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**The relationship between parental hearing status and
self-concept of deaf and hearing children**

DeLuigi, Diana M., Psy.D.

Pace University, 1991

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PREVIEW

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTAL HEARING STATUS
AND
SELF-CONCEPT OF DEAF AND HEARING CHILDREN

by

Diana M. DeLuigi

A Doctoral Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Psychology in the
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ABSTRACT

This study considered children's self-concept as it related to parental hearing status, child's hearing status, age and gender. Self-concept ratings were obtained for 33 pre-lingually deaf and 14 hearing eight to 13 year old children using the Modified Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale (CSC-M) (Convey and Koelle, 1981). The Personal Attribute Inventory for Children (PAIC, Parish, 1976) was completed by 27 children. Research groups consisted of 1) pre-lingually deaf children of hearing parents (DH), 2) pre-lingually deaf children of deaf parents (DD), and 3) hearing children of deaf parents (HD). Pre-lingual deafness means a severe to profound hearing loss occurring before age 18 months (Gregg, 1985). Post hoc analyses of the CSC-M revealed hearing children of deaf parents also scored significantly lower than either group of deaf children on Total Self-Concept ($p < .05$) and the subscales Intellectual and School Status ($p < .001$), Anxiety ($p < .001$), Popularity ($p < .001$), and Physical Appearance and Attributes ($p < .001$). Hearing children of deaf parents scored significantly lower than deaf children of hearing parents on the subscale Behavior ($p < .05$). Contrary to previous research, no relationship between parental hearing status and self-concept of deaf children was found. Further research of hearing children and deaf parents is indicated.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

One of the main tasks in a human's life is to become integrated into the society in which one lives. This integration occurs through adaptation to the society and culture. Adaptation is a continual process of interacting with and adjusting to the environment. One aspect of adaptation is to define the self. Researchers have attempted to understand human adaptation and self definition in terms of self-concept (Lynch, 1981). Defining the self is a continuous developmental process that begins at birth and proceeds throughout the course of an individual's life span (Lynch, 1981). When a child is born with a sensory deficit the question of how this deficit affects self definition becomes apparent.

There are many definitions of self-concept in the literature and they often depend upon the theoretical orientation of the researcher (Bills, 1981). Included in these definitions of self-concept is the assertion that it begins to develop at birth and continues during childhood, largely as a result of accumulated interactions with parents and other significant people in a child's life (Coopersmith, 1967; James, 1890; Mead, 1934; Piers, 1984; Sullivan, 1947). Further, self-concept is a process which is experienced and

expressed differently by children at various stages of development (Lynch, 1981; Piers, 1984).

Babies learn about themselves and begin to develop a self-concept by integrating environmental information received through their senses (taste, touch, sight, smell, and hearing). Also during infancy, establishing a mutually gratifying relationship with primary caretakers is a main factor contributing to the developing self-concept (Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975).

As children mature and interact socially with peers and other adults, self-concept is defined by these social experiences and by parental attitudes and behaviors (Piers, 1984). Self-concept becomes increasingly more differentiated as individuals move through middle school years and into adolescent years (Harter, 1983). One of the most influential factors impacting on the development of self-concept in children appears to be communication with others, especially caretakers and peers (Coopersmith, 1967; James, 1890; Mead, 1934; Piers, 1984; Sullivan, 1947) and attitudes and behaviors of primary caretakers (Coopersmith, 1967; Piers, 1984).

Language is a primary tool with which the process of communication occurs. Thus, language becomes another major factor impacting on the development of the self-concept (Mead, 1934; Myklebust, 1960; Sullivan, 1947). When babies

are born deaf, however, their interactions with others are different. Deafness deprives individuals of auditory input from the environment and access to verbal language (Levine, 1981). There is a disruption in the verbal communication between deaf individuals and other people. Communication deficits, which often begin with the parent-child relationship, continue throughout deaf children's lives and impact on the development of self-concept (Levine, 1981). Deaf children, because they often cannot comprehend verbal explanations for their behaviors or use language to channel impulses (Harris, 1978), have been noted to demonstrate poor impulse control (Goldstein-Litoff & Feldman, 1981).

