

Social Identity of Codas in Relation to Family Identity

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ABSTRACT

This study is a qualitative exploration of the social identity of adult, hearing children of deaf adults (Codas) in relation to the cultural identity of their families (i.e., “Deaf” or “deaf”). The study was approached using a social constructionist perspective, using social identity theory, and in particular, self-categorization. Data was obtained through one-on-one semi-structured interviews with 15 participants, all of whom were Codas, 7 from “Deaf” families, and 8 from “deaf” families. Data was analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. The primary themes that emerged included cultural disconnect, responsibility and frustration. Cultural disconnect was experienced only by Codas from “deaf” families and not by Codas from “Deaf” families. Frustration and responsibility, although experienced by many of the participants, was more similarly experienced for “deaf” Codas, and likewise for “Deaf” Codas, indicating that familial cultural affiliation should be considered a contributing factor in the social identity of Codas.

KEYWORDS

Coda; social identity; social constructionist.

INTRODUCTION

Research about the social identity of Cudas (hearing children of deaf adults) is limited, and is notably so for Cudas in South Africa. Cudas, historically and currently, have been grouped as a whole, and defined as hearing children born into families where one or both parents have a hearing disability (Hoffmeister, 2008; Krawczyk, 2021; Preston, 1998). Although the term implies that the participants are children, the term refers to an inherited status, regardless of age. For example, a 50-year-old person who has been born to deaf parents is still referred to as a Coda.

The most current definitions describe Cudas as having grown up with a shared experience in a cultural dichotomy of being part of, yet neither fully part of both hearing and deaf communities (Krawczyk, 2021). In a study conducted by Burge (2018), the social construction of hearing and deaf identities was explored, examining the duality of these two identities for Cudas, and how their identity changes from childhood to adulthood. Burge explains how, as children, Cudas naturally identify with Deaf, similarly to their parents, and only later, as they become adults, choose a hearing identity (2018). A change in identity during adolescence is not unique to Cudas, as studies show that identity change during early adulthood is a natural occurrence (Eriksson et al, 2020). However, what is different for Cudas is that they are assigned an initial cultural identity (deaf) as an affiliate of the family into which they are born, which they often question as they mature and realise that they are not physiologically the same, resulting in an uncertainty as to which identity they feel they have a right to (Preston, 1998).

Whilst the current definitions of Coda explain the dichotomy between hearing and deaf, they do not distinguish between the different types of “deaf”, and how this, in itself might affect Coda identity. Culturally, there is a marked difference between “deaf” and “Deaf” families, where “capital D” or “Deaf” refers to a cultural affiliation to the Deaf community and a Deaf pride, and “small d” or “deaf” refers simply to a hearing impairment or audiological condition (Lane et al., 1996). This is an important distinction as it differentiates the identities as quite separate. Lane et al. (1996) explain how those who are “deaf” identify with deafness simply as an audiological condition, and align themselves more closely with hearing identity, often attending mainstream schools, and predominantly socializing in hearing social circles, preferring to use the spoken language rather than sign language. Those who identify as “Deaf” associate themselves with a culture that includes a pride in being “Deaf”, use of sign language, and membership of a community (McIlroy, 2008). They often attend schools for the Deaf and join Deaf social clubs, often (95%) marrying within the community (Pendergrass et al, 2019). This culture celebrates Deafness as a membership affiliation to be proud of, as opposed to a disability, that implies being “less than”, or something that requires fixing (Clason, 2019). “Deaf” community members differentiate themselves from being defined by an audiological condition, and will often see those who identify as “deaf” as outsiders (McIlroy, 2008).

Interestingly, Codas who are hearing, but who have been brought up in “Deaf” families, and who may themselves identify with “Deaf”, are accepted into the Deaf community more readily, even though they have no hearing impairment, than those who are “deaf” and who do have audiological deafness (Clark, 2003; Kusters & de Meulder, 2013). The cultural exposure of a Coda is interesting because it may be assumed that it would be similar to that of a deaf child. However, because the majority (90-95%) of deaf children are born to hearing parents (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2004), they are more often automatically exposed to a hearing culture (Padden & Humphries, 1988). Their exposure to Deaf culture often occurs through schools for the Deaf, and later through adult Deaf social clubs (Ladd, 2003). Conversely, Codas are born into deaf families, and those born into “Deaf” families, receive, as a birthright a cultural “Deafness” and membership to the Deaf community (Lane et al., 1996).

