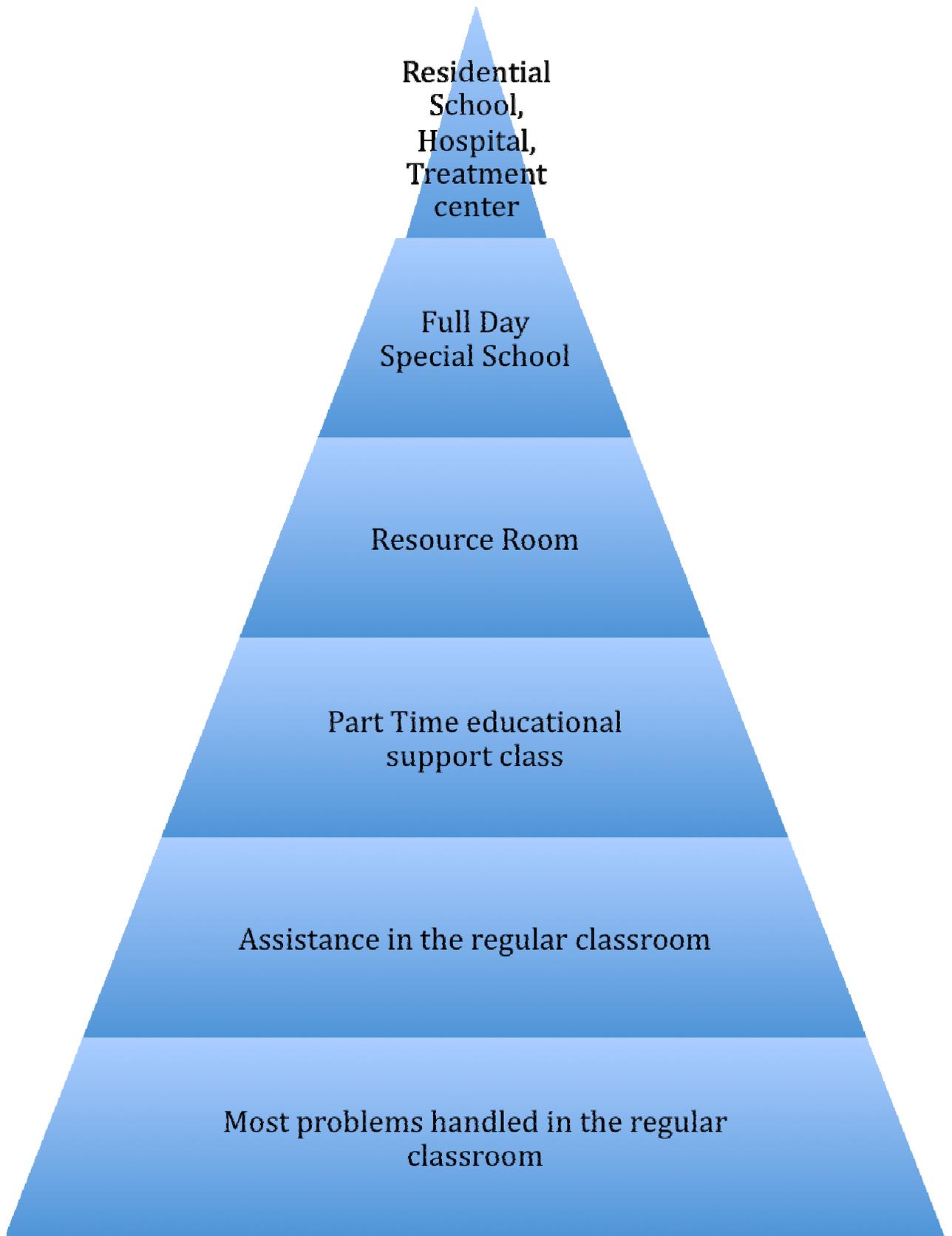
Identification of learning disabilities as its own distinct category of exceptionality began with research completed by Alfred Strauss and Heinz Werner during the 1930s and

1940s. Strauss and Werner were interested in investigating the notion of “brain injury” among children (Osgood, 2005). Through their research, they found common characteristics of distractibility, challenging behavior and perceptual weakness amongst the children examined. The research strongly suggested that significant numbers of children exhibited cognitive dysfunction and problems in school performance that could not be explained by traditional constructs of mental deficiency (Osgood, 2005). Over the next several decades, identifications including, “brain injured”, “deaf and dumb”, and “handicapped” became commonplace amongst professionals, teachers and parents. In April 1963, noted special educator Samuel Kirk of the University of Illinois described the status of the research to that point and proposed the term *learning disabilities* to describe the behaviors of children who were experiencing such troubles in school (Osgood, 2005). The term seemed to resonate with those associated with the field and this soon became a new, “catch phrase” in the American educational system.

Romaine Mackie (1965), a leading assembler and evaluator of special education statistics, believed, “It has been demonstrated that most handicapped children can have satisfying, productive lives if they receive appropriate education, training, and care. Thus, America cannot afford to ignore the gap that remains (p.39).” Mackie’s insight resulted in a greater awareness and identification of special education as an entity that was unique within the public sector. It possessed a structure specific to the needs of its’ students and continued to gain recognition and acceptance by practitioners, professionals, administrators, teachers, parents, legislators, and the public.

In 1962, Maynard Reynolds, former chairman of education at the University of Minnesota, suggested a pyramid-like framework to describe various programs serving

students with special needs. His framework suggested that even in the early 1960s there was a strong recognition that many students with special needs could be served in the regular classroom, especially if provided with consultation or supplementary teaching services (Osgood, 2005). With the bottom of the pyramid labeled “most problems handled in a regular classroom,” it ascended to include assistance in the regular classroom, a part time educational support class, resource room, full time special day school and continued up to the most severe cases that would need a residential institution, hospital or treatment center.



Reynolds' posited that the more severe a student's condition, the higher they would be on the pyramid. Reynolds provided no data on the number of students at each level, in part because he commented that there was—and should be—considerable fluidity of student movement among the stages and overlap among the stages themselves (Osgood, 2005). Reynolds' strategy challenged the belief that students with special needs should be separated from those in the mainstream setting. In addition, he argued that the most successful way to improve the education of students with special needs was to place them in regular, inclusive classes and provide them with the academic supports they needed to be successful.

Having an understanding of the history of the inclusive classroom and how it began was an important factor in my research. Understanding the shift away from academic isolation to one of inclusion assisted in my understanding of how and why many deaf students are now educated in mainstream academic settings. One caveat however, is that the inclusion model does not succinctly outline how this type of academic placement may impact student socialization. "Inclusion potentially affects identity and personal development. We need to ask ourselves what it really means to be the only deaf child or youth in a hearing classroom in terms of self-perceptions, social growth and relationships" (Leigh, 1999, p 1). In essence, a deaf child's educational experience of being placed in an inclusion setting may impact the way they construct their identity. The inclusion class (conducted using spoken English) is within an educational establishment operated by hearing people who tend not to know or use American Sign Language in any capacity (Swisher, 1989).

Adolescent Socialization: General

Psychologists, researchers and theorists have formed varying theories regarding adolescent socialization. Through direct interactions, observations, reinforcements and punishments, adolescents learn which behaviors are and are not socially acceptable (Ormrod, 2008). In time, they develop their own ideas about what is deemed to be appropriate or inappropriate in a given setting. By observing these young adults, assumptions have been made explaining the motivation factors that support adolescent behaviors. Through his continued research, Piaget (as cited by Miller, 2011) recognized the different thinking processes of child and adolescent development and worked to analyze how and why new forms of thinking emerge. Emphasizing the grand stages, which span several years each, can make us forget that thought actually develops in the moment-to-moment, everyday encounters between children and their physical and social environment (62). Piaget argued that all organisms have an innate tendency to adapt to their environment. For adolescents, this may include school, work, clubs and social situations. Through several informal observations, I have noticed how Piaget's theory applies to students. When a student transfers to a new school, the initial change may appear overwhelming. However, with time and repetition, the student begins to adapt. They learn their school schedule, where to go for help and directions around campus. They internalize the culture of their surroundings and begin to organize their thinking in a way that complements the greater way of life. In essence, what was once foreign now becomes familiar.

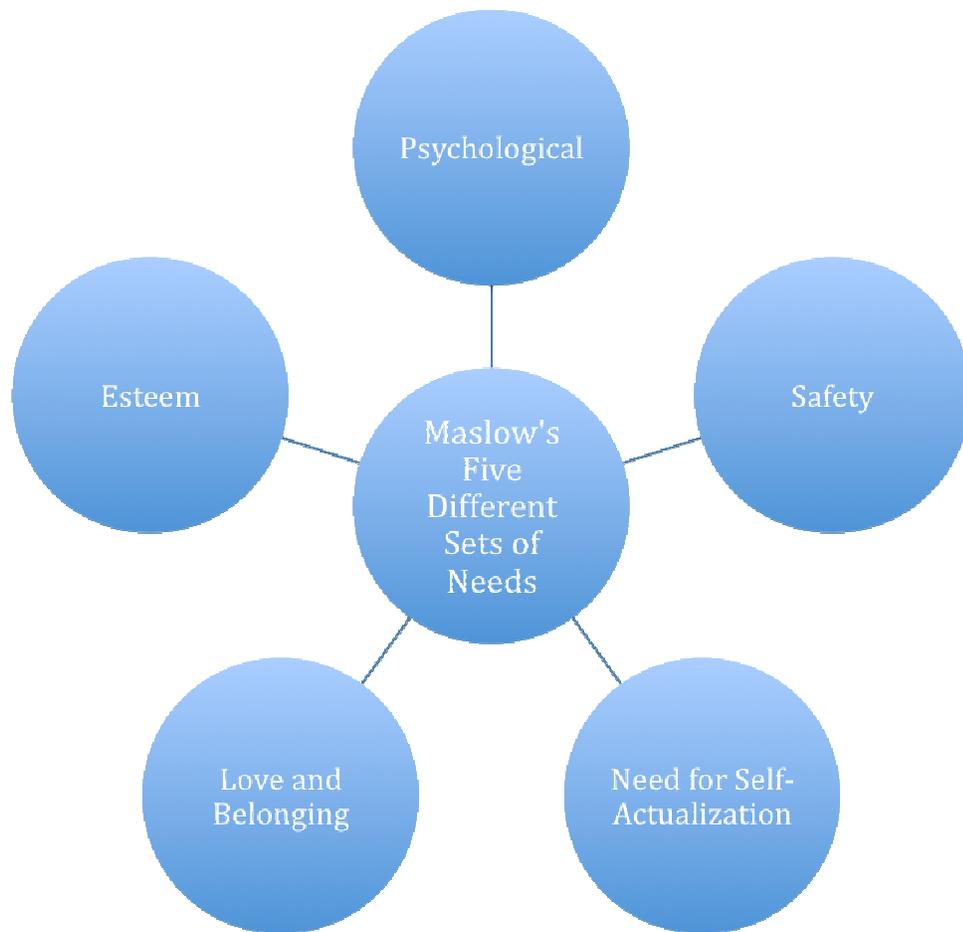
Each time an individual interacts with another, the potential for new information to be assimilated is created. During their high school years, adolescents network with parents, teachers and peers. This is the time for increasing individuality. Adolescents

tend to find their clique of friends, those who share common ideas and interests. Their need for independence increases, as does their ability to succinctly communicate. All in all the high school student has matured in both thinking and behavior (Steinberg, 2011).

I observed two areas of concern that arise during the time of adolescence: isolation and acceptance. “Interactions with peers help children realize that others often view the world differently than they do and that their own ideas are not always completely logical or accurate” (Ormrod, 2008, p. 326). When children refuse to compromise or share, they are often excluded from the group. In turn, these students feel alone, knowing their peers have not accepted them. Sometimes however, these students become outcasts not because they don’t want to socialize like everyone else, but because they don’t have the tools to do so. Some students begin to avoid social interactions by being absent from school, not because they are unable to find success academically but because the social circumstances invoke feelings of anxiety. These are the students who may not have found their niche, or are unable to communicate in a way that evokes or supports friendships. These students tend to keep to themselves or appear standoffish, thereby decreasing the likelihood of forging strong relationships with peers.

For most adolescents, the development of their identity is more gradual than instant. Most young adults are attempting to “find themselves”, and may go through phases of brooding, indecision, and self-doubt. “The adolescent may change his plans and passions as often as he changes clothes” (Steinberg, 2011, p. 234). These experiences are considered a common facet of adolescent development. What becomes alarming is the student who passes through the stages of development alone.

How individuals acquire emotions, attitudes, values and interpersonal skills is the root of Maslow's (1987) theory of humanism. Maslow believed people to have five different sets of needs: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and need for self-actualization.



It is believed that in order for people to feel physically and emotionally secure, these needs must be met. Focusing on the need to feel love and to belong, people want to be accepted by those around them. "Many young adolescents take great pains to fit in with the cool crowd (Ormrod, 2008, p. 459). To develop strong social self-esteem, students behave in a way that evokes recognition, appreciation and prestige from others. As self-

esteem builds, so does their self-confidence and self worth (Maslow, 1987). Similar to Maslow, Lavoie (2005) believes each child has eight basic needs: limits, attention, acceptance, power, success, belonging, safety and love. When a child acts out, one or more of these needs are not being met. For the focus of this research, I considered both Maslow's and Lavoie's theories about how acceptance and belonging factor into the social success of deaf adolescents.

Adolescent Socialization of Deaf Students

Adolescence is a time that is commonly filled with turmoil, self doubt and considerable introspection. Children are transitioning from a time of dolls and trucks to one of relationships, peer pressure and the need to belong. While this time is difficult for any growing child, it is considerably more difficult for one with a hearing loss.

In her book, *Alone in the Mainstream*, Gina Oliva (2004) discloses interviews completed with now deaf adults. Oliva believed the academics in a public school to be considerably stronger than in a School for the Deaf. However, that educational placement came with an emotional price. When discussing the socialization impact of placing deaf children in public schools, participants in Oliva's study declared, "No deaf child should ever be alone in a mainstream setting. For them, the loneliness and lack of self-esteem resulting from the pervasive feeling of being different were so damaging as to negate any academic benefits"(p.75). It is clear that some deaf adults look back on their educational years with anger, hurt and sadness. Even years later, the feeling of social isolation and lack of acceptance by peers leaves an emotional wound that has yet to heal.

The primary reason for a deaf child's feeling of isolation in a mainstream setting is the language barrier. At the very best, only a small percentage of the spoken words or sounds used appear on the lips (Schwartz, 1996). For a deaf student, the extent of participation within interpersonal contexts relies heavily on a communication medium that is expressed and understood with ease (Leigh, 1999). While some children with a hearing loss do not use sign language, they still struggle to follow a conversation. They are unable to follow multiple speakers at one time, or respond to someone who is not in plain sight. At best, they are only receiving and understanding a small portion of what is being said. Not only does this present itself as an academic obstacle but a social one as well. If a deaf child is unable to exchange information with a hearing classmate, it is impossible for them to develop a friendship.

