

A new Look at (Deaf) Identity and Personality

Jesper Dammeyer


UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN



Program

Study 1: Deaf Identity, well-being, and cochlear implants

Study 2: Personality traits and other individual differences in relation to identity

A photograph of a young woman with short brown hair, wearing large, dark sunglasses and a black tank top. She is smiling broadly, looking towards the left. She is holding a white document or book in her hands. The background shows an outdoor setting with a modern building, trees, and other people in the distance. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

Study 1:
**The significance of deaf
identity for
psychological well-
being**

Chapman, M. &
Dammeyer, J. (2017),
*Journal of Deaf Studies
and Deaf Education*

Background

Four Deaf identities (Glickman, 1996):

Hearing identity or culturally hearing: the individual identifies with the hearing culture only and perceives deafness as a disability.

Deaf identity or immersion: the individual identifies as Deaf, perceives deafness as a distinct culture and has a negative view of the hearing culture.

Bicultural identity: the individual identifies with both the hearing and Deaf cultures.

Marginal identity or culturally marginal: the individual identifies with neither the hearing culture nor the Deaf culture.

Background

Deaf Identity and Its Impact on Life Outcome

Previous studies have shown that having a deaf or bicultural identity is associated with higher levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction (Hintermair, 2008). By contrast, marginal identity is associated with low self-esteem and satisfaction with life (Maxwell-McCaw, 2001).

Current Study

A Danish Bilingual/Bicultural Approach

From the early 1980s to the introduction of cochlear implantation in 2000s, the Bilingual/Bicultural approach to deaf education was celebrated in Denmark (and other places in northern Europe). The possible impact of this Bilingual/Bicultural tradition on the perceived identity and well-being of Deaf individuals has not been evaluated.

Method

Participants

839 deaf adults (16-64 years of age).

Measures: Identity

A single-item question was used to measure self-perceived identity: "Do you feel you have most in common with deaf or hearing people?"

Response categories: Deaf people; Hearing people; Both deaf and hearing people; Neither deaf nor hearing people.

Method

Outcome: Psychological Well-Being

The 5-item World Health Organization Well-being Index (WHO-5) (Range 0 – 100, cut-off 50)

Other variables

Gender

Age

Additional disabilities

Sign language level

Parents' hearing loss

Type of schooling

Feeling discriminated against because of hearing loss

Degree of hearing loss

Educational level

Cochlear implant

Results

Table 1. Descriptive analysis of the psychological well-being score and the other variables of the identity groups

	Identity group			
	Deaf (<i>n</i> = 246)	Hearing (<i>n</i> = 189)	Bicultural (<i>n</i> = 256)	Marginal (<i>n</i> = 51)
Psychological well-being (range 0-100, 0 = low) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	65.5 (18.4)	66.0(18.1)	66.9 (18.6)	46.9 (16.9)
Gender (male) <i>n</i> (%)	120 (48.8)	94 (49.7)	122 (47.7)	17 (33.3)
Age (years) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	38.9 (13.8)	47.0 (14.4)	45.1 (13.4)	40.2 (13.7)
Type of school attended (range 1-5, 1 = Deaf school) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	1.5 (1.0)	4.4 (1.2)	2.4 (1.7)	3.1 (1.7)
Additional disability (yes) <i>n</i> (%)	67 (27.2)	69 (36.5)	87 (34.0)	27 (52.9)
Sign language (range 1-5, 1 = very good) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	1.4 (0.6)	2.4 (0.8)	1.8 (0.7)	2.1 (0.7)
Hearing loss (range 1-4, 1 = profound) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	1.5 (0.7)	2.0 (0.8)	1.8 (0.8)	1.8 (0.8)
Educational level (range 1-8, 1 = lowest) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	4.6 (2.1)	5.2 (2.2)	4.4 (2.2)	4.8 (2.1)
Parents' hearing loss (yes) <i>n</i> (%)	48 (19.5)	47 (24.9)	40 (15.7)	9 (17.6)
Feel discriminated (range 1-4, 1 = always) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	2.3 (0.8)	2.8 (0.9)	2.6 (0.9)	2.0 (0.7)
Cochlear implant (yes) <i>n</i> (%)	41 (16.7)	99 (52.4)	81 (31.6)	20 (39.2)