Not all those who are audiotologically deaf choose to join the Deaf community, preferring to align with hearing identity (Berke, 2022). This would infer that Codas born into “deaf” do not receive an automatic “Deaf” cultural birthright. However, according to the current definition, all Codas, irrespective of familial cultural association, are grouped as one, with common shared values and identities (Krawczyk, 2021).

There is currently very limited research on Coda identity. The bulk of research related to it has focused primarily on Deaf identity (Chapman, 2021). In the context of Coda research, these studies are important, as Deaf identity culture accordingly informs the identity of Codas who are born into it. The complexities of Deaf identity include not only social and cultural affiliation (Berke, 2022), but also language differences within the culture. This is because sign language is not universal, even within the English language (Clason, 2019; Mindness, 2006). For example, American Sign Language (ASL) and British Sign Language (BSL) are completely different and not interchangeable (Perlmutter, 2021). Although these studies are useful in understanding the source of Coda identity, their focus is on the identity of the Deaf parent. As highlighted by Bishop and Hicks (2005), Codas are an almost invisible, unrecognized minority that are bicultural, multimodal and bilingual (De Meulder et al., 2019).

Although there is limited existing research on the social identity of Codas, it is focussed largely on the language brokering aspect of growing up in a deaf family (Moroe & De Andrade, 2018; Papin, 2021). There is little to no research exploring the identities of different types of Codas, i.e., from “deaf” vs “Deaf” families. The objectives of this study aimed to explore the social identity Codas in relation to the identity of their families, i.e., “deaf” or “Deaf”.. For the purposes of this study, Codas from “deaf “ families are termed Coda(d) and Codas from “Deaf” families Coda(D).

This study was approached from a social constructionist (SC) perspective, as explained by Gergen (1985), as a means of gaining knowledge through exploring people in relation to the history, culture, and societal contributions at that time. Using this epistemology, the study was approached as a collaborative effort between researcher and participant to explore and construct meaning and reality perception (McNamee, 2012). Because of the collaboration, this

approach does not present findings objectively, but with an element of subjective construction as a result of the interaction (Burr, 1995). SC allows for an exploration of how participants view their experience within the culture, language and societal context that exists for them. For this study SC was a useful lens through which to explore the constructs of disability (with particular reference to “deafness”) as well as parenting, and how it is defined in terms of Codas, and their position within their families.

Social identity theory (SIT) as developed by Henri Tajfel et al. (1979), considers individuals’ self-concepts as members within a larger social group. This research included the self-categorization aspect of SIT, or self-categorization theory (SCT), as coined by Turner et al. (1987). In particular, the research aim was to investigate how Codas self-categorize themselves in relation to the Deaf community and their family identity. This approach was considered a good fit for this study when considering the membership aspect of “Deaf” affiliation and the categorization of “deaf” as “other”, aligning with SIT, where an in-group (us) define themselves differently from an out-group (them) or the “other” (Hogg, 2018; Smith & Hogg, 2008). SCT also incorporates an approach to the consequent dual identity questions Codas face, having inherited Deaf identity, yet not actually being deaf, and how they identify themselves accordingly. Dual identity can be understood as affiliating with multiple identities, where the feeling of affiliation need not necessarily be equally strong for both identities, but where both are compatible and are simultaneously incorporated into a self-identity (Amiot et al., 2007; Simon & Ruhs, 2008).

Solomon (2012) discussed social identity by differentiating between horizontal and vertical identity. Vertical referring to chronological link via birth heritage (language, traditions, etc.) and horizontal referring to peer or affinity group link (social, community groups, etc.). For the purposes of this research, both axes were applicable, because although language is usually vertical in normal families, Solomon suggested that it can also be horizontal for Deaf families where it may be acquired from a social group (2012). In addition, because deaf children often choose their cultural affiliation instead of being born into it (Padden & Humphries, 1988), and Codas receive the language and cultural affiliation as a birthright (Lane et al, 1996), only later deciding their own identity (Burge, 2018).