Hearing loss is a very complex phenomenon. The immediate consequence of deafness is a breakdown in communication. There may be implications to this language and communication barrier such as, "dependency, denial of abnormal hearing behavior, low self-esteem, rejection of prosthetic help and the breakdown of social relationships" (Munoz-Baell & Ruiz, 2000, p.40). In spite of this, some deaf individuals are very successful using their voices. However, this voice is not as comprehensible as believed. There are often sounds and syllables missing from words or phrases. This is often the case because a deaf person cannot hear them when they are taught. If they can't be heard and internalized, they cannot be reproduced with accuracy. For a deaf adolescent, I observed this as another moment when their hearing loss marks them as different.

The effects of a hearing loss can be pervasive and create psychological stress. If there is a lack of communication because others do not sign, there may be isolation from

people and knowledge (Moore, 2001). In short, Moore believed the social deprivation felt by deaf adolescents in a hearing environment might alter their ability to create and maintain interpersonal relationships. More contact with hearing peers does not necessarily mean deaf students will forge closer friendships (Leigh, 1999).

There are gaps that presently exist in our understanding of the maturity and emotional growth of deaf children into deaf adolescents. The literature in this area does not provide a succinct comparison of the social-emotional development of hearing and deaf adolescents. If a deaf student is not accepted and appears isolated in their academic setting, one might question if they are progressing through the stages of social development in the same manner as their hearing peers. Many might view the deaf student as being disabled. Wilcox (1989) vehemently refutes this notion. He stated, “we think of deaf students as “disabled”, but this is true only if we realize that the source of the disablement is not within the students. It is not the pathology of their deafness. Deaf students are rendered unable or disabled by their interactions and struggles with the more powerful hearing educational establishment” (p.186). A philosophy such as this implies the deaf to be an oppressed minority, the issue not being the silence of not hearing but of not being heard.

Overall, the literature cited reveals a deaf adolescent in a mainstream setting may develop more sound academic skills than one placed in a School for the Deaf. However, without other deaf children, the adolescent may feel isolated and not accepted by his or her peers. Educators may have never received the training necessary to meet the social-emotional needs of the child. This topic requires continued examination to determine the

best course of action school districts should consider when attempting to meet the academic and social needs of students with a hearing loss.

Deaf Identity

Throughout my professional career, I have observed deaf students in both schools for the deaf and mainstream settings. For deaf students in a mainstream setting, the degree of peer interactions that occur largely depend on the deaf adolescent's ability to clearly communicate. Relationships that develop in school impact the way an adolescent identifies himself or herself. "These social experiences within school settings are bound to influence later perceptions of self" (Leigh, 1999, p.1).

Adolescent self-identity is shaped considerably by environmental influence. Growing up in a house as the only deaf family member is bound to impact how an adolescent views himself or herself not only in the family but perhaps even within the predominantly hearing society. When Leigh (1999), completed her qualitative study of deaf adults and their perceptions of their experiences in mainstream high school, one participant's responses connected with the scope of this study. When asked to recount his academic and social experiences growing up, one respondent expressed that despite his hearing loss, he was able to function effectively in a mainstream setting. However, he also made note of the anger he held against his parents. He felt his parents pushed him more than was needed and, in his eyes, they never accepted his deafness. Others mentioned the feeling of being stuck between the hearing and deaf world, uncertain of their belonging. Leigh's (1999) study identifies deaf individuals who have struggled to find their place in the world and superficially makes mention of how hearing parents may

influence self-identification and development. This is a topic that was investigated in depth in my research.

Fitzgerald (1993) suggests culture is what gives people their sense of identity. If a deaf child is raised in a hearing family, is his or her primary culture to be considered that of the parents? Where might Deaf culture play into child self-identification and development? Leigh, Marcus, Dobosh and Allen (1998) found deaf adults of hearing parents viewed themselves as being marginalized when they were growing up. In addition, they expressed a stronger affiliation with the hearing world, subscribing to more of the values found in mainstream society. These findings may suggest that the hearing status of parents has the potential to impact the identity development of a deaf child, especially since they have been trained to identify with hearing values and may not be exposed to or become aware of Deaf values or beliefs until later in life.

Glickman (1996) presented a model of Deaf cultural identity that seeks to explain deaf identity formulations. Glickman posits that cultural hearing attitudes, culturally marginal attitudes, immersion attitudes and bicultural attitudes are the four stances deaf people can hold simultaneously and to varying degrees. Harris and Kuba (1997) suggest that conflicted identity occurs when “learned ways of behaving and interacting come into conflict with the messages from a community with a different ethnocentric view”(p.342). Through my observations, I found this to be an important issue to examine. If deaf adolescents are raised in hearing families and educated in hearing schools, how do they evaluate, or even re-evaluate their self-identity if they meet culturally Deaf people later in life? It was important to look at this phenomenon to better understand the experiences that occur in hearing families with a deaf adolescent.

Conceptual Framework

George Herbert Mead's (1863-1931) landmark theories on the fundamental role of symbolic interaction and social interactions provided a conceptual lens for studying the self identification and socialization challenges faced by adolescents with a hearing loss in mainstream educational settings. Mead believed the individual mind could only exist in relation to other minds with shared meanings (Desmond, 2006). He argued that the ability to communicate was the avenue by which one's sense of self is created. When a deaf child is born into a hearing family, a language barrier exists. Hearing parents who depend on verbal exchanges must find a way to communicate with their deaf child early in life. When a child with a hearing loss cannot communicate effectively, his/her message cannot be conveyed with accuracy.

Mead believed that the social act of communication and participation in such exchanges supports an individual's understanding of their potential for thought. For rich communication to take place, humans must be able to take on the perspective of others. This type of understanding is what enables human society and subtle social coordination (Desmonde, 2006). Mead observed that humans used modes of communication, such as speech, to mediate their social environments. Children primarily develop these tools to interact with others, initially as an avenue to communicate needs. Language is an important facet of a child's socialization experience. It is through shared language that a child can communicate their thoughts, needs and desires. The spoken language barrier that exists for deaf adolescents in mainstream educational settings may have implications on their socialization experience and their sense of self. I examined the lived experience of the students in my study through the lens of Mead's conceptual framework.

Mead also argued that only humans are capable of taking on the socialization role of both subject and object. We are able to feel pleasure and pain within ourselves but also empathy for others. The ability to feel empathy is vital to Mead's theory of the social process. Thus, the child's interactions with their parents are a part of the social process. Many deaf individuals can effectively communicate using manual language systems; however, when they are taken out of the environment where American Sign Language is the primary mode of communication, the question arises as to how thought, identity and social development are affected. Through interactions with others, children derive meaning and understanding of the world around them.

Chapter III: Study Design

Research Methods and Study Components

I conducted a phenomenological study of the social experience of two deaf adolescent students in a mainstream educational setting. The students were identified as participants for this study because they have a hearing loss, they have grown up in a hearing family, and they attend a public mainstream high school. The first student - Chelsea has a profound hearing loss. The second student - Jake has a moderate hearing loss. I sought to capture the essence of each student's social experience in a mainstream public high school. I wanted to understand how being from a family with hearing parents may influence the students' social experience in high school. In order to collect robust data, I interviewed each student and their parents. A phenomenological approach was an ideal research strategy for this study because it served the purpose of illuminating this particular area of focus (Creswell, 2009). In depth interviews provided data that assisted in my understanding of the essence of the students' experience, as well as the beliefs of my research participants. My specific research questions were: What is the social experience of deaf students in a mainstream academic setting? What is the impact of having hearing families on the student's social experiences in high school?

Research Design

Giorgi (1997) refers to phenomenology as the lived experiences that belong to a single person. Capturing the individual's experience through a phenomenological lens requires the researcher to "eliminate everything that represents a prejudgment or presupposition (Moustakas, 1994, p.27). As the principle investigator, it was my intent to follow this to the absolute best of my ability. I was aware that one of the greatest challenges of a phenomenological study is to describe the essence of an individual or group's experience, as it is, not how I believed it to be. I made every effort to collect and analyze the data using established protocols for phenomenological research.

I intended to collect data regarding the experiences of two people with a hearing loss who provided me with an understanding of how deafness has had an impact on their social experience in a mainstream public high school and how having hearing parents impacts their social experience. Patton (1990) identified three steps that encompass a phenomenological study: epoche', phenomenological reduction and structural synthesis. Epoche is a period when I (the researcher) identified any possible bias I may hold and I worked to eliminate personal involvement in the phenomena being studied. The biases I brought to this study are discussed in the section on potential bias and limitations of the study. Moustakas (1994) believes epoché to be the elimination of bias connected to common knowledge as the foundation for truth and reality.

Phenomenological reduction required me to describe exactly what I saw, both internally and externally, and the relationship that existed between the phenomenon and myself. In essence, this reduction lead me back to my own experience of the way things

are. In order to do this, I kept research memos documenting my thoughts and observations so that I could compare the information I gathered with the beliefs I brought to this study (Maxwell, 1996).

Structural synthesis is the amalgamation of both meaning and essence. As the final step in phenomenological research, structural synthesis is the essence or, 'final truth' (Moustakas, 1994). After reviewing the data, I was able to determine the essence of the phenomenon of growing up deaf in a hearing family and attending a mainstream public high school for these two students.

A phenomenological study of deaf adolescent students presents multifaceted issues of access, permission and confidentiality. Seidman (2006) is very clear about access to human subjects who are minors arguing: "If a researcher's study involves participants below the age of 18, access to them must involve absolutely legitimate gatekeepers: the participant's parents or guardians" (p.43). The students in my study are minors and they required parental consent to participate in my study. I also needed to secure permission to conduct my research in the public high school that was the site for my study. When studying a sensitive topic, Creswell (2007) suggests masking the names of people, places and activities. Thus, the names of the students, their parents and the school were changed to protect their true identities. In-depth explanations of the protocols and forms I used in my study are presented in the consent and anonymity sections of this chapter.

Research Site

Phenomenological studies include rich detailed descriptions of the environment in which the phenomenon being studied takes place (Moustakas, 1994). The selection of a research site and the data collected are significant elements that helped me describe the essence of the phenomenon being experienced (Creswell, 2007). The school that I chose houses students from grades 7 through 12. The district has an interesting mix of ethnicities and cultures as well as socioeconomic backgrounds. The district has been known for educating children of affluent bankers, CEOs and politicians as well as those who receive public assistance, free lunch and donations during the holiday season. Graduating seniors have been accepted to a wide array of colleges, from Ivy League Universities such as Harvard, The University of Pennsylvania and Yale, to local community colleges and trade schools.

Within this district, there are approximately 1,400 students within grades K-12 and 200 professional staff members including administrators, teachers, assistants, secretaries, guidance counselors, therapists, custodial staff and outside consultants. Although the high school is a mainstream educational setting, the school has educators and professional staff who have experience working with the (approximate) 200 students who have been identified as having a disability (including those with a hearing loss) and their families.

Using the strategy of member checking is essential in minimizing distortion of data especially when you are reporting the experience of a group of individuals who share a similar experience (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). I established myself as a researcher who

was trustworthy and sincere by:

1. Establishing credibility or confidence in the ‘truth’ of my findings.
2. Showing transferability by demonstrating how my findings may have applicability in other contexts.
3. Dependability: revealing the consistency of my findings and suggesting others may experience a similar phenomenon.
4. Confirmability: expressing my degree of neutrality and not researcher bias.

(Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Study Participants

The social experience of deaf students from hearing families who have been educated in mainstream educational setting is not well represented in the literature. The two students in my study were identified using criterion sampling. Criterion sampling works well when the individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Both students in my study have a bilateral hearing loss. They also share the experience of having hearing parents and attend a mainstream public high school. The parents in the study do not have a hearing loss. They only have one child with a hearing loss who is the focus of this study. The parents share the experience of raising a deaf child who attends a mainstream educational setting.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is important in evaluating a study’s significance (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). One of the most important issues in evaluating the precision of qualitative research is trustworthiness. I have been working with deaf students in mainstream educational settings for eight years. Conducting qualitative research in an area in which

the researcher is familiar raises several issues and ethical consideration (Creswell, 2007). For example, my knowledge of the educational system and experience working with students with a hearing loss may enable me to gain the trust of the participants in my study. However, there was a risk that the students who are the participants in this study did not understand my role as a researcher in the study. To gain the trust of the participants and their willingness to support my role as the researcher, I clearly identified my role before and during data collection process and explained the purpose of the study.

Embedded in qualitative research are the concepts of relationships and power between researchers and participants. The desire to participate in a research study depends upon a participant's willingness to share his or her experience. Patton (1990) recommends full disclosure of the purpose of the study when doing participant observation. Moreover, Patton cautions that false or partial explanations can be too risky and add unnecessary stress on participants. Capron (1989) also stressed the importance of participant's rights arguing that that any kind of research should be guided by the principles of respect for people, beneficence, and justice. He considered that respect for people is the recognition of participants' rights, including the right to be informed about the study, the right to freely decide whether to participate in a study, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. In a qualitative research study this principle is honored by informed consent with the goal of achieving a reasonable balance between over-informing and under-informing (Kvale, 1996).

Consent

Creswell (2007) asserts that all participants must provide consent for being involved in a research study, informed that they will not be placed at risk and reminded

that they may discontinue participation in the study at any time without repercussions. In addition, the relationship established between researcher and participant was be respectful and at no point were stereotypes or labels be used that participants did not embrace. It also meant that participants had every opportunity to exercise their rights as autonomous persons to voluntarily accept or refuse to participate in the study.

Consent has been referred to as a negotiation of trust, and it requires continuous renegotiation (Patton, 1990). I initially contacted each parent by telephone to explain my study and requested his or her participation in my research. When they agreed to be involved, I mailed home consent forms to be signed. I mailed a letter to each participant's parents. The letter informed the parents about the purpose of my study and how the findings will be used. When the parents and the students volunteered to participate in the study, the parents were asked to return a signed consent form. The participants were also informed that they had the option to stop participation in the study at any time without harm, coercion, or fear of retribution. The students were informed that they had the right, without repercussion, to choose to not answer my questions. In no way were these students placed in a position that was physically or emotionally harmful. They were told that they did not need to share information that was uncomfortable for them. There was no pressure for them to provide information that invoked any type of negative, emotional response. Students and parents were later given a summary of my research goals, both verbally and in writing. They were told, again, both verbally and in writing that they were volunteering to be part of my study and they had the opportunity to choose to discontinue their participation in this study at any time without consequence.

Anonymity

The students in my study are minors and may be considered a vulnerable population due to the nature of their hearing loss. I worked to ensure the anonymity of the participants and the school in my study. Ensuring the anonymity of the participants in this study is of the utmost importance. A researcher protects the anonymity of the informants, for example, by using aliases to ensure confidentiality for the participants (Creswell, 2007). I changed the names of the participants in the study. The name of the school that the students attending were also changed.

Ethical Considerations

It was, and always will be important to consider my ethical responsibilities as a researcher. Being that I am a teacher and that I work with students at a public high school establishes a power relationship. I reminded the participants in my study that they could voluntarily choose to discontinue their participation in this study at any time without consequence. As a safeguard to avoid potential coercion, I informed the participants that they could speak with their school principal at any time if they wished to discontinue participation in the study for any reason.

I also anticipated that students might share sensitive information with me in the interviews. Although researchers have an ethical obligation to protect the privacy of the participants in a study (Creswell, 2009), I had an obligation to report any information a student shared with me that lead me to believe they were putting themselves in danger, have been put in or experienced harm and/or if they intend to harm anyone else. I was, and still am bound by law to protect participants and would have reported serious issues to the appropriate authorities if the need had risen.

