PERSONAL IDENTITY IN DEAF ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors influencing the identity deaf adolescents. The study involved 67 deaf adolescents (38 boys and 29 girls aged 16 to 19 students of secondary school). Ninety-three hearing children constituted a comparison group. The structure of identity was explored on the basis of identification references given by the subjects who were to reply in writing, 20 times running, to the question: „Who Am I?” the test, adapted from M. H. Kuhn and T. S. McPartland by Martines and Silvestre (1995) given in written and signed mode.

Results showed that the hearing status as well as mode of communication influence the description of personal identity. It was found that deaf adolescents used more descriptions especially in the following categories: Civil Status, Body and Physical Appearance, Tastes and Activities, Friendship and Relationships, Personal and Social Situation, Negative Personal Traits, and Neutral Personality Traits. Although this study could demonstrate impact independent variables on identity, the data raise the need for further, preferably longitudinal, research. This complex phenomenon has to be examined more closely.

Combined self-descriptive processes lead to the development of an organized, learned and dynamic identity, and subjective description of an individual has strong emotional consequences for the individual in question.
Personality development in the deaf is of great interest, and it is evident that adolescents who can cultivate a clear and positive identity after their developmental struggles in adolescence often advance more smoothly into adulthood (1, 2).

Identity is a new way of thinking about oneself that emerges during adolescence. It involves a sense of self-unity, accompanied by a feeling that the self has continuity over time. A firmly established identity also provides a sense of uniqueness as a person. The formation of identity in adolescence sets the stage for continual changes in the content of identity through the adulthood. Although the question related to identity development in deaf adolescents seems to be important, not much research has been done in this field (3). A review of the literature helps us to distinguish the central questions that have been posed and the answers that have been put forward. Allowing for the fact that self-concept and identity in the deaf develop in interaction between socio-emotional, cognitive, communicative and linguistic factors, significant differences can be found between deaf and hearing adolescents.

Some researchers have explored the differences between the deaf and the hearing in personality development by taking into account social interactions related to the upbringing process that are the basis of feelings of belonging. The importance of the early relationships of the deaf baby and significant adults was pointed out (4) and it was shown that deaf population is weaker than comparison groups in the component aspects of the self.

There are generally three factors for deaf children that are directly linked to identity. On the one hand, the attitudes of the parents are critical; parents who approach deaf children's issues related to their hearing loss in a positive way will then impact their children's identity positively. On the other hand, social interaction in a family with deaf children is related to the mode of communication.
Адекватната комуникација дома може да развие адекватни социјални вештини (5). Ако едно се-мејство има вообичаен стил на комуникација, глувите деца можат да ги задоволат своите по-треби за сигурност и разбиране. Незадоволени-те основни потреби водат до нарушување на идентитетот (6).

Трето, доминантниот стил на комуникација се однесува на јазичната компетентност. Јазична-та компетентност на глувите ученици разбрана како дел од нивниот процес на социјализа-ција и формирање на нивниот самоконцент, исто така е важен показател на самоидентитетот. Главниот резултат што најновите студии од оваа област го потенцираат е односот меѓу по-зитивниот самоконцент и повеќето аспекти на говорната компетентност (7). Силното чувство за јазикот и наследството заедно со чувството на припадност може да се развива кога глувите деца ќе се вклучат во глувата заедница и могат да се идентификуваат со други слични луѓе (8).

**Method**

**Participants**

The sample of the preliminary study presented was drawn from the Special School and Therapy Centre for the Deaf in Krakow. 67 deaf adolescents (38 boys and 29 girls aged 16 to 19, secondary school students) took part in the survey. The control group consisted of 93 hearing adolescents (53 boys and 40 girls) of this same age range and the same level of education.

**Measures**

The structure of identity was explored on the basis of identification references given by the subjects who were to reply in writing, 20 times running, to the question: „Who Am I?“ the test, adapted from M. H. Kuhn and T. S. McPartland by Martines and Silvestre (3). The assumption was that each person possesses a repertory of identification references. These references correspond with the cognitive-affective components of an identity.
An analysis of the classifying content of the subjects’ replies was carried out according to the categorization done by Martines and Silvestre (3) who found 14 main categories in Spanish adolescents.