Although existing research incorporates family cultural identity into their explanation of deaf society, there is no research suggesting that it is an important factor to consider when defining Coda identity. The implication of this is that studies using simply “Coda” as a description may ignore potentially significant factors about a group who may have quite different identities. This study intends to explore intra-group experiences according to this affiliation, which may contribute to providing justification to further define the term Coda. The findings may help Codas to better understand their own identity and, provide a useful framework for parents, educators, and society to better understand the different needs of different Codas. Is the social identity of Codas affected by the cultural affiliation of their family?

METHOD

Data was gathered using one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with participants from “deaf” and “Deaf” families. Semi-structured interviews were used, to allow for elaboration of ideas that may not have been originally identified (Gill et al., 2008).

Interview data was explored using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), using a combination of inductive and deductive approaches, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2020) to allow themes to be conceptualized, based on interview questions. RTA is considered to be a flexible means of analysis, suitable to a range of epistemological approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2019), and is considered a trustworthy qualitative analysis tool because the step-by-step process produces a visible trail that is easily auditable (Nowell et al., 2017). Provision is made for exploration of implicit as well as explicit meaning with RTA (Guest et al., 2012), which was useful for exploring the lived experience of Coda. RTA not only allows for reflection and influence of the researcher as well as the lived experience of the participants (Brulé & Finnigan, 2020), but considers the researcher’s contribution as not only necessary but unavoidable (Forbes, 2021). This was particularly useful in this study as there is very limited existing research on the subject matter, and it made allowances for considered subjective reflection by the researcher as a Coda with lived experience. Data analysis included assigning codes to ideas according to Braun and Clarke’s six steps (2019):

1. Familiarization with data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining themes
6. Producing a report

This six-step process is considered reliable due to the visible audit trail (Nowell et al., 2017). The researcher is also a Coda, and as such had unique access to the participant base. This assisted in the purposive sampling of participants. Recruitment was primarily online, via advertisement to Coda community groups and social media Coda support groups. Permission was obtained from group administration, where required. The reflexive nature of this study matches the researcher’s own lived experience, which contributed to the reliability and validity of the study.

As part of the research design, the researcher was aware of the potential for bias, as a Coda with “Deaf” family identity. This provided further justification for the use of RTA, as it makes accommodation for this. Although the researcher acknowledged that all research is subject to bias (Morrow, 2005), there was a constant mindfulness of this, with provisions including highlighting the trustworthiness of the analysis method (RTA), constant reflexivity, recruiting as varied a group of participants as possible, recording of all data (Engago, 2021), and continued consideration to maintain neutrality.

Participants

Participants included only Cudas (Children of Deaf Adults), English speaking, hearing, and at least 18 years old. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, and invited to participate online and through Coda support groups.

The sample included fifteen Cudas from cultural affiliations including “deaf” and “Deaf” families. There was an intentional selection of a similar number of Cudas from each group, in order to explore whether there were notable differences that might organically emerge through the interview questions. In accordance with Braun and Clarke’s (2021) recommendation for saturation of samples sizes for thematic analysis, a sample of fifteen participants was determined. Participants were recruited from different countries, although all were white and most were born in South Africa, and one in the UK. Participants’ current locations included South Africa, Canada, Botswana, United Kingdom and Korea.

Participants did not receive any payments or incentives for their participation.

Materials

Interview questions were formulated by the researcher based on lived experience as well as through considered discussions held on a Coda support group. Example questions included:

1. In what ways do you feel different to your parents with regards to their deafness and your hearing?
2. Do you feel like you are part of the Deaf community (if your parents belong to it), and in what way? How do you feel you fit into it, if at all?
3. How do you perceive that society views you in terms of your family?

The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for a fluid discussion, and additional questions or elaboration, led by the responses of the participants. All interviews were recorded and transcribed through Microsoft Teams and stored securely online using unique participant codes.