Interview Protocols

For a phenomenological study, in depth interviews are the primary way of collecting information (Creswell, 2007). It is important to use interview data to describe the meaning of the phenomenon by those who have lived it. Moustakas (1994) suggests asking broad, general questions about what individuals have experienced in terms of the phenomenon. Creswell (2007) echoes this approach arguing, “Open ended questions focus on gathering data that will lead to a textural description and a structural description of the experiences that ultimately provide and understanding of the common experiences of the participants” (p.61). To gain a rich understanding of the participants’ experience, I conducted in-person interviews and transcribed the information exchange that occurred during that time. All participants agreed to be recorded.

I was the only investigator for this study. I conducted unstructured in-depth interviews with each deaf student in my study. Given the age of the students in the study and their short attention span, I conducted several interviews with each student that lasted 30-45 minutes. My questions focused on the participant’s experiences, feelings, and beliefs about their social experience in a mainstream educational setting (Welman & Kruger, 1999). According to Bailey (1996) unstructured interviews are a deliberate attempt by the researcher to find out more information about the participant’s lived experience. The interviews were an exchange in which the deaf students and I engaged in a dialogue.

The interviews took place over the course of three months. Each interview with the deaf students was done by either video or audio tape. When videotaping an individual who is deaf, the transcription process is multilayered. (Baker-Shenk and

Cokely,1980). In order to transcribe the interview with accuracy, it must be understood that the grammar and syntax of American Sign Language differs from written English. In American Sign Language, words such as, “am”, “is”, “are”, “was” and “were” are not part of the language. In addition, American Sign Language is not a written language so to transcribe what is signed into English will appear choppy and unorganized. However, being fluent in American Sign Language, I was able to understand the differences between it and English, even when it is written in what may appear to be a distorted fashion. I was able to take that information as it was and searched for themes that emerged.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with the parents of the deaf students. The interviews took place during the summer of 2011. Each interview was digitally recorded verbatim. A semi-structured interview uses open-ended questions that are, “A narrowing of the central question and sub-questions in the research study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 133). Semi-structured interviews are useful for providing understanding of the issues because the interviewer can clarify responses through guided follow-up questions (Creswell, 2007). A set of pre-determined interview questions were used to conduct in-depth, one-on-one, interviews that lasted approximately 60 minutes. As I interviewed each parent, their responses warranted questions that were not initially anticipated. Semi-structured interviews gave me the flexibility to ask questions that were not planned but still aligned with my study.

Creswell (2007) and Moustakas (1994) suggest allowing research participants the opportunity to read the transcription of their interview upon its completion, giving the participants the opportunity to clarify their responses or add anything else they may have

forgotten. Conducting interviews can be challenging. “Equipment issues loom large as a problem in interviewing and both recording equipment and transcribing equipment need to be organized in advance of the interview” (Creswell, 2007, p.140). In order to tackle the possibility of a technological challenge, I tested the video and digital voice recording equipment prior to the interviews to ensure that technological obstacles did not interrupt the time allocated for participant interviews.

Interviews with the deaf students took place both during their school day and in the privacy of their homes. I worked with school administrators to schedule time with the students that did not interfere with their classes or other academic requirements. I reserved a private room in the high school and placed a sign on the door requesting there be no interruptions except in the case of an emergency. In an effort to minimize any distractions, I asked each student to turn their cell phone to a silent or the vibration setting.

Data Collection

For this study, I used interview transcripts as well as formal and informal student documents. The student in my study with a profound hearing loss has kept a journal for several years. I sought her permission to examine her journal entries. Using journals for qualitative data collection is feasible and acceptable when conducting a phenomenological study. Those who complete journals are often engaged in a reflective process that enables them to address significant events in a way they may not be able to do via spoken interviews. Journals provide benefits not only for the participant but the researcher as well. They prove to be appropriate to a study seeking to explore the lived experience of the participants. Researchers conducting studies depending on a

phenomenological perspective should consider journals as a valuable data collection tool (Bedwell, McGowan & Lavender, 2011). Having journal entries from the second student in this study would have greatly supported my researcher however only one student presently keeps a journal to log thoughts, feelings and ideas.

In addition to participant interviews and journals, my observations of the students in a mainstream educational setting played an important role in my data collection. I observed the two deaf students involved in this study in classroom and “free time” settings. I observed their interactions during a content area class as well as during lunch and study hall. The latter times did not require students to attend to teachers or lessons and gave them the opportunity to socialize with their peers. By observing their interactions in both of these settings, I was able to better understand how the students respond to times of structured and unstructured peer interactions.

Data Analysis

All transcripts from the interviews were coded and analyzed for common themes. All documentation connected to this study is stored in a locked file cabinet in a secure location outside of the research site. I am the only person who has access to this information. Upon receiving notification from the IRB this study has been closed, all interview transcripts will be destroyed. I examined themes that emerge in the interview transcripts, the students’ journals, academic scores and psychological evaluations. In phenomenological research, Creswell (2007) suggests analyzing data by:

- Reading through texts.
- Making notes in the margins.

- Describing the essence of the phenomenon.
- Classifying statements by placing them into meaningful units.
- Developing a textual description explaining what happened and how the phenomenon was experienced.

Upon the completion of my data collection, I coded and analyzed the data to trace the emergent themes. I carefully transcribed the interviews and double-checked the accuracy of the transcripts. In addition, I crosschecked the codes that emerged in my data to determine if information had been overlooked or lacked consistency. The overarching, ‘essence of the phenomenon’ code became the fundamental, descriptive core of this final written report. This compassed the codes I expected to find, those that were surprising, unusual and addressed a larger theoretical framework (Creswell, 2007).

Creswell (2007) recommends five key steps to analyzing data: “Reading through written transcripts, identifying significant phrases, formulating meaning and clustering them into themes, integrating the results into an in-depth, exhaustive description of the phenomenon and evaluating the findings” (p. 89). In this phenomenological study, I analyzed anticipated as well as unexpected themes that materialized.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are important to consider when conducting research. Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that in order for research to be deemed reliable, it must be consistent and reasonably stable over time. In order for my research to be

considered valid, my findings need to be clear, truthful and accurate. Member checking was a useful strategy to ensure the accuracy of my data and minimize researcher bias. Member checking is the process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of account (Creswell, 2007). I scheduled follow up meeting with participants in my study to provide them with a written copy of my findings to validate that they reflected their perspectives regarding their social experience in a mainstream high school (Groenewald, 2004). I asked participants whether the description of their experience is complete and realistic, if the themes are accurate to include, and if my interpretations were fair and representative. The follow up student meetings took place in their homes (with the permission of the student's parent). Follow up meetings with the parents also took place in their home at a time that was convenient for them. A follow up meeting also gave participants the opportunity to volunteer additional information that was remembered upon review of their interview (Creswell, 2007).

Bias and Study Limitations

As a researcher, I may have brought certain biases to this study. "Being objective is an essential aspect of competent inquiry; researchers must examine methods and conclusions for bias" (Creswell, 2009, p.7). Clarifying the bias I brought to this study creates an open and honest narrative with the readers of this paper.

Bracketing is another method to use to assist in the reduction of researcher bias (DeMarris & Lapan, 2005). I attempted to identify any assumptions or beliefs I hold that had the potential to interfere with my understanding of the experiences I learned about as I collected data.

I am certified as a teacher of the deaf, American Sign Language and students with disabilities. I have significant background in the area of deafness, inclusion and psychology and have been working with this population for ten years. It is important that I clarified this bias as I completed this study. My background and education may have influence how I interpreted research findings however I bracketed my assumptions as a researcher so those ideas and beliefs did not impede or interfere with my understanding of the phenomenon that occurred with my research participants.

The sample size of my study is small and may present a limitation to the study. Patton (2002) points out that there are no hard and fast rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on several factors including what can be done with available time and resources. However, the in-depth information that I gathered from the small number of people in the study was very valuable. Piaget contributed a major breakthrough to our understanding of how children think by observing his own two children in great depth. Patton (2002) argued, “The insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than the sample size (p. 245).

Chapter IV: Discovering the Essence

The purpose of my qualitative, phenomenological study was to understand the essence of the perceptions, lived experiences and social realities of two deaf adolescents with hearing parents in a mainstream, academic setting. This study used personal interviews with the students and their parents, as well as a student journal and researcher observations to document and capture participant experiences. Including parents in this study was important because it illustrated how parental influence has the potential to shape child development and sense of self. It also supplied me with an understanding of parental views of hearing loss and how that perspective has influenced their child rearing practices. The rationale for using interviews with open-ended questions was to capture actual words of the participants in the study offering different perspectives on the research topic and providing a complex picture of their perceptions about deafness and socialization (Creswell, 2009).

Data Collection Technique

The qualitative data collection technique uses interviews to acquire an understanding of both descriptive and interpretive responses (Creswell, 2002; Simon, 2006). The one-on-one interviews assisted in the creation of an environment where participants could communicate freely and comfortably. In a phenomenological study, a central goal is to understand the essence of participant's lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). By respecting their privacy and affording them the opportunity to share their stories in a confidential manner, establishing an environment that is accommodating and compassionate is essential.

Interviews

Personal interviews were utilized to collect text data for this qualitative, phenomenological study. Initially, I believed it was most important to establish a rapport and establish an environment that was conducive for the participant to feel comfortable sharing personal, perhaps even somewhat private, information (Creswell, 2002; Simon, 2006). To establish this rapport, I spoke with the participants about non-related subjects. With both the parents and the students, we discussed summer plans, upcoming vacations and final exams that were soon to be over. While these topics do not seem particularly in-depth, they assisted in, “breaking the ice” and establishing a level of comfort between my interview participants and myself.

The interview protocol used for this qualitative, phenomenological study initially began with a brief overview and explanation of the study, followed by a discussion of how the data would be secured and protected at an off site location and finally requesting a signature of consent from the participant. In an effort to gain a deep and rich understanding of the participants’ lived experience, I conducted three interviews with each student. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes. I conducted two interviews with each parent. The first interview took 60 minutes and the second interview was 30 minutes. This was done to ensure adequate time to understand the essence of the participant’s experiences and to allow for themes to emerge while also trying honoring participant time limitations and other responsibilities.

Interview Preparation and Implementation. Preparation for participant interviews included planning dates, times and locations of interview sessions as well as

ensuring that the interview atmosphere was comfortable and relaxed. I introduced the study to the participant by reviewing the letter of consent, scheduling the participant interviews for mutually agreeable days and times and reserving the interview location.

At the time of the interviews, I met the participants at the designated location. I reviewed the study's purpose, participant consent forms and confidentiality agreement with the participants prior to each interview. Participants were given the opportunity to opt out of the interview at any time without consequence. For all interviews after the initial meeting, I engaged in member checking (Creswell, 2007) and asked each participant to review previous interview transcriptions. This gave participants the opportunity to provide more information where necessary and further explain responses that may have appeared vague or unclear. I completed each interview by thanking the participants for sharing their personal experiences and taking the time to meet with me.

Interview Outline, Collection and Responses. The initial interview questions were designed to establish comfort and trust with the participants in my study. The interview questions were designed to be thought provoking and to motivate the participants to share their experiences either as having a hearing loss or being a parent of a child with a hearing loss. The questions I asked were guided by the responses of the participants and focused on the lived experiences and social actuality in the areas of socialization, communication and self-identity.

The participants' responses revealed rich textural data that I examined to identify themes and to better understand the meaning of the participants' experiences. Participants were given the opportunity to review the transcribed interview data and

clarify, revise, or enhance their responses. Following data collection protocols established by Moustakas (1994), I created individual descriptions from each interview to generate in depth descriptions of the meaning and essence of the lived experiences of the participants.

The data collection method including interviews, a student journal and observation established the foundation to determine the core structural meaning of my study. Moustakas, (1994) argues, “Structures underlie textures and are inherent in their coming together to create a fullness in understanding the essences of a phenomenon” (p. 79).

Interview Questions. Open-ended interview questions were used to elicit the meanings of the socialization experiences of the participants in the study. “This open-endedness allows the participants to contribute as much detailed information as they desire and it also allows the researcher to ask probing questions as a means of follow-up.

Standardized open-ended interviews are likely the most popular form of interviewing utilized in research studies because of the nature of the open-ended questions, allowing the participants to fully express their viewpoints and experiences” (Turner, 2010, p. 756).

The questions allowed the participants the opportunity to share their stories and afforded me the opportunity to capture rich descriptions of experiences related to this study.

While the questions used throughout the interviews were not structured, they were guided by my central research questions which attempted to understand the social experience of deaf students in a mainstream academic setting and the impact of having hearing parents on their social experience in school.

I discovered that my research questions revealed something far deeper than I had initially considered. The students and the parents were quite motivated to share their experiences with me. Both Chelsea and Jake's mother made mention of these interviews being an opportunity for them to finally share these experiences with those who would never know they even existed. Having a child with a hearing loss is not common and those who were involved with this study appeared thankful to finally have the opportunity to explain their feelings of shock and devastation, knowing there was no cure for their child's hearing loss and the hard truth that this would be one of their greatest struggles in life. During one interview, Mrs. Murphy said that she was thrilled to be part of this study because she knew there were other families, other parents, siblings and children who may be experiencing something similar. In addition, Mrs. McGrath said she was lucky to have found a few parents that had children with a hearing loss and she was able to lean on them for support and guidance as she learned to expect the unexpected. This was the first time anyone had even asked them how they were feeling, the struggles they faced and how they overcame obstacles that arose when confronted with the social, emotional and educational challenges that appear and evolve when raising a child with a hearing loss.

For Chelsea and Jake, both seemed motivated when I told them that I would be writing a, "really, long paper" about them. They seem elated to share their story, the opportunity to finally be "heard" in a world that has only known them as silent.

Reliability. Reliability in phenomenological, qualitative research concentrates on documenting the genuine essence of an experience and collecting data through multiple sources that can encourage unconventional perspectives to view the subject matter

(Neuman, 2003). Collecting and integrating different kinds of data enabled me to triangulate my findings and better understand the essence of this phenomenon. After collecting multiple sources of data, I was able to examine the lived experiences of participants. As a researcher, it is my responsibility to accurately interpret these life, “texts” and consider how deafness has had an impact on the students’ ability to socialize in a mainstream, academic setting.

Credibility and Trustworthiness. Phenomenological studies are grounded in the participant’s internalized perceptions of truth and reality and are ever-changing (Neuman, 2003). I worked to build validity safeguards into my analysis plan by exploring the data collected through interviews, a student journal and observations in the participants’ school. Moustakas (1994) argued that interviewing participants in an environment that was comfortable and calm would support their ability to genuinely express their lived experiences while simultaneously reducing the potential of researcher bias. I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to interview the research participants in their homes. This confirmed Moustakas’ (1994) theories; the participants were calm and open when sharing personal information when they were in an environment that was comfortable to them.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2007) argues, “Following description, the researcher analyzes the data for specific themes, aggregating information into larger clusters of ideas and providing details that support the themes” (p.244). Five major student themes and four major parent themes emerged from the data. The following chart outlines the themes that

emerged after interviewing the participants in my study. Each theme noted in the chart below will be reviewed and explained later in the chapter.