Researchers have considered many issues regarding deafness in children (e.g. the relationship between etiology of deafness and self-concept in children; the relationship of academic achievement level and deafness). However, much of the research on deaf children and self-concept to date is plagued by definitional and methodological problems (Garrison & Tesch, 1978; Koelle & Convey, 1982; Rudner, 1978). One problem has been that researchers have mistakenly treated the deaf population as a homogeneous group, but actually there is considerable variability within the population (Brinich, 1980; Meadow, 1972; Myklebust, 1964; Sussman, 1973; Wedell & Lumley, 1980; and Yachnik, 1986). Other methodological problems include poor

reliability and validity of assessment instruments, use of instruments that have not been normed on deaf children, and use of instruments with reading levels that are too high for the average deaf child (Garrison & Tesch, 1978; Koelle & Convey, 1982; Lapham, 1981; Rudner, 1978).

Parental hearing status has been identified as one factor contributing to the variability in the deaf population (Trybus & Karchmer, 1977) and impacting on the development of self-concept in deaf children (Brinich, 1980; Levine, 1981; Meadow, 1972; Wedell & Lumley, 1980; Yachnik, 1986). Typically, deaf children whose parents are deaf have been found to have higher self-concept scores than deaf children whose parents are hearing (Yachnik, 1986). One explanation for this finding is that deaf parents are familiar with deafness, can communicate with the child and therefore have fewer problems and fears regarding the deaf child (Levine, 1981).

Other variables have also been determined to impact on deaf children's self-concept. These variables include communication method at home (i.e., manual or oral) (Bernstein, 1976; Norden, 1981; Williams, 1970), type of school setting (e.g. mainstream, self-contained or residential) (Green, 1978; Meadow, 1972; Sussman, 1973), degree of hearing loss (i.e., from mild to profound) (Meadow, 1972), age (Meadow, 1972; Myklebust, 1964; Titus,

1965), and gender (Blanton & Nunnally, 1964; Loeb & Sarigiani, 1986; Titus, 1965).

Although the relationship of parental hearing status and deaf children's self-concept has been investigated, there has been a dearth of research investigating the relationship of parental deafness and self-concept in hearing children (Pecora, Despain & Loveland, 1986). The limited research on the population of deaf parents and hearing children has focused on family relationships in general rather than self-concept in children in particular. Studies suggested that when parents are deaf and children are not that there may be family relationship difficulties (Halbreich, 1979; Rayson, 1987). Hearing children may suffer communication problems and alienation from peers. In fact, Harris (1983) found that deaf parents passed on to their children feelings of inferiority and the belief that deaf people cannot succeed. Others have noted that deaf parents of hearing children feel guilty, insecure and are often overprotective with their children (Ford, 1984). Additionally, it has been observed that there is an imbalance of the usual power relationships because, due to deafness, parents frequently become dependent on their child for interpreting (Rayson, 1987).

Studies also have found that the self-esteem of deaf children differed significantly depending on the age of the

child (Meadow, 1972; Myklebust, 1964). Much of the research in the area of self-concept and deaf children has focused on the self-concept of deaf adolescents (Garrison et. al, 1978; Green, 1978; Titus, 1965) and young adults (Yachnik, 1986). It has tended not to focus on the earlier development of self-concept during latency and pre-pubescence. But the younger age group is important as these children progress through latency and pre-pubescent stages and the issue of self-concept becomes highly relevant as one of the developmental tasks is to move outside the family system and integrate with peer groups.

An additional issue in the research of self-concept in deaf children has been gender. Literature has indicated that self-concept in deaf (Hopper, 1988; Loeb & Sarigiani, 1986) and hearing children may vary depending on gender (Fisher, 1974; Stopper, 1978). However, these results are inconsistent and the issue has been overlooked in the research of deaf children.

Rationale for the present study

The purpose of this present research was three-fold. First, it was designed to add to the existing body of research on self-concept and deaf children and to focus on a more homogenous group of deaf children than previously studied. Second, it was developed to add to the narrow body of research regarding hearing children of deaf parents.

Third, it was formulated to answer questions regarding deafness in children, parental hearing status, and children's self-concept as related to age and gender.

Research has left many questions unanswered regarding the relationship between deafness and self-concept. For example, it is unclear whether there is a change in deaf children's self-concept depending on age or gender of the child. It is also unclear whether there is a significant relationship between parental hearing status and deaf children's self-concept when confounding variables are not present (i.e., type of school setting, communication method, age of onset of deafness). Further, it is uncertain whether there is a relationship between parental deafness and self-concept in hearing children. This study considered some of these issues by examining the following questions:

- 1) What is the relationship between children's self-concept and the hearing status of children and their parents? In other words, does the self-concept of pre-lingually deaf 8 to 13 year old children, whose parents are hearing, differ significantly from pre-lingually deaf age-mates whose parents are deaf? Does the self-concept of pre-lingually deaf 8 to 13 year old children, whose parents are deaf, differ significantly from hearing age-mates whose parents are deaf? Does the self-concept of pre-lingually deaf 8 to 13 year old children, whose parents

are hearing, differ significantly from normally hearing age-mates whose parents are deaf?