Procedure

Participants were invited online to partake in the study using a Participant Invitation. Participants who responded were sent a Qualtrics link explaining the aims of the study, format of the interview, a note on the voluntary nature of the study, GDPR statement, confidentiality and withdrawal rights and procedures, as well as contact details of the researcher. Participants gave consent and created unique alphanumeric codes to ensure privacy and confidentiality of their data. Interviews were conducted online and recorded in a semi-structured format, based on the interview questions, for no longer than one hour per interview.

Analytical strategy

Data was analysed using RTA, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2020) using their six-phase process, which included familiarisation of the data, systematically coding the data, generation of themes, review of themes, definition and naming of themes and reporting of themes.

Analysis

Exploring the social identity of Codas in relation to the cultural affiliation of their families revealed several themes, including: cultural disconnect; adult responsibility; frustration; teenage conflict; heightened sensitivity; tolerance; birth order differences; family identity; communication issues; lack of support; cultural differences and change in current identity. However, to accommodate the brevity requirements of this study, only three themes were discussed. The three most prominent themes were i) cultural disconnect ii) adult responsibility and iii) frustration. For ease of reading, the participant numbers were affixed with “d” or “D” to identify the family cultural affiliation of the participants more easily. In many instances the sentiments were echoed by several participants. This is reflected accordingly after the quotes.

Cultural disconnect

There appeared to be a common theme of cultural disconnect that emerged for Codas(d), which included a disconnect with the condition of deafness, and in particular with the culture of “Deaf” and an expression of remorse as a result of this. As an addendum to this, some participants expressed that they felt like imposters being labelled by society as Codas because they did not experience their parents as being deaf. This theme only emerged for Codas(d) and was not evident at all for Codas(D).

Research shows that deaf families operate more similarly to hearing families than Deaf families (Pendergrass et al., 2019), which was confirmed by the experience of Participant 8d, who explained “We didn't know how deaf people spoke to each other... only how hearing people speak because that is how my folks communicated with each other and with us.” Many of the Codas(d) agreed and expressed regret at not being exposed to the culture of Deafness, as explained by Participant 8d who said “I wish we'd had more exposure to the Deaf community...I am frustrated (that I can't talk to them) because I have not been exposed to sign language -...I wish it would have been a part of me.”

Participant 8d's comment “I wish...it would have been a part of me” further infers a desire for the culture to have been assimilated into the participant's identity and remorse that it was not.

Participant 13d echoed a similar experience saying “We never learned to sign which I feel bad about. I do feel like that would have helped a lot (with communication in our family.)”.

Although most of the participants(d) expressed remorse and a feeling that signing would have made communication easier in the family, Participant 13d also expressed guilt: “We never learned to sign which I feel bad about”. However, the social construct of family cultural identity does not provide a neutral environment for personal identity, instead, deeply affecting it (Scabini & Manzi, 2011). Signing is part of ‘Deaf’ identity, and not part of “deaf” identity (Pendergrass et al., 2019), which would not have made it automatically accessible to the participant through family identity.

Remorse with regards to the experienced cultural disconnect also emerged when participants were asked how they would feel if they discovered that their children would be

born deaf. The question was asked as a manner of exploring how comfortable they were with “deafness”. Participant 10d responded “If my children were deaf, it would be important for them to explore the Deaf community... I would want to..., bring that pride.” Participants (d) agreed. These quotes suggested that Cudas(d) would have welcomed exposure to Deaf culture.

The experience of disconnect from “Deaf” culture was further extended when participants(d) indicated that they were uncertain about their identity affiliation as Coda. This was expressed by Participant 10d as “I don’t think society would know that I’m a Coda”, and similarly echoed by Participant 15d “I don’t feel like a Coda. Technically, I suppose you could say I am. But if I am, it’s a very background thing.” These quotes indicated a discomfort, and almost reluctance to accept the socially constructed identity of Coda. Prior to the interview sessions, many of the Cudas(d) were hesitant to participate and asked if they even qualified, as they were uncertain whether they were considered “real” Cudas or not, and whether it was a social identity they felt comfortable with.