Table 1: Emergent Student Themes

Theme	Chelsea	Jake
Depending on Others	Depends on others for communication needs: Parents, Interpreter, peers who had knowledge of American Sign Language	Depends on others for communication needs: Parents, teachers repeat information at a pace that is most comfortable for Jake to learn. They also monitor the pace of conversations so Jake can follow along.
Self Identity and Personal Understanding of Deafness	<p>Deafness has a negative connotation</p> <p>“Deaf have lower education, lower pay, not as smart”</p> <p>This perception may be held because Chelsea transferred from a school for the deaf to a mainstream setting where her parents believed she would receive a better education.</p> <p>Hearing = positive</p> <p>“Hearing people can communicate better, go to college, get jobs that pay more money”</p> <p>Frequently used: “Normal” when referring</p>	<p>Deaf schools “Don’t teach good”, “Not enough kids”.</p> <p>This perception may be held because Jake was raised in a hearing family and has no educational experience in a school for the deaf.</p> <p>Hearing Schools: “learn a lot, good teachers, good education”. “The teachers are good. They say I’m a good student”. Has a strong relationship with teachers.</p> <p>Goals: Graduate/College/Marriage. Doesn’t care if future wife is deaf/hearing/hard of hearing.</p>

	<p>to hearing people.</p> <p>Goals: Graduate/ College/ Marriage. Wants a deaf husband.</p>	
Social Situations	<p>Feelings: left out, bored, uninvolved, confused at school with her peers and home with extended family that does not sign.</p> <p>Frequently used: “Communication is difficult”: between parents, siblings, teachers, peers, strangers</p> <p>Wants: “People to be patient with me”</p> <p>Closest friends are deaf “They understand me”.</p> <p>Making friends is difficult. Socializing with boys is challenging due to language barrier. Dating hearing boys is difficult.</p>	<p>Frequently discussed family and their role in his life: Parents, siblings, uncles and grandmother. He is in always speaking with his family. He calls his grandmother every evening at 5:00pm.</p> <p>Feelings: ignored, left out, “teeved off”, frustrated at school with his peers.</p> <p>Wants: Friends to call on the weekend. Feels alone, isolated.</p> <p>Closest friend (1) also has a hearing loss. “She gets me”.</p> <p>Making friends is tough. Doesn’t socialize with peers outside of school. Prefers to spend the weekends with his family.</p>
Communication	<p>Primary mode of communication is American Sign</p>	<p>Uses speech to communicate. Was taught American Sign Language as an infant however once his speech skills were</p>

	<p>Language. She feels “no struggle” when signing with those who know ASL. She explained that she speaks when necessary however it is not her preferred communication avenue.</p>	<p>strong enough, “I stopped signing and only talked”.</p>
<p>Education, Technology and Social Networking</p>	<p>Amplification Technology: No longer uses cochlear implant: doesn't like it. Uses a hearing aid.</p> <p>Technology aids communication: phones for texting, email, Facebook, online chat, Video chat: Social Networking supports communication needs.</p> <p>Believes students might perceive her as “stupid” or “not educated” because she is deaf. “I'm really nice if you take the time to talk to me”. Social Networking helps Chelsea communicate with her peers.</p>	<p>Amplification: Uses a hearing aid. Doesn't like it.</p> <p>Technology: phones, texting, e-mail, Facebook: Social Networking supports communication needs.</p> <p>Believes students perceive him as nice and smart and “cool”.</p>

Table 2: Emergent Parent Themes

Theme	Chelsea's Parents	Jake's Parents
Identification of Hearing Loss: Emotional Reactions	Devastation, fear of, "inability to communicate", overwhelming, crying, concerned, denial, pity, frustration	Acceptance of deafness, "We were prepared to raise a deaf child"
Determining an Educational Setting	<p>Education: Chelsea started at a school for the deaf but later transferred to a mainstream setting. School for the Deaf was not providing a, "quality education"</p> <p>Education is vital: graduate/college/career. Academics and future plans are important "Socialization comes second".</p> <p>Parents believe Chelsea will become a math teacher or an accountant.</p>	<p>. Education: screened at a school for the deaf but parents chose the public schools "Committee on Special Education (part of the public school system) gave us every accommodation we asked for".</p> <p>Education: "school is where Jake gets both his socialization and his academics. Does not socialize with peers outside of school". "I wish he would get involved more".</p> <p>College: No, Trade School: Yes: Carpenter, Chef.</p>
Parent Perceptions	<p>Socialization in the mainstream setting: "I would categorize this as a colossal failure"</p> <p>"Always on the computer".</p> <p>Technology: phone, text, e-mail, Facebook "Fill in the socialization gaps".</p>	<p>Socialization in the mainstream setting: one close friend (attends a different school): also has a hearing loss. Never invites friends over on the weekend "spends a lot of time in his room on the computer".</p> <p>Technology: Mom "completely against Facebook but sees how it helps him carry on 1:1 conversations that he struggles with in school". Text messaging, email.</p>
Hearing Influence on	Parents do not want her to "limit herself to the	Fear of Jake being frustrated. From birth, the family learned to sign so he would

<p>Self Identification</p>	<p>deaf world. We (hearing) are the majority”.</p> <p>Immediate family learned American Sign Language but if she is to effectively communicate with her extended family, Chelsea must speak.</p> <p>Mrs. McGrath’s family has offered monetary and emotional supports for Chelsea to be successful, regardless of her hearing loss.</p> <p>Mr. McGrath’s family, “feels sorry for Chelsea”. They have always wanted to “fix” her so she could be, “hearing like her siblings and cousins”.</p> <p>Chelsea’s hearing loss affects her ability to socialize with the hearing world.</p>	<p>never be frustrated. When he stopped signing and started using speech as his main mode of communication, the family followed suit and stopped using ASL as well.</p> <p>Jake is the youngest of four children. His brothers and sister are significantly older than him and, “Jake had five parents” who had a continual influence on him. Jake has always wanted to be like his older brothers.</p> <p>Hearing loss never “seemed” to affect academics but socialization “seemed more challenging”.</p>
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The intent of the interview process was to capture and understand the perceived, lived experiences of the participants in the study. I analyzed the interview transcriptions, identified emerging themes, and developed a deep and rich account of the perceptions of the socialization experiences of deaf students in a mainstream academic setting. All data was secured with access granted to only Northeastern University’s IRB, Dr. John Caron (dissertation advisor) and myself.

Interview Transcription Process

After each interview I transcribed the interview dialogues from digital and visual recordings to written documents. Transcription is the process of converting digital audio recordings or field notes into text data (Creswell, 2007). Given the small sample size of my study, I chose to transcribe the data by hand. Upon completion of the transcription process, each participant was given a copy of the transcript. I conducted follow up interviews that consisted of reviewing and updating the transcription document. I met one more time with each participant to discuss their experiences related to study.

Coding and Data Analysis

Coding qualitative data is a vital process used to organize and understand the data that was collected (Trochim and Donnelly, 2008). First, the data was separated into common areas, labeled and analyzed for information that may overlap or appear to be repetitive. I examined the interview transcripts and identified recurrent words, phrases, and comments. Finally, the common areas that were discovered were categorized into themes. Creswell (2007) states that the coding process is, “an inductive process of narrowing data into a few themes” (p.266). While many ideas emerged in my data collection, I was able to encapsulate the experiences of these six research participants into eight, major themes. Coding assisted me in my goal of understanding the essence of the lived experiences of the participants. Coding supported me in my search to better grasp not only the minute concepts and emotions that the participants felt, but also the overarching feelings and experiences they appear to share. (Trochim and Donnelly, 2008).

Moustakas (1994) argues that data analysis in qualitative, phenomenological research, “determines what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (p.13). Using this as a guide, I was able to extract the essence of the lived experiences of my research participants and interpreting meanings based on the information they provided during their interviews. In fact, this is an important cornerstone of my research study. By meeting and interviewing the participants on several occasions, observing the students in their academic setting and reviewing a student journal, I was able to capture and share the essence of their lived experiences. I reviewed my transcription notes before returning to speak with the participants and found that after the third round of student interviews and second round of parent interview, I found the categories I had identified were saturated, that is, I could, “no longer find new information that adds to my understanding of the category” (Creswell, 2007, p.240).

The Participants

For this research study, I had the opportunity to interview two adolescents with a hearing loss and both of their hearing parents. The following is an account of their responses to my interview questions.

FAMILY STORIES

The McGrath Family

As I walked up the front steps to the large, yellow, colonial house on the corner of a tree-lined street, a bright and cheery young girl came running toward me. “I’m so happy you’re here,” she signed. With long, flowing brown hair and piercing blue eyes, I

looked at the 17-year-old high school junior and replied, “Me too”. Chelsea led me inside to where I was greeted by both of her parents, her younger sister who is 15 and her brother who is 12. Chelsea is the eldest of the child in a hearing family. “We heard that you’re going to interview everyone. Are we going to be on television?” asked Billy*. “What did he say?” signed Chelsea and it was there that I saw a glimpse into what it must be like for a deaf person to live amongst the hearing.

I asked (via American Sign Language) Chelsea if I could interview her first. Truth be told, I didn’t see this being a problem. She was thrilled that someone was writing a, “really long paper” all about her and her family. Chelsea’s story is quite spectacular. She shared personal experiences with me that were gut wrenching. She spoke of moments of triumph that would make any parent proud. And, in typical teenage fashion, talked about boys, her “annoying” siblings and how she couldn’t wait to go to college.

Chelsea’s parents were equally as lovely. Quite forthcoming with information, Mr. McGrath shared his love and admiration for Chelsea as well as the heartache and struggle that went along with raising a child with a hearing loss. Mr. McGrath spoke of his job required him to travel a lot when Chelsea was young and the guilt he felt knowing his wife was home raising a child who had so many needs. He shared the story of telling his boss that he needed time off to help his wife with his daughter who was diagnosed with a hearing loss. Fortunately, Mr. McGrath had a compassionate boss who offered him an insurance increase to offset the costs of upcoming doctor visits, hearing aids and speech therapy. Mr. McGrath also discussed the barrage of genetic testing he and his wife underwent to determine if their future children would have a hearing loss as well.

These years were trying for him and his wife yet, when his interview was over, he stated, “would you like to interview my blushing bride next?”

Touched by the story about Mr. McGrath and his boss, I asked Mrs. McGrath if she also wanted to share some information about this time. Quite comically she responded, “I’m still trying to get past the blushing bride comment! The blushing bride would love for the groom to do the dishes!” She then shared the experience of Mr. McGrath’s company being bought by a larger corporation and he had to confront the decision to accept a new position with different responsibilities or resign. Mr. McGrath accepted the position but it added a great deal of stress to the family. Mrs. McGrath spoke of him living in Florida during the week and then taking a four-hour flight home on the weekends to see his daughter. At two years old, Chelsea would watch her father get in the car to head back to the airport on Monday mornings and cry asking him to stay home.

The family considered moving to Florida but then Mr. McGrath’s position was transferred to Maryland and then later to Connecticut. The search for schools was grueling and each state had different laws regarding the accommodations given to a child with a hearing loss. Mrs. McGrath shared a story about how one school she visited said that she would put her daughter on the bus, “with her bags” on Monday morning and then pick her up Friday afternoon. Disgusted by this thought, Mrs. McGrath recalled, “yes, I wanted my child to get a good education but like hell would I not see my baby for an entire week. I raise my children, no one else”. The McGrath’s interviews showed the utmost devotion to their daughter, their family and the importance of being together.

The Murphy Family

As I completed my first interviews with the McGraths, I became curious as to the stories I would hear when I met with the Murphy family. They too welcomed me into their home and were eager to share their experiences as individuals and as a family.

As I drove up the long, sprawling driveway, I observed that the landscape was immaculate. The lawn was a lush green, the pool looked like a picture from a catalog advertising vacations to a tropical destination. The inside of the house was equally as impressive. Jake answered the door, accompanied by a small dog that was feverously barking. Trying to raise his voice above the barking Jake said, “Can you believe how loud he is? I can hear him even without my hearing aid!” Jake’s comment seemed like a typical reaction at the time, but I became even more eager to learn about Jake. I wanted to understand what he could and could not hear and how this has influenced his sense of self.

Jake and I sat in the living room and began our interview. The couch was soft and comfortable and his dog sat loyally on Jake’s lap. As we began to converse, I took note of Jake’s physical stature. He’s a bit shorter than his peers, just over five feet tall, with blue eyes and blond hair. He has glasses and one hearing aid. He is unable to wear a hearing aid on his other ear because the outer earlobe never formed. He has a very slight limp that has required years of occupational therapy to correct. Despite these physical barriers, Jake is quite charming, exceptionally polite and quite chivalrous.

Like Chelsea, Jake seemed excited to share his story with me. He also talked about times of happiness and frustration but most consistent was his mention of his

family. They are the most important part of his life; more so than friends, his hearing or even his future. Since he was seven, he has called his grandmother every day at 5:00pm to see how she is doing. When I later spoke with Mrs. Murphy she said, “I ask Jake, ‘how was your day?’ and he says, ‘fine’ but when I hear him on the phone with my mother, I hear him giving her the play-by-play of each second of his day (laughs)”.

Mrs. Murphy is a medical administrator for the county executive. This job requires much of her time and energy and with that comes considerable stress. When we sat to talk, she made it a point of shutting off her pager, not because it was my request but because she said she would enjoy a few moments without the pressures of work. As she began to talk, she offered me the opportunity to see Jake’s medical records. I politely declined, explaining that while my research took a medical condition into account, I wanted to genuinely understand her life experiences raising a child with a hearing loss. After sitting silently for a moment she stated, “You know, no one has EVER asked me about how I felt. It’s always been about my son as a condition, not as a person. It think what you’re doing is going to help a lot of people see the human side to hearing loss”. As a professional, I was flattered by her compliment and felt that we had established a level of comfort and trust that would allow me to ask her questions that were rather sensitive in nature.

I have been in the field of deaf education for close to a decade. During that time I have acquired extensive knowledge of the terminology and vernacular that surrounds the condition of hearing loss and deafness as a culture. I was most impressed with Mrs. Murphy’s knowledge and understanding of hearing loss, her use of vocabulary and her clear comprehension of how his hearing loss initially affected her family. Jake is the

youngest of four children (three boys, one girl) with her next son being close to ten years older than him. By the time Jake was born, his siblings were somewhat self-sufficient and the Murphys were no longer changing diapers or running after toddlers. “This actually helped because my other kids were old enough to understand deafness to a certain degree and they were motivated to learn to sign so they could communicate with Jake”. Close to two decades later, Jake still appears to have five “parents” who look after him. They rotate driving him to school, taking him to golf lessons or playing chess after dinner. When I later asked Mr. Murphy to tell me more about this, his eyes began to water. “My kids are amazing. They made Jake who he is today. They have played an insurmountable role in his life. You need to meet them, all of them. Do you want to interview them too? They can tell you so much about him”. I was flattered by the Murphy’s openness in sharing so much information with me.

Mr. Murphy owns his own construction business. Through our conversations, I learned that he has completed renovations in some very affluent areas along the east coast which, accompanied by his wife’s form of employment, has made the family financially comfortable. He was dressed in blue jeans, a t-shirt and construction boots, considerably different from his wife who was in a full woman’s dress suit. Regardless of physical attire, the Murphy’s, similar to the McGraths, are genuinely proud of their child and the obstacles he has overcome.

Emergent Student Themes

After meeting with both families, five student themes and four parent themes emerged. The following reviews each theme in depth, allowing me to better understand the essence of the lived experiences of Chelsea, Jake and their parents.