Results
On the assumption that hearing impairment could be a factor underlying identity development, the identification references given by the subjects (who were to reply in writing 20 times running, to the question: „Who Am I?”) were counted. The identification references given by the subjects were coded into 14 categories differentiated by Martinez and Silvestre (1995). Flexibility of identity was measured in terms of the number of descriptions given by the adolescents, and an analysis of variance was performed (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Flexibility of identity in relation to hearing impairment and gender $F(1, 138) = 0.0523, p = 0.81455$

Слика 1. Флексибилност на идентитетот во однос со оштетувањето на слухот и полот $F(1, 138) = 0.0523, p = 0.81455$

masculine (male)  feminine (female)

Сливи (deaf)  со слух (hearing)
Flexibility of identity was measured by the total number of descriptions used (Figure 1). Deaf adolescents filled in the questionnaire with more expressions than the hearing respondents did. It might suggest that, firstly, the deaf have better access to self identity categories; secondly, that they tried to express their verbal fluency, as they do in many educational situations. The gender effect is similar in both groups, which means that girls’ identity is enriched in comparison to boys.

Two main effects were found, related separately to the independent variables: the hearing impairment (F=8.888, p<0.004) as well as the gender (F=5.537, p<0.02). Firstly, deaf adolescents used significantly more adjectives and nouns to describe themselves in relation to different areas than hearing students did, and secondly, females were significantly more verbally fluent than males in both deaf and hearing subgroups, but the interaction between both independent variables did not have a significant effect.
Barajaćki razliki među глувите и тие со слух во референтните категории на идентитетот (слика 2), беше откриено дека глувите адолесценти користеа повеќе описи, особено во следните категории: граѓански статус, телесна и физичка појава, вкусови и активности, пријателство и врски, лична и социјална положба, негативни и неутрални лични карактеристики.

Од друга страна, не беа забележани значајни разлики во следните категории: друг статус, апстрактни концепти, идгината и еволуцијата на jae, политичкиот и социјалниот свет, идеалниот jae, егзистенционалниот прашалник за jae, семејството и позитивните лични карактеристики. Глувите адолесценти користат многу апстрактни концепти за да се опишат себе како што тоа го прават оние што слушаат, но тие користат повеќе негативни карактеристики на претпоставката дека се описат себе како што тоа го прават оние што слушаат, но тие користат повеќе негативни карактеристики. На претпоставката дека мострата за когнитивниот развој која ја даде Piaget (9) е универсална и независна од доминантниот модалитет, беше откриено дека способноста на глувите да откриват и користат апстрактни симболи и да ги следат правилата на логиката, не покажа ниту застој во развојот ниту некоја друга мостра (10), иако глувите може да имаат пониско самопочитување во некои области. Студијата ја користеше методологијата на Martinez и Silvestre (3), работејки со претпоставката дека разликаите во идентитетот кој се јавува меѓу глувите и адолесцентите што слушаат се резултат на развојните мостри кои се однесуват на оштетувањето отколку на нивната културна состојба. Во полскиот примерок само двајца адолесценти направија експлицитни референции на глувост, што е значително пониско од оние во Шпанија. Во полските училишта за глувост изразувале се едни концепти за глувост, што е значително пониско од оние во Шпанија.

Looking for differences between the deaf and the hearing in identity reference categories (Figure 2), it was found that deaf adolescents used more descriptions especially in the following categories: Civil Status, Body and Physical Appearance, Tastes and Activities, Friendship and Relationships, Personal and Social Situation, Negative Personal Traits, and Neutral Personality Traits. On the other hand, no significant differences were noticed in the following categories: Other Status, Abstract Concepts, Future and Evolution of Self, Political and Social World, Ideal Me, Existential Questioning about Self, Family, and Positive Personal Traits.

Deaf adolescents use as many abstract concepts to describe themselves as the hearing do, but they use more negative personal traits. On the assumption that the cognitive development pattern prescribed by Piaget (9) is universal and independent of the dominant modality, it was found that the ability of the deaf to discover and use abstract symbols and follow the rules of logic shows neither a lag in development nor a different pattern (10), although the deaf may have lower self-esteem in some areas. The study was conducted using the methodology by Martinez and Silvestre (3), working with the assumption that differences in identity found between deaf and hearing adolescent are the result of developmental patterns related to the impairment than their cultural background.

In the Polish sample only two adolescents made explicit references to deafness, which is significantly lower than in Spain. In Polish schools for the deaf Total Communication is still the primary method of communication, which combines both signing and speaking, although oralism is strongly stressed on the assumption that deaf people have to deal with relationships with the hearing majority. By avoiding references to deafness adolescents might deny their true individuality as well as personal belonging to the group of similar individuals. Those who identify with the Deaf culture might form a representation of the deaf world as a minority where sign language would be the primary means of communication.
Училишната средина треба да биде содобна за развој на бикултурни вештини, кон се екстремно важни за успешно живеење со мноштвото што слуша како и плодно учество во културното и националното наследство. Полските глувини адолесценти не би свесни за нивното колективно самоидентидизвикаат со одејтив позитивно самопочитување, таа до комуникативен сбор во културата на глувите. Тоа не се опишуваа себе според концепти во однос на глувоста како што тоа го сториаа шпанските испитаници (3).