In accordance with SIT and SCT theories of an individual’s self-definition as a perceived member of a group (Tajfel et al., 1979; Turner et al., 1987), Participants 10d and 15d expressed an uncertainty as to how they themselves identified as Cudas, where their family identity was more closely aligned with a hearing identity, whilst they were included in the social construct of Coda identity. Current research on the dual identity of Cudas focusses on the dichotomy and assimilation of hearing and Deaf cultures (Krawczyk, 2021), however there is no research exploring the dual identity conflict of Cudas(d) who are from families who do not identify with Deaf culture. In a study on the dual identity of immigrants it was suggested that there are discrepancies between dual identity that is self categorised and dual identity as a measure of a group, (Fleischman & Verkuyten, 2016), which may contribute to understanding this identity conflict for Cudas(d). Conventional dual identity models infer that although identity strengths may not be equal for each identity, there is a compatibility of identities (Simon & Ruhs, 2008), which was not clearly evident in the Coda(d) experiences expressed here.

The identity conflict was further indicated where participants(d) expressed experiencing their deaf parent as culturally separate to them, even in situations where the deaf parent did not culturally affiliate with or identify as “Deaf”. As Participant 9d said “It’s the whole culture difference... like two different worlds coming together trying to communicate. I think that the ways of the world are different in her (deaf parent) mind to mine”. This identity disconnect was further highlighted when participants(d) expressed a feeling of particular cultural disconnect when the “deaf” parent had tried to explore “Deaf” culture, having identified previously as “deaf”. Participant 12 d expressed “We were never part of a Deaf community. She started to learn sign language and then gravitated towards the Deaf world. And then she excluded her family because we couldn’t sign.” Participant 11d similarly experienced this saying “She always used to say that Deaf people can get very frustrated with people quickly. I think she might have had a preconception about them.” This quote was particularly interesting, because both she and the deaf parent referred to “Deaf” as “them”, highlighting the sense of “otherness” to the

culture of “Deaf”. This aligns with Smith and Hogg’s explanation of ‘in’ vs “out’ group classifications of SIT (2008).

Much of the existing research about Deaf social identity documents the classification by the Deaf community of an “in-group” of members who align with Deaf culture and an “out-group” of those who are simply audilogically deaf (Clason, 2019; Kusters & de Meulder, 2013). However, there is no research exploring this with regards to “deaf” identity and how they might similarly view “Deaf” as an “out-group”, as is evidenced in these quotes. This sentiment was extended by Participant 11d, who did not identify their parents as being deaf, saying “Once they've met my mom...they see, it's not what they would think a deaf person is... its hard for me to identify when I realized she was actually deaf.”

This contributes to understanding the potential for conflict within the dual identity of a Coda(d) if the deaf parent does not identify as deaf, in relation to how the Coda is defined by society, and how they themselves identify. These findings revealed an identity experience or “crisis” that was particular to Codas(d) and did not emerge in any way for Codas(D), who were born into the culture and had automatic access to it.

Responsibility

Studies agree that a common shared experience amongst Codas includes a higher responsibility load than there would be in hearing families, including making calls, interpreting during appointments and social situations, and sometimes even making adult decisions on behalf of the deaf parent (Krawczyk, 2021). Because the current study included a mix of family configurations (one parent hearing, one “deaf”; one parent hearing, one “Deaf”; both parents “Deaf”) the additional responsibility was shared in some families by the hearing parent and Coda: Participant 8d expressed a recognition of the added responsibility shared by Codas that is different from “normal” families when he said “I know we had more responsibilities than other kids, but my dad carried a huge amount more, and we only understood when he died. When he died, he said he is sorry that he left us this responsibility”

Participant 8d, also highlighting that the load was significantly greater for the hearing parent, and the extent of this was only realized upon their father’s death, when the responsibility became theirs.