Theme One: Depending On Others

Chelsea is a profoundly deaf adolescent girl. She uses American Sign Language to communicate with others. When I interviewed Chelsea, I asked her to tell me about some of her personal and educational experiences as a deaf individual in a predominantly hearing world. Chelsea revealed her need to depend on others to assist her in effectively communicating with those who do not know or use American Sign Language. Chelsea's dependency on her mother to communicate was clear when she stated, "My mom usually interprets for me however if my mother is not available, my sister or my Dad will sometimes interpret".

Chelsea also made brief mention of the American Sign Language interpreter that accompanies her to all of her academic classes. I asked Chelsea to describe how having an interpreter with her in a mainstream school affected her day-to-day experience. Chelsea said that the interpreter is present in all verbal exchanges, "except when I talk to boys". Clearly, the adolescent/adult boundary exists and the latter is not welcome when social interactions occurred with the opposite sex. Having observed Chelsea during some of these interactions, I took note that they appeared strained and difficult for both her and the boy. She would stare intently at him trying to read his lips and he would work equally as hard trying to understand her speech. Chelsea appeared to gravitate toward the

boys that I observed talking to everyone, rather social and pleasant to be around. Conversations were always very brief, with the questions and answers being simple (How are you? What's up? Do we have homework?). Interestingly, I observed the boys were often in search of the interpreter, appearing unable to understand her speech but polite enough to not turn their back and walk away.

Just slightly younger is Jake, a 16-year-old adolescent who has a bilateral, severe hearing loss. Although Jake knows the fundamental constructions of American Sign Language, he relies on speech, his residual hearing, and lip reading to communicate with others. When asked if he depends on others to help him to communicate, Jake asserted, "No, I can do it myself. I might say 'pardon me?' or 'can you repeat that again?' if I don't understand what someone is saying". When asked if he depends on his parents or siblings for anything other than communication Jake responded, "only to drive me to school because I don't have a license. I can cook hotdogs and oatmeal and do my laundry and keep my room clean". Jake is fiercely proud of his independence as well as his ability to communicate in a way that does not require him to depend on others to convey his message.

Chelsea and Jake's dependency on others for communication assistance differs significantly. Chelsea's hearing loss is considered medically profound in nature and because of this, her ability to use speech effectively to communicate is hampered. She is aware of her need to have someone present who can be her communication liaison with the hearing world. Jake's hearing loss is not as severe and his ability to use his residual hearing and lip reading skills affords him the advantage of not having as much of a dependency on others to communicate.

Theme Two: Self Identity

The formation of one's self-identity may be influenced by a variety of factors. One's parents, siblings, family, peers, environment, race, creed, color, socio-economic status, sexuality and/or disability are agents of socialization that may shape one's sense of self. Lavoie (2005) asserts that one's self-identity and social success is "largely dependent" (p.255) on the child's ability to understand, internalize and effectively navigate their way through each of these agents of socialization. When I spoke with Chelsea and Jake, I inquired as to how they perceive themselves and the impact their hearing loss has had on their self-identity.

Chelsea appeared poised and prepared to tackle any of my questions. During each of our interviews, she appeared open, honest and forthcoming with information regarding her social and educational experiences. Central to my research question, I asked Chelsea to talk about how her social experiences in school may have been impacted by having hearing parents. She explained how growing up and being around hearing people for the majority of her life prepared her to be in a mainstream academic setting. Chelsea explained that although she is not hearing, she identifies with, "both the hearing and the deaf worlds" and she stated her awareness of being around hearing people, "in school, for my job and the rest of my life". Growing up with hearing parents who present mannerisms and characteristics of those who have auditory proficiency has influenced Chelsea in a way that reminds her that she will remain, to some degree, in the hearing world for the rest of her life. Presently, she has absorbed this understanding of hearing people from her parents and uses these lessons to navigate her way through her mainstream academic setting.

Moradi and Rottenstein (2007) found, “deaf persons are considered members of a unique culture” (p.178). It is within this deaf culture that members share a common language and history and are able to empathize with others’ experiences growing up in hearing households, with hearing families and attending mainstream schools. Through my interviews, Chelsea exhibited a *bicultural attitude*, one that, “reflects recognition of strengths and weaknesses of deaf and hearing cultures and persons, along with culture in both the deaf and hearing worlds”(Moradi & Rottenstein, 2007, p.179). In essence, she has learned the ways of both worlds and can transition between them even when she must consider alternate means of communication (i.e.: pen and paper versus American Sign Language).

Jake’s perception and understanding of his sense of self is laced with struggle. His statements regarding socialization illustrated his interest in connecting with his peers but also the difficulty of success in such interactions. Central to the research questions of my study, I asked Jake how he thinks his peers and his parents view him. Jake described his perceptions of how others see him this way,

The kids at school probably see me as cool and fun kid and cool to hang out with. My parents see me as a good son who is respectful and an important part of the family and who always keeps his room clean.

Jake appears to see himself exactly as he stated. When asked about how he sees himself, he looked at me as though I did not understand his initial statement. He once again explained that he sees himself as a, “really good kid” who is, “really cool”, works hard and loves his family. This is very much how he portrays himself in his academic setting. Through several observations, I took note of how genuinely respectful Jake is with his teachers. Always willing to help, Jake is the first to raise his hand to bring the

attendance roster to the main office or pass out books and papers to his classmate. He says hello to every, single person who enters the classroom. This could be a student in his class, a teacher, a supervisor and even the superintendent.

Jake carries a very large backpack with him to class. In addition to his schoolbooks, Jake carries a photo album with him. Inside the album are pictures from his confirmation, his brother's wedding and recent holidays. When given free time in class, Jake quickly pulls out the album and shares it with teachers and peers. Family is clearly of the utmost importance

Jake sees himself as neat and organized. Jake gave me permission to look in his backpack. I observed that his books are in order; binders are organized by class and color coded in sections labeled, "articles", "homework" and "class notes". There are no frayed edges of papers, books upside down or pencils out of a specified holder. Jake appears to have a clear understanding of the importance of school and how his organization skills will support his academic success.

I encouraged Jake to discuss the connection between having hearing parents and his ability to interact with the hearing students in his high school. Jake said,

Yeah, my parents hear and my brothers and sisters hear and I hear a little bit too. I think I get along with hearing people well because everyone in my family hears. I think it would be hard for me to talk to deaf people if I went to a deaf school.

When I asked Jake why it might be difficult to communicate with someone who has a hearing loss, he explained that he does not have a strong ability to use American Sign Language and if they used a manual form of communication, he could not respond. He independently suggested, "writing on paper" or "talking slower" but did not appear to

genuinely feel comfortable with the idea of being placed in an environment where speech was not the primary mode of communication. Although his parents used American Sign Language when Jake was initially identified as having a hearing loss as an infant, he was able to develop strong speech skills and convey his thoughts. As a result, Jake chose to stop using American Sign Language to communicate with others. Seeing his use of speech, Jake's family followed his lead and stopped using American Sign Language as well.

Similar to Chelsea, Jake also shared the strain and tension felt when socializing with his peers. He shared, "Sometimes I talk to the other kids in my class and they ignore me. That makes me frustrated". He found the computer to be an easier communication venue that allowed him the opportunity to connect with his peers. When discussing the influence of his parents, Jake identified himself as being connected to the hearing world both at home and in school. This was different from Chelsea who believed she identified with both the hearing and deaf world and could navigate her way through both.

Theme Three: Social Situations

Without even realizing it, hearing people are often in social situations where multiple conversations are occurring simultaneously. For example, if a group is sitting at a table in a restaurant, several conversations may be happening simultaneously: the traffic on the way to the restaurant, what to order for appetizers, which movie to see after the meal and the like. For Chelsea, following several speakers is quite challenging. I discovered that this phenomenon occurs in both family and educational situations for

Chelsea and Jake. In fact, Chelsea spoke of this position when she expressed feeling “left out” or “bored” in these situations. She also shared: “ When I am with my family or a big group of friends, they have conversations and don’t sign. Sometimes they don’t know how to sign but other times they just don’t and that hurts because it’s like they kind of forgot that I’m sitting at the table”. Through my observations, I also found this to be true in school. Having seen Chelsea in the cafeteria, I saw her sit with a group of her hearing peers but not interact with any of them.

Through my observations, I witnessed Jake in both structured and unstructured social situations. During his structured courses, Jake appears socially appropriate. He can work with others in a small group and participates appropriately during class discussions. During unstructured social situations such as lunch, Jake struggles to navigate a conversation with ease. When asked about lunch, Jake explained, “I like to go to the library because it is quieter in there. The cafeteria is too loud for me”. The library, a quiet location, provides Jake with the environmental silence he needs to be able to focus on a person’s mouth and vocal volume. In the cafeteria, “there are too many noises”. After this comment, I went back to the cafeteria and observed Jake again. This time, I took note of the noise and how it might hinder effective communication for someone with a hearing loss. During a brief ten-minute period, I heard the chairs on the cafeteria floor, drinks and food coming out of the vending machine, cell phone ringers, bags opening, the cash register, teacher’s talking and 250 student voices. I asked Jake about these sounds and his response was, “I know, it’s so annoying and I can’t hear anyone and they can’t hear me so I just eat fast and go to the library”. For someone with a hearing loss,

unstructured social situations invite a myriad of noises that may hinder one's ability to communicate effectively.

As stated by both Chelsea and Jake, socialization in a mainstream setting is difficult. For Chelsea, it is most difficult because the dominant language is not manual. For Jake, the environment must be very precise to maximize his residual hearing.

Theme Four: Communication

Communication is essential for human interaction. For a receiver to understand a sender's message, the language used by both parties must have qualities that are similar. When this is not the case, there is a breakdown of communication and the message that needs to be conveyed is lost in translation.

During my time interviewing Chelsea, I asked her to reflect on a time when she did not worry about her ability to communicate. Quickly, she shared a story about her experience at a camp she attended last summer:

I attended a camp called Explore Your Future (EYF). Everyone who went to the camp was deaf and used ASL to communicate. Even the teachers knew sign language. I was around deaf people for six or seven days. I was using my first language the entire time. I didn't have to think, 'does that person understand me?' or, 'is my voice clear enough?' I just signed. I was just natural. I didn't have to think about anything.

Chelsea's experience at a summer camp for deaf children shows a clear identification and comfort in using a manual language. As stated earlier, Chelsea depends on her parents, siblings and sign language interpreter for her manual thoughts to be translated into spoken words. At camp, Chelsea was able to communicate in her first

language no longer needing an intermediary to communicate for her. She was able to share her thoughts and receive immediate feedback. She did not feel isolated from conversations and could seek clarification to questions or share ideas with her peers without the fear of her message not being conveyed properly or understood in the manner she intended. Chelsea was clear in her convictions that manual language was her primary choice for expression.

At a very young age, Jake, his parents and his siblings were all taught and used American Sign Language. Speech therapists and teachers came to the home to work with the family to build Jake's language repertoire. As he got older, he began to show speech and language improvement and chose to communicate orally instead of manually. When asked how he feels when he communicates with others and he is not understood, Jake explained,

Sometimes people say, 'what?' or, 'what's that again?' and it's because I'm not, like, speaking properly. Sometimes my speech is a little off and it's hard for other people to hear and understand me.

Due to some health concerns, Jake did not begin school until he was six. He did not attend pre-school or pre-kindergarten classes or socialize with other children outside of the home. When Jake was asked about his education, he shared that he and his parents had visited both a school for the deaf and his home district's elementary school. He explained that he and his parents decided that a public school education was the most appropriate fit for his needs and, "I have more teachers to help me. At Millridge* (school for the deaf), it was like one or two teachers but here (Vanderbilt* public school) I have nine".

Jake has had minimal exposure to the deaf world and its culture. He identifies himself as a hearing boy who has hearing parents, siblings and family. Perhaps, without even realizing it, Jake's membership to a hearing family has influenced how he sees himself, and why he and his family chose a mainstream academic setting for him.

During his interview, Jake made of a close friend. a young, deaf girl who attends another school. Jake stated, "She's been my friend for six years. She goes to another school. She wears hearing aids like me. I miss her". When asked about his ability to socialize with students in school, Jake explained,

For the kids at school, I go up to them and say, 'hey, how's it going?' and sometimes they go on to the next group. They are not easy to talk to. I ask them if they want to hang out but then on the weekend they never call".

Although Jake perceives himself as, "cool" and prides himself on not needing anyone to communicate for him, his deafness still seems to affect his social experiences. This appears to be a contradiction that emerged during data collection. After several observations, I occasionally noted Jake sitting alone in class, standing outside social circles and reading silently while his peers conversed before, during and after class. The isolation I observed in Jake's school setting appears to be in opposition to his belief that he has strong relationships with his peers. In addition, his mention of his friend at another school was interesting because he identified with her having, "hearing aids like me". Perhaps without realizing it, Jake feels a certain level of comfort communicating with others who understand his struggle to hear. Regardless of the manner used to convey a message, communication is necessary for adequate self-expression and successful human interaction. Both Chelsea and Jake have the means to communicate

however their interviews suggest feelings of frustration and distress when they describe the experience of communicating with their peers.

Theme Five: Education, Socialization and Social Networking

Due to their hearing loss, both Chelsea and Jake struggle to effectively communicate face-to-face with their peers. Technology and social networking have assisted them in diminishing this communication gap.

When asked about her educational history, Chelsea shared her experiences at both a school for the deaf as well as her transfer into a mainstream school. “I was taught sign language at the Millridge School for the Deaf* toddler program so I learned English and ASL at the same time”. However as time passed, Chelsea’s parents felt the education she was receiving was not equivalent to that of a mainstream setting. In the fifth grade, Chelsea was transferred to a local elementary school and was provided with an interpreter to assist her in all of her classes. Chelsea offered the following reflection of this time:

Educationally, it was a good experience because I could get an education like normal, hearing people. All hearing people have an education but deaf education is lower than hearing education. Normal deaf people can read up to, like, a third grade reading level while a hearing reader can read at a 12th grade reading level. Deaf writers are not great writers, hearing writers are better.

From an educational perspective, Chelsea has compared her perceived success rate of deaf students in schools for the deaf versus those who are educated in a mainstream academic setting. While she does not have empirical data to support her statement, she believes she has become more academically inclined than her friends who attend schools for the deaf. When asked about this, Chelsea said, “None of them (her friends) have sat to complete the SATs or ACTs”. She believes many of them are going

to seek employment when they graduate high school whereas she intends to pursue a college education. Socially, however, Chelsea's views are a bit different. When asked to describe her social experience in a mainstream, academic setting, Chelsea remarked,

Socially it's a challenge. I have to rely on my interpreter or anyone who knows sign language. I use paper and pen, or my phone or gestures. I'm not really satisfied with my social life in high school. Not a lot of hearing people have patience with me. They just want to have a normal conversation without it taking a long time. But, socially at a hearing school, it gives me some understanding of what kind of challenges I will probably face in the future with my career.