^aSignificant lower/different than all other three groups; ^bSignificant lower/different than two other groups; ^cSignificant lower/different than one other group

Results

Table 2. Summary of logistic regression model of variables explaining psychological well-being score

Variable	Psychological well-being	
	<i>P</i>	Exp(<i>B</i>)
Identity (deaf/hearing/bicultural = 1, marginal = 2)	0.001	0.250
Feel discriminated because of hearing loss (1-4, always = 1)	0.001	1.648
Additional disabilities (yes = 1)	0.033	1.696
Education level (range 1-8, lowest = 1)	0.032	1.128

Cochlear implants

- In this study, CI did not explain level of psychological well-being

A further study (Chapman et al, 2018) found:

- Neither age nor age of cochlear implant surgery explained level of psychological well-being
- For older people (age >25) having a CI was significantly associated with hearing identity and not having a CI with deaf identity; having a CI was significantly associated with feeling limited by hearing loss
- Young people (16-25 years of age) with and without CIs presented a mixed picture of identity

A flexible identity

- Some have argued for the need for a less fixed understanding of identity
- Changes in Deaf culture due to cochlear implants
- Changes in hearing cultures

Implications

It is important in educational practice to support the identity formation of deaf children – no matter the communication mode used – and take account of other individual differences.

It may be the case that support for a flexible identity that also embraces deaf culture and use of sign language would benefit deaf and hard of hearing children/people, particularly those who have persistent difficulties of communication and social participation (and who may be at risk of marginal identity).

How to support identity

Strategies to maintain positive social identity as a minority or threatened group (Social identity theory, Tajfel (1978))

Social mobility: individual dissociation from a threatened social group and identification with a higher-status or majority group (e.g. identifying as hearing)

Social creativity: the cultivation of a resilient minority identity, encompassing processes of positively representing that identity in order to achieve “positive distinctiveness” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) (e.g. cultivation of a positively distinct Deaf cultural identity)

Multi/Bicultural identity? Elements of both strategies: cultivation of a distinct cross-cultural identity and protection from a singular threatened identity

Marginal identity? Lack of any strategy or positive group identity. Vulnerable to negative self-concept and feelings of discrimination, which would explain low psychological well-being



Study 2:

Personality and CI use

Dammeyer, Marschark, & Zettler (2018). Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education

Personality traits:

- **Emotional stability:** The tendency to experience negative emotional states and view oneself and the world around negatively.
- **Extroversion:** The tendency to experience positive emotional states and feel good about oneself and the world around.
- **Agreeableness/Anger:** The tendency to get along well with others.
- **Conscientiousness:** The extent to which a person is careful, scrupulous, and persevering.
- **Openness to Experience:** The extent to which a person is original, has broad interests, and is willing to take risks.
- **Honesty-Humility:** pro-social behavior, treating people fairly and being unconcerned with self-promotion.

Background

- Personality traits can predict life-outcome including relationship satisfaction, job performance, longevity, just to mention a few.
- Personality traits are partly stable and partly flexible. They have a genetic basis, but some (major) life experiences can change personality traits (to some degree).

Method

Sample:

- 106 hearing US college students
- 223 Deaf US college students

Measures:

HEXACO-60 personality questionnaire

Results

Variables	Deaf No-CI users M (SD)	Deaf CI users M (SD)	Hearing M (SD)
Personality traits (ranges 10–50)			
Honesty-Humility (H)	32.98 (5.10)	32.91 (5.18)	31.84 (6.62)
Emotionality (E)	30.96 (5.31)	31.59 (5.88)	31.58 (6.68)
Extraversion (X)	32.78 (5.28)	33.45 (5.64)	32.19 (7.40)
Agreeableness/Anger (A)	33.30 (5.08)	33.32 (4.76)	32.62 (6.20)
Conscientiousness (C)	33.81 (5.49)	33.22 (4.98)	36.42 (5.38)
Openness to Experience (O)	33.74 (5.77)	32.84 (5.01)	34.78 (5.21)

Discussion

- Personality traits (and other individual differences) might be able to explain some of the variability in language, cognitive, and social outcomes among people with hearing loss.
- Identity and other individual differences might affect personality trait changes among people with hearing loss.