- 2) What is the relationship between children's self-concept and gender when deafness exists in the parent, the child, or both? In other words, does the self-concept of pre-lingually deaf 8 to 13 year old females and males, whose parents are hearing, differ significantly from pre-lingually deaf, female and male age-mates whose parents are deaf? Does the self-concept of pre-lingually deaf 8 to 13 year old females and males, whose parents are deaf, differ significantly from normally hearing, female and male age-mates whose parents are deaf? Does the self-concept of pre-lingually deaf 8 to 13 year old females and males, whose parents are hearing, differ significantly from normally hearing, female and male age-mates whose parents are deaf?
- 3) What is the relationship between age and children's self-concept when deafness exists in the parent, the child, or both? What is the relationship between age and self-concept of pre-lingually deaf 8 to 13 year old children, whose parents are hearing, and their pre-lingually deaf age-mates whose parents are deaf? What is the relationship between age and self-concept of pre-lingually deaf 8 to 13 year old children, whose parents are deaf, and their normally hearing age-mates whose

parents are deaf? What is the relationship between age and self-concept of pre-lingually deaf 8 to 13 year old children, whose parents are hearing, and their normally hearing age-mates whose parents are deaf? What is the relationship between age and self-concept of pre-lingually deaf 8 to 13 year old children whose parents are hearing? What is the relationship between age and self-concept of pre-lingually deaf 8 to 13 year old children whose parents are deaf? What is the relationship between age and self-concept of normally hearing 8 to 13 year old children whose parents are deaf?

- 4) What is the relationship between two measures of self-concept with children who are prelingually deaf?

The following hypotheses were formulated as a result of questions generated by previous research.

Hypothesis one.

There will be significant differences in mean scores among deaf children of hearing parents (DH), deaf children of deaf parents (DD) and hearing children of deaf parents (HD), with respect to self-concept as measured by the Modified Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale and Personal Attribute Inventory for Children. Deaf children of deaf parents will have higher mean self-concept scores than deaf children of hearing parents or hearing children of deaf parents.

Hypothesis two.

There will be significant mean differences between males and females, with respect to self-concept as measured by the Modified Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale and Personal Attribute Inventory for Children. Males will have higher mean self-concept scores than females.

Hypothesis three.

There will be a significant relationship between younger subjects and self-concept scores, as measured by the Modified Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale and the Personal Attribute Inventory for Children. There will be a positive relationship between age and self-concept.

Hypothesis four.

The Modified Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale and the Personal Attribute Inventory for Children will be positively correlated with each other.

The present study empirically investigated how the factors of age, gender, and parental hearing status are related to self-concept in deaf and hearing children. A specific consideration of this study was to explore whether hearing status of parents is related to self-concept of deaf children differentially than it affects self-concept of hearing children, depending on age and gender of the child. Three groups of children were used for this research; pre-lingually deaf children of hearing parents (DH),

pre-lingually deaf children of deaf parents (DD), and hearing children of deaf or hearing-impaired parents.

This study corrected for problems plaguing prior research of population heterogeneity and inappropriate instrumentation for use with deaf children. This was achieved by 1) restricting the subject pool of deaf children to include only those who were pre-lingually deaf and attended schools for the deaf; 2) using measures appropriate for deaf children; and 3) eliminating the need for children to read questions.

In order to clarify the discussion of deafness, the following definitions are used.

Definition of terms.

Hearing Impairment: "A generic term indicating a hearing disability which may range in severity from mild to profound; it includes the subsets of deaf and hard of hearing" (Newby, 1979, p.393).

Deaf Person: "A person whose hearing disability precludes successful processing of linguistic information through audition, with or without a hearing aid." (Newby, 1979, p.393).

Severe to Profound Hearing Impairment: a diagnosed pure tone average (500-2000hz) hearing loss of 70dB in the better ear (Moore, 1978).

Pre-lingual Deafness: Deafness occurring before the acquisition of language - age 18 months (Gregg, 1985).

School for the Deaf: an educational facility specifically for deaf children, child must have a severe to profound hearing loss in New York State (Trybus and Karchmer, 1977).

American Sign Language: A unique and recognizable language that has its own grammatical pattern. It is used by deaf persons and combines manual symbols and finger spelling to represent ideas and concepts (Riekehof, 1978).

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