Between Two Worlds: Relationships between hearing children and their Deaf parents

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Between Two Worlds
Relationships between hearing children and their Deaf parents

Hearing children of Deaf parents (HCDPs)—a population rarely addressed by researchers—are surrounded by the Deaf culture of their parents and Hearing culture of their peers and mentors. The differences in language and culture that they experience produce a confusing and potentially disorienting world. HCDPs accept Deafness as an integral part of their identity, as illustrated through the relationships between parent and child.

Communication
HCDPs receive a lot of pressure by their parents and the Hearing world to provide an effective communication link.

“You’re depended on for a lot of the interpreting because you are the first to learn it and you’re the person they depend on everything. It’s just part of being the oldest child. There are just responsibilities that just come with that.”
-HCDP

“Sometimes I’d get the oldest daughter [to interpret]. [I ask] ‘What they saying?’ She will abbreviate and talk for about an hour and… [tells] me 5 minutes [worth of the conversation]. I want to know the details!”
-Deaf mother of five hearing children

Parent-child Relationship
A unique relationship between HCDPs and their parents results from the communication barrier. Deaf parents are unable to connect to their children on an emotional level, but still provide the necessary parental support.

Involvement
HCDPs struggle to balance the Deaf and Hearing culture within themselves and often move through periods of involvement and intensity with each culture.

“But I used [sign language] for so long that now I am like, I don’t want to be known as the girl who knows sign language. I want people to like me for me and to know me for me”
-HCDP

Conclusion
These subjects help us better understand and appreciate the cultural background of people who are seemingly the same as the rest of Hearing culture, but who have experienced a different, and perhaps a more complex, process into adulthood.

Corinne Hoskin • mentored by Dr. John Hawkins • Department of Anthropology