Participant 8d stated “He was the 90% parent “about the hearing parent, further highlighting his recognition of this additional load of the hearing parent as primary, rather than shared parent. An understanding of this may be aided by exploring the construct of ‘parenting’ as culturally constructed by society. According to Polivanova (2018), society currently has differing models of parenthood that contradict one another and as a result confuse the traditionally constructed views of what parenting has been, i.e., strong mothering and intense parental bonds with children, with defined parental and child roles (Ambert, 1994). Polinova differentiates between the constructs of raising children as a process and the social role of parenthood (2018). The Codas(d) in this study, all had mothers who were deaf, and fathers who were hearing. The construct of a mothering role, as described by Ambert (1994) and Poilnova

(2018) appeared to be experienced differently for these participants, who experienced their father as primary parent. The question of how society constructs ableism must also be considered when exploring these experiences, as all of the family structures (d) included one deaf and one hearing parent.

Further exploration of parenting and ableism constructs are better served after also exploring the experiences of Codas from families where both parents were Deaf as well, as illustrated by Participant 5D who felt “I have forever spent time as parent. In other families the adults have access to other sources of information..., you are the only source of information...We instinctively go into parent mode”. This was echoed by Codas (D) in Participant 6D’s statement “From a young age I felt a greater responsibility to understand things properly so that you can articulate and translate it - having to be the adult from a young age”.

Although all participants indicated an experience of an increased responsibility in their families compared to hearing families, it appeared that this was experienced differently for Codas(d) and Codas(D). Codas(d) expressed feeling that the bulk of the load was primarily carried by the hearing parent, and carried by the child as a requirement only when their hearing parent was unavailable. In contrast, Codas(D) had no hearing parent with whom the load could be shared, and in many of the quotes, referred to feeling like they were in some respects “the parent” in their family. The construct of parent has evolved from biological parenting to the reciprocal efforts of an individual within a family relationship, as determined by both society and the family members (Reupert et al., 2015). This is an important point to consider when exploring the parental role of Codas, and whether the construct of parent is something that society has defined or whether it is something required and agreed upon within the family.

The differently experienced responsibility load for Codas(d) and Codas(D) might seem as a result of the presence of a hearing parent, who might naturally be assumed to carry the bulk of the load. However, the only Coda(D) Participant 2D who had one hearing and one Deaf parent experienced the load as primarily hers, similar to the experience of the other Codas(D) and said “My dad only earlier, and then when I was able to...I would be more available than my father ...from as young as I can remember”. This might suggest that responsibility sharing for Codas may be more influenced by the cultural affiliation of the family (Deaf vs deaf) than by the structure of the family (one hearing vs both deaf).

With regards to Coda responsibility load, Moroe and De Andrade (2018) described how the language brokering role of Codas is not dissimilar to that of immigrant children who translate for their parents (Orellana, 2009). However, it is perhaps more complex for Codas because it is not only bilingual and bicultural, but also bimodal, incorporating sign language and speech simultaneously in translation (Lynch, 2021). This language brokering function is a large contributor to the experience of performing a parental role (Moroe & De Andrade, 2018).

This parental role might allude to the construct of parentification, which is defined as a situation where children assume roles and responsibilities that are traditionally socially assigned to their parents (Pfeiffer & In-Albon, 2022). Although this sometimes becomes a natural role for

Codas, as is evidenced by the quotes, it is socially constructed as being a negative situation that deprives children of their childhood and can create self-esteem issues, depression, and even the possibility of psychopathology (Bying-Hall, 2008; Jurkovic, 1998). However, the only aspect of this evident in the quotes was the loss of childhood, where the participants expressed a feeling of parental responsibility from a young age: *“We instinctively go into parent mode”* (Participant 5D); *“Having to be the adult from a young age”* (Participant 6D). This might suggest that, with the exception of loss of childhood, the negative effects socially constructed for parentification may not be applicable to Codas. In fact, recent studies have shown that parentification can even have an indirectly positive effect on psychological well-being if there is an increased level of proactivity (Eskisu, 2021).

Parentification in Codas may be better explored from the perspective of disabled parenting and specifically, the manner in which society views this type of family structure. As experienced by many deaf parents, society has a diminished view of their ability, not only what they are capable of in society and in the workplace, but also as parents, and this is a contributor to Coda parentification (Kashar, 2021). Kashar (2021), a deaf parent and blog writer, explains how society will often direct communications to her Coda children instead of her, bypassing her entirely, and creating potential for unbalanced family dynamics. This is demonstrated by the social construct of ableism, which refers to a system of beliefs defining a mental and/or physical standard of “normal”, and unequal attitude of respect towards those who deviate from that standard (Rice, 2021).