Меѓутога, важно е да се запомни дека индивидуалното $jac$, без разлика на колективното или индивидуалното културно членство, иако стекнува универсална предност над другите видови $jac$, движејќи се кон колективното $jac$ претставува еден одбраниен механизам за $jac$, каде што веќе припадноста на група или колективното $jac$ претставува еден евolutивен развој за самоопситувањето (11). Идентитетот на глувите каде што владеа би-девијки групната идентификација имаше позитивен ефект на самопочитувањето (12) а двојното идентитет се однесува на постоенето и на најмало тешкотии (13). Работата врз основа на одделно образование во основното училиште е од корист за социјалното и академското достижење кај глувите деца, билејки тие се во можност целосно да комуницираат и да ги разменуваат искуствата со други слични људи (14).

Може да се сугерира дека одделното образование води кон попозитивно самопочитување, иако овој резултат не е потврден. Врз основа на наодите опишани од Bat-Chava (15) може да се претпостави дека од културен аспект глувите и бикултурните идентитети би имале повисоко самопочитување. Од друга страна, одделното опкружување може да води кон помалку позитивен резултат и може да создаде услови за лична изолација билејки глувите људи го тогаш остануваат без можност да учат како да функционираат во светот што слуша. Теоријата за социјалниот идентитет (16) претставува дека членовите на малцинските групи постигаат позитивен социјален идентитет преку: (а) обид да стекнат пристап кон нормалното преку индивидуална мобилност или (б) работа со другите членови на групата за да предизвикаат социјална промена.

The school environment should be the background for the development of bicultural skills, which are extremely important to successful living within a hearing majority as well as fruitful participation in cultural and national heritage. Polish deaf adolescents were not conscious of their collective self in categories related to Deaf culture. They did not describe themselves in terms of concepts related to deafness as their Spanish counterparts did (3). However, it’s important to remember that although the individual self, regardless of collectivist or individualistic culture membership, takes universal primacy over other types of self, shifting towards the collectivist self is a defence mechanism for the self, where as actually belonging to a group, or the collectivist self, is an evolutionary development for self-survival (11). Deaf identity in Polish adolescents has to be developed because group identification had a positive effect on self-esteem (12) and dual identity is related to having the fewest difficulties (13).

Working on the basis that segregated education throughout elementary school is beneficial for the social and academic achievement of deaf children, because they are able to fully communicate and share experiences among other similar people (14), it might be suggested that segregated education leads to more positive self-esteem, though this result was not confirmed. On the basis of the findings described by Bat-Chava (15) it could be predicted that culturally the deaf and bicultural identities would have higher self-esteem.

On the other hand, a segregated setting might lead to a less positive outcome and may form a background to personal isolation because the deaf people then lack the opportunity to learn how to function in the hearing world. The Social Identity Theory (16) posits that members of minority groups achieve positive social identity by (a) attempting to gain access to the mainstream through individual mobility or (b) working with other group members to bring about social change.
The next step of the analysis was related to the influence of the social context on the personal identity of deaf adolescents. Only a few significant differences were found but they may be of interest. It was found that Body and Physical Appearance description is dependent on the parents’ hearing status. Deaf adolescents who had a deaf mother \((F=4.978, p<0.03)\) as well as a deaf father \((F=6.232, p<0.02)\) used more words within this category. The hearing status of siblings is related to the Positive Personal Traits description \((F=3.617, p<0.03)\). The mode of communication used is related to two identity categories: Body and Physical Appearance as well as Individuality, Ideal Me, and Existential Questioning about Self (Figure 3).

Sign language influences the first category, while the oral mode of communication influences the second one. It might suggest that speech is a better way of describing ideal stages and existential questions.

**Conclusions**

The preliminary findings have led us to the following conclusions:

1. Differences in identity description in the deaf are related to specific developmental conditions stemming from hearing impairment, especially the family hearing status and mode of communication.
2. The process of identity formation might have a universal pattern independent of the sensory impairment.
3. More research should be conducted in this field and more data should be taken into consideration (such as the means of communication at home, the severity of the hearing loss and use of a hearing aid).

Литература / References

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