Chelsea's description of her social experience in a mainstream school offers insight into the challenges that she has had to overcome. For example, Chelsea needs to rely on an interpreter. The need for a communication liaison who is also an adult is a social challenge for Chelsea. In my work as a teacher I have observed that adolescents are desperately trying to break free of adult control and find their independence. The communication barrier that Chelsea experiences plays a significant role in her struggle to converse with ease. I also observed a sense of sadness when Chelsea described how her peers lack the patience necessary to speak to her. This can be nothing short of disheartening for a teenager who wants to fit in. "The last thing the young adolescent wants is to stand out from the crowd" (Steinberg, 2011, p. 155). As the literature states, the importance of, "fitting in" is important to all adolescents. They seem to believe that being, "different" in any way is detrimental to their social success. For Chelsea, this feeling of being unlike her peers is magnified because of her hearing loss. Lastly is her maturity in that Chelsea is aware that the obstacles she faces now will not disappear and it is vital that she learn how to work through these struggles now because they will continue to be ever present in the future.

Throughout her interview, Chelsea talked candidly about her abilities and challenges to socialize with peers and her understanding of her sense of self as a student, teenager, daughter and sister. She made several comments about her use of the social networking site called Facebook as her primary mode of communication with her peers. It is through this technological tool that Chelsea is able to express herself and communicate with her peers without needing a physical communication intermediary like an interpreter. Chelsea made mention of her struggle to follow multiple conversations that happen at the same time. Through Facebook, she is able to use the online chat feature, conversing with each of her peers in a one-to-one fashion. She does not have to concern herself with being interrupted, environmental distractions or misunderstanding a statement when she is trying to read lips. Facebook allows her to be part of the social norm and she feels she is up to date on the daily gossip and happenings that occur in high school.

Social networking may seem to be a well established mode of communication but in fact it is a relatively new phenomenon. Sites such as Facebook and applications like Instant Messenger allow Chelsea's deafness to go unnoticed. While there is always the possibility that Chelsea will miss the non-verbal cues (such as facial expressions and body language) that occur during face-to-face interactions, this communication medium has afforded Chelsea with the opportunity to feel and act like her peers without her hearing loss becoming an interaction obstacle. I asked Chelsea to tell me about some of her experiences when using technology to communicate. She shared,

Sometimes in school, people don't understand my speech. That's why I wait to come home and chat with my friends from school. It's easier for me. Last year, I asked a boy to the prom on Facebook. Just as friends. I didn't want him to feel

pressure to go with me. He wasn't going to the prom at all so we didn't go. But I wanted to ask him and was a little embarrassed to do it in school to his face. His friends are always around. Facebook is more private.

I asked Chelsea to tell me how frequently she uses technology to communicate with her hearing peers. She stated,

Oh, all the time. I love Facebook. Do you use Facebook? It's pretty cool. I go online when I get home from school, around, three o'clock. I stay on the computer until I go to sleep around ten. I don't sit in front of it the entire time though. I leave it on so that if someone is online and wants to chat, they can send a message. Or, if I have a question with my homework or see a friend of mine on chat, I can send them a message.

I took note of Chelsea's statement regarding the time frame in which she is online. Chelsea leaves her computer on approximately seven hours per day, the same amount of time she spends at school. It appears as though her academics are her focus during the day and her socialization begins after the school day is over. Whether or not this is her genuine intent was not mentioned however, from my experience in this field, it appears that it is easier for Chelsea to communicate with her peers via a technological medium, not face to face.

When I asked Chelsea how she believes others might see her, she responded, "stupid because I'm deaf and have no friends." Although Chelsea explained that she doesn't think *all* of her peers believe this, if she were to venture a guess she believes many of peers would give this type of response. When I asked Chelsea how she sees herself and her experiences in high school, she said,

In high school I have become more responsible. I proved to people I could do anything hearing people can do, I just can't hear at all. I always make sure that I have good grades because it depends on my future and my college and what college I will go to. I really have to have money management now. Because I have to save money for things like gas, food, clothes and put some away for the future. Because everything is expensive now.

Chelsea's words clearly mirror her unusual maturity for someone her age. She understands money and the value of a strong education. She sees her future right before her eyes and is working to put the appropriate pieces in place to have a lifetime of success. Both she and Jake seem to have learned strategies to overcompensate for their hearing loss. Gerber, et. Al (1992) found that students with disabilities often put forth extra effort in areas of their lives in which they have control. For Chelsea, it is her understanding of money, the importance of high grades and her acceptance into college. For Jake, it is being close with his family, cleaning his room and being able to cook on his own.

Similar to Chelsea, Jake further explained that he also connects with his peers via the social networking site Facebook. Jake said,

I don't usually leave messages but sometimes if a post is interesting I do. I just do chat. I have a lot of school friends on Facebook and I have family and some other friends and I talk to them sometimes.

Similar to Chelsea, Jake uses social networking sites to communicate with his peers. He can have one-to-one conversations with ease and at no point does his hearing loss present itself as a communication obstacle. I asked Jake to explain why he likes Facebook and using the computer and he stated, "I feel like I always know what's going on with everyone". Perhaps Jake feels as though he is missing social information in face-to-face interactions and Facebook allows him to stay on top of what is happening with his peers.

While both Chelsea and Jake discussed the importance of a sound education, they also both struggled to succeed in the social arena. Social networking websites and other

communicative technological advancements have afforded them both opportunities to socialize they might not otherwise have if the only interaction option was face to face communication.

The View through the Eyes of a Parent

Understanding the influence of hearing parents on their deaf children was an essential component I wanted to better comprehend after interviewing both Chelsea and Jake's parents. The McGraths (Chelsea's parents) and the Murphys (Jake's parents) live in the same town and both have one child with a hearing loss. None of their other children or extended family have any known history of deafness. After interviewing the McGraths and the Murphys, four main themes emerged from my interview transcriptions. The information that follows offers the reader the essence of the experiences these families have had raising a child with a hearing loss.

Theme One: Identification of Hearing Loss: Emotional Reactions

Deaf. Hard of Hearing. Hearing Impaired. Hearing aids. Cochlear Implants. Struggle. Communication. Education. Future. These are but a few of the terms the McGraths and the Murphys needed to digest and emotionally tackle when they learned of their child's deafness.

Having no history of a hearing loss in their immediate or extended family, and not being aware that she was born deaf, Chelsea's mother and father individually talked about the signs that something was different and the moment they realized their baby girl could not hear them.

The signs were there. I spoke to the pediatrician about it at her nine-month check up. I brought her to my nieces cheerleading competition and with all the screaming and music, Chelsea slept right through it. From a very young age, she was very visual. But the day I knew, we were playing on the floor and I was holding her toy. She crawled right up to me and grabbed my face and moved her mouth but she was absolutely silent. I knew right then.

Similarly, Chelsea's father recounted events that led him to believe his daughter had a hearing loss:

We made an appointment to see an audiologist but the night before she (Chelsea's mother) was so nervous. The doctor told us we could do a home test. One of us needed to play with her and the other would have to sneak up behind her and pop a balloon and see if there was a reaction. There was no reaction. So we pretty much knew that there was something wrong. We didn't know it was deafness but we knew something was wrong.

In each interview, Chelsea's parents described learning of Chelsea's deafness as, "devastating", "overwhelming", "sorry", "upset" and "crying hysterical". However, shortly after receiving confirmation of a diagnosis they had already considered, Chelsea's father said,

I remember getting the call (from Chelsea's mom) and the confirmation and we were upset that night but by the time we went to bed, we had formulated a plan of what we were going to have to do.

Chelsea's parents were clearly shocked by the end result of the countless tests performed on their daughter. However, they knew action needed to be taken to ensure that she received the best medical and educational services possible.

Quickly following Chelsea's diagnosis, the McGraths researched early intervention programs. They hired a speech therapist to work with Chelsea, had her fitted with hearing aids and began to learn American Sign Language. Mrs. McGrath reflected, "We we going to communicate with our daughter. We would never accept her living in a world where she could not communicate with us. We researched every possible avenue. It was heartbreaking and overwhelming but this was our baby, I mean, what

parent wouldn't do this for their child? We did what seemed natural.”

The McGrath's experience differed from the Murphys right from the start. Jake was born with a malformed ear. The outer earlobe is almost non-existent. When Jake's parents saw this disfigurement, they believed their son may have some form of a hearing loss. As thought, Jake was diagnosed with a severe to profound hearing loss in both ears. When their belief was confirmed, Mrs. Murphy shared,

We were fully prepared to raise a deaf child. Jake is our youngest child and he is also the one with the most severe needs. We have always had a strong, close family and everyone was on board to help us learn how to communicate with him. Our biggest fear was that he would be frustrated so we spoke with therapists at the hospital to determine the best course of action. Him being frustrated and unable to communicate was our biggest concern.

When asked about the mode of communication they planned to use with Jake, Mrs. Murphy also shared,

My husband and I agreed that we were going to try to learn American Sign Language. We had a speech therapist come to the house and we began to learn. My husband was very good at it. Once Jake was aided (given a hearing aid), he would only use some basic sign language and we just kind of stopped the signing.

While the emotional response was obviously not identical, the McGraths and the Murphys were both quick in their plan to seek out intervention services that would benefit the linguistic development of their children. What followed was years of language training (for both the parents and the children) and then the need to investigate and find an educational environment that was best for a child with a hearing loss.

Theme Two: Determining an Educational Setting

After accepting their children had a hearing loss, the McGraths and the Murphys needed to consider the educational options available to them. For Chelsea and the McGraths, what followed was several months of doctor's appointments, fittings for hearing aids, sign language classes and educational research to determine the most

beneficial educational pathway for Chelsea. After exhausting options both in and out of state, the McGraths chose to enroll Chelsea in a school for the deaf. There she would be taught both English and American Sign Language and would be in a class with other deaf children. Mr. McGrath succinctly stated,

When we took her to Millridge, it was like throwing a fish back into water, she absorbed all of the language she was seeing with her eyes and producing it with her hands.

This mirrored Mrs. McGrath's statement when she shared,

When anyone met Chelsea, they always said the same things: she was so visual, she had big, beautiful eyes that just watched you with such intensity, she had such amazing facial expression. When we brought her to Millridge, all of that worked to her advantage and she now had a language to put with all of her already established ability to express herself. Wow, as I think back, I can't believe all the messages she was sending us just with her face and we didn't even know.

The McGraths clearly felt that a school for the deaf was the most appropriate placement for Chelsea and it was here that her ability to communicate flourished.

However, after ten years at the Millridge School, the McGraths became concerned that the education Chelsea was receiving was not as rigorous as that she would receive in a public school. Mrs. McGrath said,

We decided we wanted to give Chelsea the opportunity to try a public school. It initially started as once per week. The school district hired an interpreter and she would go from Millridge to Vanderbilt* and work with other hearing students her age. Then, we decided to split her day, half at Millridge, half at Vanderbilt. Finally, she finished out Millridge in June and started full time at Vanderbilt in September.

When I asked Mr. McGrath to tell me about this transition for Chelsea, he laughed a bit before commenting, “that’s a loaded question”. He then explained both the educational and social obstacles that presented themselves upon Chelsea’s transfer to public school:

I think it was a leap of faith but she (Chelsea) was trusting our judgement. She got a lot of pressure from her peers at the deaf school and parents also wanted to know why we were unhappy with the education at Millridge. And it’s not that we were unhappy but we knew that my niece who is the same age as Chelsea was completing assignments that were far more in depth than what she (Chelsea) was getting from her teachers. At first, Chelsea was seen as the ‘cute deaf girl’, almost like a novelty that everyone wanted to know. We even had special business cards created so the girls in Chelsea’s class could use the relay service to call her. She was invited for play dates and to birthday parties and then, the novelty wore off. Like all new things, they start off shiny but after awhile they lose their luster. And I don’t think Chelsea did anything wrong, I just think the kids didn’t want to take the time to really speak slowly and have a conversation with her.

The McGraths were very much aware of Chelsea’s social struggles in the mainstream setting. In fact, Mr. McGrath shared a conversation between he and Chelsea after her first year in middle school.

I said to her, ‘do you really hate school?’ and very honestly she said, ‘yes’. I asked her if she wanted to go back to Millridge and she, so mature for her age said, ‘no’. When I asked her why, she said, ‘I know I am smarter than my friends. I learn more here. My classes are harder and the work they do there is sooooo second grade. I just wish I could talk to people’. I didn’t know what to say. She was right. Maybe not in the words she chose but she was right.

Chelsea’s educational experience through the eyes of her parents appeared to be accurate. Similar to what Chelsea shared during her interviews, she was succeeding academically but “paid the price” socially. Jake, on the other hand, never attended a school for the deaf, even when American Sign Language was his primary mode of

communication. The experiences his parents shared differed somewhat from that of the Murphy family.

As Jake matured both physically and linguistically, there were some medical issues which came to pass. According to Mrs. Murphy, these issues did not impact his hearing but they did require him to stay at home and not attend pre-school or pre-kindergarten. When Mr. and Mrs. Murphy began to plan for Jake's educational services, they researched both schools for the deaf as well as their local school district. Mr. Murphy shared,

I remember looking at Millridge and Jake not really liking it. I think he liked Vanderbilt better because he liked the interactions with the kids I think. I think that's what has brought him this far. He was interacting with the kids. If he was there and wasn't socializing with the kids, he was always doing projects and was involved in so many activities and I don't think Millridge would have given him that.

While peer socialization was clearly a concern for both the McGraths and the Murphys, academics took considerable precedence. Both families clearly wanted their children to be happy and have friends but there was also the concern of academics and their importance in preparing them for the future.

Theme Three: Parent Perceptions

The McGraths and the Murphys shared the experiences they had enrolling their children in public school and the impact they believe it may have played on their social, emotional and academic development.

Both of Chelsea's parents explained the frustration their daughter felt as she continued through school in a mainstream academic setting. Descriptions such as, "lonely", "frustrated", "frequent breakdowns", "alone" and "isolated" supported their recounts of these experiences. Mr. McGrath commended his daughter when he explained that even with her frustrations, Chelsea chose to stay in public school because she knew she was getting, "a better education" than what she would have received if she continued to attend Millridge.

Similar to Chelsea's interviews, Mr. and Mrs. McGrath both spoke highly of today's technological advancements and how they have assisted Chelsea in her ability to socialize with her peers. Mrs. McGrath explained,

Technology has evolved and it is at her advantage. With Facebooking, IMing, text messaging, it opened up a whole new world for her. With technology, she may not have had the one-to-one face time but she was socially involved and knew what was going on by being on the computer. The computer became a big socialization piece for her and it became a big piece that was lacking with communication. Now, she was less worried about socializing in school because she thought, 'oh, I can just talk to them on Facebook later'.

While most of Chelsea's socialization with her hearing peers occurred after school hours, Jake's parent's shared a different view of the experiences their son had being in a mainstream academic setting.

Mr. and Mrs. Murphy explained that Jake has been enrolled in the public school system since kindergarten and has received accommodations (speech therapy, preferential seating, extra time on exams) to compensate for his hearing loss. When shifting from his academic to social development, Mrs. Murphy expressed the changes she has seen with Jake over the last ten years:

I really wish he was involved more. He did join the golf team but I still wish he was more involved in clubs and activities after school. My mother (Jake's grandmother) is always giving me a hard time about why he doesn't invite friends over. He's always talking to his family or his cousins or his siblings. He can talk with family or about family for hours. I guess if he's ok with getting his academics and socialization during the school day, we can't pressure him.