Frustration

Studies have documented that one of the possible shared experiences of Codas is an element of frustration in their role and the additional requirements that are placed on them (Krawczyk, 2021; Moroe & De Andrade, 2018). This was expressed by Participant 6D as “I sometimes feel frustrated about the level of dependence on me”, and Participant 7D “You have to do everything. Even the recognition – its just not...You have to grow up pretty quickly, and you are a constant interpreter.”

These experiences were not shared by other participants, but indicated that for these participants there was a frustration with the roles required of them, and possibly a feeling of pressure: “dependence on me” (Participant 6D); “You have to do everything on your own” (Participant 7D). Participant 7D expressed that there was no acknowledgement for the increased responsibility role within the family “the recognition – its just not”. The parentification experience of Codas as spokesperson, caretaker, etc. (Reupert et al., 2015), may be a possible contributor to the experience of frustration of Codas, who may be uncertain of what their roles are and whether these should be defined according to the social construct of child vs parent.

There was a larger group of participants who collectively experienced frustration as a result of communication challenges, particularly with respect to the difference between hearing and deaf capabilities, and an expectation of the deaf parent to behave as hearing. This appeared to be specific to Codas(d) and was expressed by Participant 10d as “It can be hard to relate to

her sometimes ... in group situations, she can't follow and there can be a disconnect". The sentiment of Participant 12 d was echoed by Codas 9d) with the statement "The communication is demanding... It used to frustrate me that we were constantly giving allowances for mum. I feel, sad, angry, pressure...overall the experience was a frustrating one".

In addition to the frustration as a result of disconnection, there was experience of conflict within the family as a result of this, expressed by Participant 13 d as "There was always friction in our family...with communication, you know they just think differently. I would definitely not marry a deaf person! Because experiences that we had, I know how hard it is. I love my mom, but no.". This expression of frustration at the difficulties in communication alluded to the cultural disconnect experienced with the quote "they just think differently", referring to the deaf parent as "they" and "different", which aligns with Smith and Hogg's SIT classification of "in" vs "out" groups (2008), and how the participant experienced his mother as part of the "them" deaf world. The frustration at the experience was highlighted by the participant's firm declaration that he would not marry a deaf person. Although the statement may be considered cutting, the participant added as an addendum that he loved his mother, which might indicate that the feelings of frustration were in reference to the experience of a difficult situation and an understanding of the challenges faced as a result of the disability, rather than towards his mother personally.

Frustration, although a separate theme, incorporated aspects of the previous themes of cultural disconnect and responsibility, as these were in some instances the source of frustration as evidenced by the quotes. However, the cause of frustration appeared to be experienced differently depending on familial cultural identity. Codas(D) expressed frustration primarily at the responsibility role and expectation. Codas(d) expressed frustration as a result of communication issues and the resultant disconnect. However, for Codas(d), the family identity aligned more similarly with hearing identity (Lane et al., 1996). However, the structure of the family includes a physiologically deaf parent, with the very real communication challenges that that infers (Cawthon & Garberoglio, 2017). In addition to this, the social attitudes of ableism, incorporating unequal attitude towards those viewed as different to "normal" (Rice, 2021) should also be considered. These combined factors may result in an experience of conflict for Codas(d) where the family, identity is hearing, with the reality of deaf communication challenges.

DISCUSSION

Research on the cultural affiliation of families for "deaf" vs "Deaf" families exists with reference to the social identity of the deaf parents, but is very limited for the children of these parents. The objective of this qualitative study was to explore the social identity of Codas in relation to the configuration and cultural affiliation of their families. The results of the study revealed many themes, three of which were explored for their relevance to the research, namely, cultural disconnect, responsibility and frustration.