Mr. Murphy also commented on Jake's friendships with his peers and his ability to socialize with others:

At all of the meetings, the teachers tell us that he is doing great and has a lot of friends. I don't know, the phone never rings here. But, he's always on that computer. My two older boys told us he should get an account on Facebook and my wife did not like that idea AT ALL. She felt like he was going to be harassed by a predator or something but they said it would be good for him and that's what kids his age do. So, we agreed but we watch him. Now, we can't get him off that computer and it's actually good for him because I see when he leaves the screen open that he's talking to kids at school, not just his cousins. He doesn't give long answers but I see he answers posts and writes things like, 'Yo buddy, what's up?'

Similar to Chelsea, it appears that social media is an avenue students with a hearing loss feel comfortable using to communicate with their hearing peers. Both the McGraths and the Murphys shared their understanding and awareness of how technology has assisted their children in staying connected to their hearing peers.

Theme Four: Hearing Influence on Self Identification

A large component of my research was to gain a better understanding of how a parent's hearing status may influence their deaf child's sense of self. When asked about how they think Chelsea views herself, both Mr. and Mrs. McGrath believe that although Chelsea was raised in a hearing household and attended a mainstream academic setting, they believe she feels most comfortable communicating with other deaf people and using American Sign Language. As they begin to plan for Chelsea after she graduates, the

McGraths are aware that she has set her heart on a college that caters to and has extensive accommodations for deaf students. Mrs. McGrath believes Chelsea will be successful in whatever she achieves. Mr. McGrath echoes the sentiments of his wife however he believes that Chelsea must continue to work on her speech, language and communication skills, even if she is planning to attend a college that uses American Sign Language in both classroom and social settings. Mr. McGrath shared,

We've never told her that anything is impossible for her. I want her to be happy and if that's where she will be happy, that's fine. But, I think if she limits herself to just the Deaf community there will be limitations and she will not be everything she can possibly be.

Overall, the McGraths were more than willing to share both their struggles and successes raising a child with a hearing loss. In essence, they disclosed their memories of Chelsea's academic and social history and believe that her sense of self has been influenced by members of both the deaf and hearing communities.

Perhaps because his hearing loss was not as profound, the Murphys' responses differed somewhat from that of the McGraths. I asked both Mr. and Mrs. Murphy if they believe their ability to hear has impacted Jake's self-identity. Mr. Murphy poignantly expressed,

Look, every once and awhile, you think your life is great and then you get dealt a certain card and now you gotta play it. You gotta deal with it, take it in full stride and take every day and live everyday to the fullest. Look at the situation, whatever it is...we love him like he's a normal kid and just accept him, deal with the obstacles and treat him like every other kid in the family.

Similar to Chelsea's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Murphy believe they have put the emotional and academic pieces in place to support Jake's overall development. In essence, these lived experiences of both deaf students and their parents have presented

both positive memories and difficult obstacles that they have worked through to achieve the most successful and rewarding educational and social achievements possible.

Chapter 5: Reflections of the Findings

Significance of the Study

My research study was about the social experience of two deaf students from hearing families in a mainstream educational setting. No one has documented the experience of the participants in my study in their own words and there was little qualitative research to document the social experience of deaf students in mainstream educational settings such as this. Furthermore, there appeared to be a dearth of literature concerning the lived experience of deaf students from hearing families in mainstream educational setting from the students' and parents' viewpoints. This research identified the participants' experience and its influence on them. Thus, it contributed to the qualitative socialization literature on deaf students from hearing families.

The goal of my study was to provide a rich, thick description of the participants' perceptions and understandings of the social experience in a mainstream high school. Educators might use this study's information to better understand how this experience impacts the lives of deaf students from hearing families in mainstream educational settings. This information is significant for the prior participant research in the special needs student area and augments the quantitative data. The data showed ways deaf students and their hearing parents might be better prepared to navigate the social experience in a mainstream educational setting from theme clusters that were discovered.

Upon reviewing interview transcripts, Chelsea's journals and my observation reports, several themes arose from the data collected. This section focuses on my analysis and reflections of the themes that emerged from my research, "not for

generalizing beyond the case, but for understanding the complexity of the case”
(Creswell, 2007, p.75).

This section will be separated into three segments. The first will review the themes that emerged through interactions with Chelsea and Jake. I will compare their lived experiences and determine if any common emotions or feelings were similar. Next, I will review and analyze the themes that emerged from my interviews with the four parents involved in this study. As will be reviewed, several common themes emerged between these two families. Last, I will review the themes that emerged from this study, one in particular that was consistent in all six interviews completed.

Discussion

Communication Frustrations

In their interviews both Chelsea and Jake made mention of the importance of communication in navigating social situations in a mainstream educational setting and with their hearing families. They both felt it was important to be able to communicate with family, friends, teachers and acquaintances. Having a more severe loss, Chelsea made mention of being “dependant” on others in certain situations. For example, at a family party, Chelsea would depend on her mother or sister to interpret the conversation for her. In school, she needed an interpreter with her in all classes to follow the material at the same pace as her peers. She does not have her interpreter during lunch and it was often difficult to communicate effectively without him. He accompanies her to after school clubs, activities and sports however she is on her own in the locker room or during, “down time” when her interpreter takes his lunch break.

Jake also felt that communicating clearly was important. His hearing loss is significant although not as profound as Chelsea's. He has basic knowledge of American Sign Language however he uses his residual hearing and speech to communicate with others.

Communicating with others proved to be frustrating for both Chelsea and Jake. Having observed both of them in a mainstream educational setting, I saw how a hearing loss can truly hamper one's ability to effectively converse. I often witnessed Jake saying, "Huh?", "What?" and Chelsea turning to her interpreter when she could no longer read the lips of the person speaking to her. Peer interactions appeared laborious and tiresome and I often saw Chelsea and Jake more focused on their class work than on the conversations occurring amongst their peers. Chelsea and Jake's experience is consistent with Oliva's (2004) observations about peer to peer interaction: "In a school environment where cliques abound and students have other things competing for their time, most youths do not have the maturity or desire to take the time to communicate with a deaf or hard of hearing student" (p 81-82).

Both Chelsea and Jake use hearing aids to amplify environmental and verbal sounds. These amplification devices are necessary for them to hear if a car is coming, the class bell, or if their name is being called in class. The hearing aids are visible as Jake has short hair and Chelsea often pulls her hair up into a ponytail. While this may seem like a rather insignificant detail, I believe it actually impacts how Chelsea and Jake's peers choose to communicate with them. "An important method of nonverbal communication involves artifactual system. This refers to artifacts to communicate with others: clothing, hairstyles, jewelry...people often form instant impressions of others

upon viewing their outward appearance” (Lavoie, 2005, p.91-92). Having seen their hearing aids, it appears that the peers in Chelsea and Jake’s classes have already determined a belief about deafness and the manner in which they will now communicate with someone who has a hearing loss. From my experience as a teacher and through several observations, this seems common amongst adolescents. They want to fit in and be like everyone else. Physical appearances influence popularity and the, “cool kids” are those with the perfect hair, teeth and physique. It is rare, and incredibly unfortunate to see that the, “in crowd” does not include those in a wheelchair, with crutches, blind or deaf.

Communication is an important aspect of the social experience for all adolescents in high school. This is magnified for Chelsea and Jake who are both aware of the importance of communication and the struggle they both face to do so effectively. The effort needed to succeed can be frustrating and has frequently been met with confusion and annoyance felt by both adolescents. Sociologist George Herbert Mead believed language to consist of gestures and symbols however these were only significant if an appropriate response was elicited from the recipient of the message (Mead, 1982). In the case of Chelsea and Jake, their hearing loss prevents them from producing or receiving language in a manner that makes conversations and social interactions simple and straightforward. This leads to another theme that emerged during my data collection: the social experience.

The Social Experience

Chelsea and Jake shared the essence of their social experiences in high school. Both mentioned feeling, “left out”, “bored”, “frustrated” and “confused”. In a conversation with multiple speakers, both Chelsea and Jake described how they struggle to follow along. They must both identify the speaker and then focus on their mouths to read their lips and discriminate vocal sounds from those in the surrounding environment. This comes naturally to hearing people and we are able to understand and focus on a conversation without having the television, music or a passing car disrupt its’ flow. For someone with a hearing loss, the focus must be on the speaker, an arduous task for Chelsea and Jake. From my observations, this was more feasible in a structured classroom setting. However during lunch, it was very difficult for either of them to follow conversations with the abundance of environmental and social distractions that occurred. Chelsea and Jake would sit near groups of students eating lunch but they rarely participated in the conversations. This is most likely because the level of sound in the cafeteria was overwhelming. It is during lunch that the students appear to smile, laugh and enjoy being with their peers. Chelsea and Jake did not appear to prosper socially during this time.

“During middle and high school, social dynamics change. Although teachers can remind students to take turns talking or to make room for a deaf student in a group discussion, critical interaction takes place outside of the classroom...socialization provides about half of the education that students need” (Oliva, 2004, p.82). This process is unnatural for hearing people and the students in Chelsea and Jake’s classes struggled to keep the natural pace of a conversation when they were asked to include a peer with a

hearing loss. The students were not intentionally isolating Chelsea and Jake from their conversations however it simply appeared too difficult to meet the needs of both the hearing and deaf participants. This was the point at which Chelsea and Jake might return to their desk, take out a book, study or simply look on in a conversation but choose not to force their participation. According to Mead, communication is a conversation of gestures (usually voice) and it is these gestures that convey meaning between the speakers. As an individual matures, they are often able to sense how others will respond to their gestures and they plan their conversations accordingly (Mead, 1934). In the case of Chelsea and Jake who are not understood by their peers, they struggle to participate in conversations. This negatively influences their social experiences in school, during after school activities and weekend sporting events. The struggle to communicate impacts their ability to make friends and date because they are unable to share their thoughts, ideas and feelings and learn about their peers in a reciprocating fashion.

Although both Chelsea and Jake attend high school in a predominantly hearing setting, they do not share the same belief regarding their identification and understanding of self. Sense of self and identification was another prominent theme that emerged during this study.

Self Identity

Although they attend the same school, live in the same town and have mutual friends, Chelsea and Jake identify themselves very differently. This may be in part because of their individual level of hearing loss as well as their chosen mode of communication. When Chelsea was asked if she identifies with the hearing or deaf

world, she explained that she was raised in a hearing world but members of the deaf world “understand me”. On the other hand, when I asked Jake to explain how he saw himself, he said he grew up in a hearing house with a hearing family, attends a hearing school and doesn’t think he would have felt comfortable if he had been educated in a school for the deaf.

Mead’s (1934) conceptual framework on the identity of the self comes into play here as well. Communication, according to Mead is important because it provides a type of behavior in which an individual may become an object to himself. Mead is referring to communication in the sense of significant symbols not sounds. Jake’s level of hearing loss combined with the experience of being raised in a hearing culture enabled him to more successfully interact with other hearing people learning the meaning attached to symbolic behaviors and developing a sense of himself as a hearing person. This does not seem to be the case for Chelsea. Even though she has hearing parents, it appears that her severe hearing loss means that she had to learn how to interpret meaning through symbolic interaction more like the way deaf babies and children learn.

“For many people who grow up as part of the culture of hearing people, they think of themselves as hearing people with a hearing loss” (Wilcox, 1989, p.11). Through my interviews with these students, I found that while both are medically identified as having a hearing loss, it is only Jake who wholeheartedly believes he is a complete member of the hearing world. Chelsea made several comments regarding her deaf friends, attending summer camp for deaf teenagers and even her plans to attend a college primarily composed of deaf students. She is aware that she will always need to communicate with the predominantly hearing society but she finds most social comfort with other deaf

students, particularly those who are also educated in mainstream settings. “They get it. They understand the struggle”, she says. At no point did Jake make mention of identifying with members of the Deaf community however he did say his closest friend is a girl who has a hearing loss but attends school in another county.

It seems, based only on the information collected from these two students, that their understanding of who they are is greatly influenced on their level of hearing loss. Having interviewed and observed these students, I have seen how Chelsea’s profound hearing loss has been a communication and social barrier that cannot be shattered. She identifies with others that use her primary language, American Sign Language and have shared the struggle of growing up deaf in a hearing family and attending a school that caters to hearing students. It appears that Chelsea has been successful academically in the mainstream setting. Socially however, Chelsea may have prospered socially if she had remained in a school for the deaf.

Jake’s loss is considerable but not to the severity that requires a manual language to communicate. Since Jake is still able to speak in a manner that is somewhat intelligible to others, he is better able to acclimate himself into the hearing world. He has never used American Sign Language in his academic setting and students have never identified him as one who does so. This may be one of the reasons why Jake recognizes himself as a hearing person who, “can’t hear good” as opposed to a member of the Deaf community whose primary mode of communication is American Sign Language. Chelsea and Jake’s parents shared their experiences having a deaf child, the obstacles they faced, the decisions they made and the emotions that occurred.

Communication

One theme that consistently emerged was the parents' need to communicate with their child. When Chelsea was born, Mr. and Mrs. McGrath were unaware of her profound hearing loss. They described the eventual diagnosis of deafness as "absolutely devastating" and Mrs. McGrath feared she would not be able to learn American Sign Language to effectively communicate with her daughter. They experienced feeling "overwhelmed", "concerned", "denial" and "self-pity". These feelings are consistent with Moores' (2001) findings that parents of deaf children go through several periods of stress once they have learned of their child's diagnosis. For some, it is initially a sign of relief because now that they can finally put a label on a concern they have usually had for quite some time. However, this feeling of reprieve is usually followed by grief, denial, blame, fear and eventually acceptance. "Practical considerations quickly emerge. Because the parents lack of knowledge about deafness, they may question whether the child will ever become self-sufficient and assume a productive role in society" (p. 148).

The Murphy family shared similar concerns to that of the McGraths. Jake was born with a malformed ear and the doctors informed them that he might have a hearing loss. Mrs. Murphy explained, "We were fully prepared to raise a deaf child". From Jake's birth, Mr. and Mrs. Murphy had therapists in the home to teach the entire family American Sign Language. One concern that continued to be discussed in the Murphy interviews was the fear that Jake would become angry and frustrated and unable to explain to others what he needed. The Murphy's believed that learning American Sign Language would prevent Jake from being misunderstood.

Moore (2001) found that children who are diagnosed with a severe to profound hearing loss are not typically diagnosed until they are between 18-30 months of age. After diagnosis, Moore (2001) found that parents do not enroll their child or the family in any form of communication intervention program until the child is almost four. Contrary to the literary findings, Chelsea's diagnostic and audiological testing was completed at thirteen months and she was in an intervention program less than one month later. Having noticed that she was not responding to sounds or turning when her name was called, Chelsea's parents were proactive in determining if their daughter did in fact have a hearing loss. While Jake was not formally diagnosed with a hearing loss at birth, his parents were aware of the possibility of raising a deaf child and immediately enrolled in at-home therapeutic services. While this is not the case for all children with a hearing loss, it is interesting to see how both sets of parents in this phenomenological study found communication to be of the utmost importance to their child's success and took immediate action to ensure both the child and the family were learning American Sign Language.

Education

While communication was of significant importance to both the McGrath and Murphy families, educational options and concerns were also discussed at length during our interviews. According to Wilcox (1989), "the problem of educating deaf children can be looked at from two points of view. Traditionally, deaf children have been regarded as a handicapped group, whose inability to hear imposes severe limitations on how they could learn. It cannot be denied that deaf children, compared to hearing children, are in fact handicapped; they lack the ability to hear spoken language" (p.103).

After diagnosis, the McGraths made several visits to mainstream schools and schools for deaf children. Being that Chelsea had not had any access to language or sound, the McGraths chose to enroll her in a school for the deaf that used a communication method known as Total Communication that consisted of using a combination of sign language and speech (Baker-Shenk & Cokely, 1980). Chelsea would learn speech and sign language at school and in addition, a teacher from the school would come to the McGrath house to teach the family American Sign Language. The McGraths were concerned that Chelsea would not be able to communicate or receive a proper education without a solid language base and in turn, utilized each and every resource available in their affluent community to afford Chelsea the communication input she would need to educationally succeed.

Chelsea attended a school for the deaf until she was in the fourth grade. At that time, the McGraths began to notice that the curriculum Chelsea was being taught in the school for the deaf was far more simplistic than that of her hearing cousin who was also in the fourth grade. Believing that she was falling behind her hearing counterparts, the McGrath's made the decision to place her in a mainstream setting with an interpreter in all of her classes. Educationally, Chelsea thrived. She did well in her classes and completed assignments in a timely manner and without struggle. Educationally she was flourishing however socially, she was feeling isolated and alone. "We need to ask ourselves what it really means to be the only deaf child or youth in a hearing classroom in terms of self-perceptions, social growth and development" (Leigh, 1999, p. 236). The Murphy's were also concerned about Jake's education. Would he be able to

communicate well enough to succeed in school? Knowing that his hearing loss would impact his language development, Mr. and Mrs. Murphy hired a speech therapist and sign language instructor to come to their home and teach the family American Sign Language as well as speech intervention to Jake.

When the time came to enroll Jake in school, the Murphy's also explored a variety of academic programs. They looked into a school for the deaf as well as a mainstream setting for Jake. Since Jake had begun to develop some basic speech skills, the Murphy's felt he would progress comfortably in a mainstream setting. Jake began to rely more heavily on his speech and residual hearing and his dependency on a manual language as form of communication significantly diminished. From kindergarten, Jake attended a mainstream academic school and received support services (speech therapy, preferential seating, an FM auditory amplification device) to meet his educational needs. He was able to communicate with enough clarity to be understood by his teachers and peers and unlike Chelsea, he thrived educationally and socially in a mainstream.

Education was a key theme that emerged from my interviews with the McGraths and the Murphys. In addition, socialization and friendship was also an area of concern.

Socialization and Friendship

Educationally, both the McGraths and the Murphy's found the mainstream academic setting to be the best choice for Chelsea and Jake. However, both made mention of some of the socialization struggles that occurred when their deaf child attended a school with hearing peers. Mr. McGrath referred to Chelsea's socialization experience as a, "colossal disaster", a rather bold statement, and one embroiled with a

host of unspoken interpretations. The Murphy's also cited changes in Jake's socialization experiences, explaining that he was, "invited to birthday parties and play dates when he was younger" however they diminished as he got older. Leigh (1999) argues the deaf dimension:

For the deaf student in a mainstream setting, the extent of participation with interpersonal contexts is very much contingent on a multiplicity of factors, including, but not limited to, communication skills, personality and level of assertiveness, acceptance by peers, academic achievement, and the like. The philosophy of inclusion presupposes that increasing the extent to which deaf students are mainstreamed increases the likelihood that they will identify with hearing peers. This leads to the implication that the definition of social success is contingent upon 'making it with hearing peers'. If one does not have hearing friends, 'not making it' with hearing peers will affect personal development (p.237).

Having observed both Chelsea and Jake, it is clear that the socialization concerns held by their parents are not unwarranted. Chelsea and Jake spend a significant amount of class time sitting alone, not pushing to involve themselves with their peers or being invited into existing social circles. This observation shows how these two deaf students feel socially isolated from their hearing peers. Through her research, Oliva (2004) found this feeling to be continually present in deaf children who are educated in mainstream settings.

Parental Influence on Self Identity

While their experiences may be different, the Murphy and McGrath families share the common bond of having one deaf child who is the only person in the family with a hearing loss. When asked about how their hearing identity as parents may have influenced their deaf child's identity, the responses varied significantly. The McGraths

collectively believed that although Chelsea was raised in a hearing household and attended a mainstream school, she ultimately identified with others who had a hearing loss and used American Sign Language. Mr. McGrath made mention of Chelsea having to remember that the world is, for the most part, hearing and she will always have an involvement in it, whether it be because of family, occupation or even a trip to the supermarket. Perhaps this perspective was used to encourage Chelsea to always be strong and ready to compensate for her hearing loss. Mrs. McGrath, having a stronger grasp on American Sign Language than her husband, believed that she would always be able to communicate with her daughter and it was unimportant to her which world Chelsea chose to “join” as long as she was happy. Both parents want their daughter to succeed and be happy and they believe they have taught her all of the morals and values she will need to succeed in life, regardless of her hearing loss. “The concept of biculturalism encompasses the notion that an individual is able to gain competence within two cultures without having to choose one culture over the other” (Leigh, et al, 1998, p.330). Chelsea demonstrates competencies in both the hearing and deaf world. Having observed Chelsea and read her journal entries as well as interviewing her and her family, I believe she has absorbed and now possesses the values and norms of both the hearing and deaf world and will continue to move between in the years to come.

When I interviewed Jake’s parents, I asked them how they believed their membership in the hearing world may have influenced Jake’s sense of self and identification with the world around him. Having chosen the oral route at a very young age, Jake’s parent’s explained that he was never fully exposed or immersed in the Deaf world and their culture. Differing from Chelsea, Jake never attended a school for deaf

children or used American Sign Language consistently enough to make it his primary mode of communication. “The cultural orientation refers to those who are culturally hearing, meaning, that hearing norms are the reference point for normality, health and spoken communication. The role of deafness in one’s identity is not emphasized” (Leigh, et al, 1998, p.331). For Jake, although he was medically diagnosed as having a hearing loss, his parents did not identify him as being culturally affiliated with the deaf community, therefore, Jake appears to have established his sense of self with hearing values and influences, unlike Chelsea who has had exposure to those connected with both worlds.

The Largest Theme: Technology and Social Networking

The theme of technology – more specifically *social networking* emerged in all of the interviews I conducted. Although social networking has become a widely used platform for communication, it was not a central focus of my research study. When I went back to the literature I was unable to locate research on social networking and deaf adolescents. After completing the interviews with both the parents and the students, I found social networking, particularly the use of Facebook, had an impact on how the deaf students in my study communicate with their peers and family members. Like their hearing peers, Chelsea and Jake use Facebook as a communication tool to socialize with their peers. However, social networking platforms like Facebook also enabled Chelsea and Jake to overcome many of the challenges that they face with their social experience in a mainstream educational setting. Chelsea and Jake both explained that although their hearing loss makes it difficult to have conversations with peers in school, Facebook enabled them to stay involved in daily happenings and teenage gossip. It is here that they

can read their peer's wall posts, comment on a link or have a one to one typed conversation that is not distracted by other outside sounds. Chelsea said she has learned a lot of, "cool slang hearing kids use" while on Facebook. Jake said he can, "see what friends and family are doing" when he is online.

Chelsea's mother said that Facebook enables her daughter to experience the, "ebb and flow of adolescence". There are tears over boys, disagreements with peers and secrets between friends. She also said Chelsea uses her cell phone to check her email and text message her friends, both hearing and deaf. "The technology we have today has made a world of difference for Chelsea" noted Mrs. McGrath.

The Murphy's also found Facebook to be a great socialization avenue for Jake. Initially hesitant with the use of Facebook, Mrs. Murphy was apprehensive that others would take advantage of her son. Mr. Murphy explained that his older children believed this would be a way for Jake to stay involved with his peers even if it was a struggle during the school day. As predicted, Mr. and Mrs. Murphy believe Jake has made great social progress online. Similar to Chelsea's experience, Jake is able to converse one-on-one with his peers, text someone to say hello and post a comment on someone's wall. Although not within physical proximity, Chelsea and Jake are able to connect with their hearing peers even it is not with face-to-face interaction.

Conclusion

Chelsea, Jake and their parents shared experiences that have shaped them into the individuals they have become. They all believe communication is key to success and have researched every available option to lessen the obstacles that emerge when a hearing

loss is present. Overall, technology and social networking have provided an important tool to facilitate communication easing the conversational or socialization struggles that exist for Chelsea and Jake. With regard to their sense of self and identification with one culture over the other, it appears that the level of hearing loss and the primary mode of communication employed has a significant bearing on which culture Chelsea and Jake choose to identify with. Use of American Sign Language and attendance at a school for the deaf have clearly influenced Chelsea's affiliation with the Deaf world. On the other hand, although he has a hearing loss, being raised in a hearing house, attending a mainstream school and using spoken language has affected Jake in a way where the Deaf world seems foreign to him. It is clear that parental influence and guidance has saturated the social experiences of both Chelsea and Jake however it appears that only Jake will remain solely in hearing world whereas Chelsea identifies herself as a member of both.

Upon review of the literature, it appears that, to date, there is an absence in the literature about modern technology, social networking and its influence on the social experience of the deaf. After interviewing the six participants involved in my study, I found that social networking is what they believe has been the greatest link between the deaf and hearing worlds. These deaf students rarely use paper and pen to communicate with hearing people. They now use their cell phones to text their messages. They leave notes on their hearing friends' Facebook walls and if they have a question about homework, an instant message can be sent to find the answer. While this does not erase the social struggles that exist between deaf and hearing adolescents in a face-to-face situation, it does allow for the deaf to still feel attached, to a certain degree, to their hearing peers. Feelings of frustration and isolation remained prominent in my interviews

with Chelsea and Jake. This allows us to see that even though they are able to communicate with their peers when they arrive home and via a technological medium, their school day is still saturated with social silence.

The parents interviewed in this study want nothing more than the absolute best for their children. They speak about their children with pride, knowing how far they have come and are still aware of how much further they need to go. Chelsea's parents know that she transitions between both the hearing and deaf worlds and they believe that she will ultimately attend a college that largely caters to the needs of those with a hearing loss. While they have had significant influence on her academic and social beliefs, Chelsea's inclination is to be with those who are like her, who understand her and whose social struggles are similar to those she has experienced.

Jake's parents enrolled him in a mainstream academic setting since kindergarten. Jake knows nothing but the hearing world, its norms, values and tendencies. Through our interviews, it was clear that he does not see his hearing loss as something that will prevent him from remaining a member of hearing society. Jake's parents have undying love and devotion for their son and it appears that their influence has prompted Jake to identify himself as hearing.

Educationally, Chelsea and Jake have done well in their mainstream academic setting. Through my observations, it is clear that they have the scholastic ability to remain in a mainstream classroom. They have been provided academic supports and intervention services and these have given them every opportunity possible to succeed.

Socially, Chelsea and Jake's hearing loss appears to be their greatest communication and social obstacle. Having experience working with students with a hearing loss, I found Chelsea and Jake to be warm, affable, caring and charismatic young adults. It is unfortunate that the language barrier that exists inhibits their hearing peers from getting to know and identify them as, "friends".

Overall, Chelsea, Jake and their parents were honest and forthcoming when sharing their experiences associated with hearing loss. It was an absolute honor to have met and learned about those who, prior to this thesis, were never offered the opportunity to have the silence broken and their voices heard.

Topic for Additional Study

While deaf adolescents from hearing families may struggle to socialize in a mainstream academic setting, the possibility of this study being replicated in this precise manner may be difficult since this is a phenomenological account of the lived experiences of these six participants. Just as these participants did not share identical experiences in and amongst themselves, it is doubtful that others outside of this study could do so either. A study with a larger sample size would be helpful in discovering shared lived experiences of deaf students who have hearing families and who attend mainstream educational settings.

To date, little research has been done that focuses on the social influence technology has on deaf adolescents. Instant messaging, Facebook and other social networking sites have opened up a social world that was once foreign to the deaf. Further

research on this topic is needed in order to understand how relationships between the deaf and hearing have changed due to the phenomenon of social networking.

The results of this research led me to consider additional topics for future study. While speaking with the parents involved in my study, each offered me the opportunity to interview their hearing children. This made me consider the possibility of interviewing hearing siblings of deaf children and gaining an understanding of their views and experiences growing up in a household with a deaf sibling. They may be able to share information regarding their family dynamic or if they attended the same school as their deaf sibling, they could shed light onto their understanding of their social experiences in the mainstream setting.

In addition to a sibling's perspective on having a deaf brother or sister, I have also considered something of a reverse study from this thesis: the hearing student's perspective of having a deaf student in their class. Perhaps having a better understanding of how they see this student, their concerns, fears and emotions might allow educators to consider unconventional curriculum and instruction methods that incorporate deaf and hearing students in a way that makes them academically and socially similar.

Last, additional research is needed to assist mainstream educators and districts in their incorporation of students with a hearing loss into their classrooms. While this may not be problematic in an academic or curricular venue, educators should have greater understanding of how a hearing loss affects a student emotionally and socially. With this knowledge, it is my hope that students with a hearing loss in a mainstream academic setting would prosper not only on an academic level but on a social forefront as well.

APPENDIX

Questions for Parents:

- 1) What was your experience or understanding of hearing loss prior to (Jake, Chelsea's) birth?
- 2) How would you describe your child's hearing loss to someone who knew nothing about it? How might you describe it to a stranger versus another parent?
- 3) What led you to question J/C's hearing? Can you describe the events leading up to his/her diagnosis?
- 4) What was your reaction when you first learned that J/C had a hearing loss?
- 5) How did you perceive your role as parent with a deaf child?
- 6) What were/are your biggest worries about J/C's ability to socialize with his/her peers in school?
- 7) What challenges arise when communicating with J/C?
- 8) How do you think J/C sees him/herself? How do you think J/C's social experience in high school has impacted how his/her social development?
- 9) Does J/C ever discuss his/her hearing loss? How do they feel about their hearing loss?
- 10) Does J/C associate with peers who also have a hearing loss? What do you notice about those interactions?
- 11) How do you think J/C identifies him/herself in your family?
- 12) How do you think J/C identifies him/herself compared to the other students in his/her grade?
- 13) Why did you decide to place J/C in a mainstream educational setting?

- 14) How would you describe J/C's social experience in a mainstream educational setting?
- 15) Where do you see J/C ten years from now?
- 16) What do you hope for in J/C's future?

Questions for Students

- 1) Tell me about your family. Does anyone else have a hearing loss?
- 2) How do you communicate with your family? Do your parents understand you?
- 3) What happens when your family doesn't understand you? How do you make your message clear?
- 4) Explain how you feel going to a high school with hearing students? What feelings do you have?
- 5) What was your social experience like in high school? What has been your experience with hearing peers?
- 6) What social experiences have had a profound impact on you? Explain?
- 7) Tell me about your friends. Are they deaf? Hearing?
- 8) Who do you feel most comfortable talking to?
- 9) Which world do you feel most comfortable in?
- 10) How does your interpreter help or hurt your ability to communicate with others?
- 11) What happens in school when students or teachers don't understand you? How do you make yourself clear?
- 12) When you think about your experiences in high school, what words come to mind? Why?

- 13) When you think about your own sense of who you are, what words come to mind? Why?
- 14) When you think about how your peers view you, what words come to mind? Why?
- 15) When you think about how your parents view you, what words come to mind? Why?

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