The emergent themes highlighted a different experienced social identity for Codas from different familial cultural affiliations. It was evident that, although they had shared experiences, there were some contrasts between the experiences and identity of Codas(d) and Codas(D). The theme of cultural disconnect was expressed by Codas(d) only, where these participants struggled with the social construct of themselves as “Codas” and expressed that they felt as though they were imposters. Imposter phenomenon, as coined by Clance (1985) relates to individuals who believe themselves as unworthy of recognition, and believe themselves to be frauds. This has been challenged by the notion that the phenomenon may be a social construct (Jarldorn & Gatwiri, 2022), and may be relevant to the case of Codas, who are assigned this label as a cultural birthright (Lane et al., 1996). It may be that there is an acknowledgement of this birthright that Codas(d) are assigned by society, but without any of the cultural access that it implies. Codas(d) also expressed that many of them did not automatically experience their parent as being “deaf”, and appeared uncertain as to the social identity of the parent, aligning them more closely with hearing identity. The consequence of this appeared to result in conflicting ideas about their own identity.

Of the shared experiences amongst Codas, increased responsibility was expressed by all. In some instances (Codas[D]) the responsibility was expressed as almost parental, raising the question of the what the social construct of parent is, and which responsibilities are assigned to members according to the social definition of family. Viewing these terms through a social constructionist lens was useful in exploring the roles defined by society and how these were experienced by Codas, in particular, through the constructs of parentification and ableism. The experience of the participants revealed that their responsibilities within their families emerged according to the requirements of the family configuration (whether a hearing parent was present to share the load, or whether the responsibility was theirs alone), and more specifically, according to the family identity. With regards family configuration, participants with one hearing and one deaf parent expressed an increased load compared to their peers, however carried primarily by the hearing parent. Participants with two Deaf parents expressed an increased load, carried by the participant themselves in an almost parental role. The one family with one hearing and one Deaf parent, expressed the same responses as both Deaf parent families. The difference between this family and the other families with one hearing parent was the “Deaf” identity. As a result, it appears that the experience is influenced more by cultural affiliation than family configuration.

The experience of frustration appeared to be experienced according to cultural affiliation. Codas(d) experienced frustration with cultural disconnect to a greater degree, and Codas(D) experienced frustration with regards to responsibility to a greater degree.

The themes indicate that the experiences of Codas, particularly with regards their identity, is influenced by the cultural affiliation of their families. Although there were shared experiences, many of the experiences appeared to be more similarly experienced depending on whether Codas had families affiliated with “deaf” or “Deaf” identity.

This poses the question of whether the definition of “Coda” should include further clarification, and include a distinction between cultural affiliation. Society encourages inclusivity rather than segregation (Wijesekera et al., 2019), so it may appear counterintuitive to advocate for further division. However, studies have shown that recognizing individual differences assists in providing specialized support (Saha & Pesonen, 2022), and where Coda have differing experiences, it may be of benefit to recognize these, in order to develop support solutions that are suited to specific experiences, rather than a blanket solution.

The sample size for this study included only deaf mothers and hearing fathers for the “deaf” families, and both Deaf parents for the “Deaf families”, and one “Deaf family” with one hearing and one Deaf parent. Future research may benefit from exploring families where the father is deaf and the mother hearing, and families where both parents are deaf but not “Deaf”. Interesting research might also include families that change identities from “deaf” to “Deaf”.

Most participants in this study were born in South Africa. Future research may benefit from studies across different countries and cultures. Additional possibilities for future studies include further exploration of imposter syndrome for Coda.

Overall, the objective of this study was to explore the social identity of Coda in relation to the cultural identity of their families (“deaf” and “Deaf”). The findings indicated that Coda shared common experiences, including a greater load of responsibility when compared to hearing families, and an expression of frustration with some of the experiences of living in a differently abled family. However, not all responsibility and frustration experiences were shared similarly, and some appeared to be experienced more comparably according to cultural affiliation. Likewise the experience of cultural disconnect, which was shared by Coda(d) only, further indicating that familial cultural identity may be a contributing factor to consider when exploring Coda social identity.

Reflexivity

The researcher is a Coda from a “Deaf” family, so the possibility should be considered that participants may have responded accordingly, depending on their identity [Coda(d), or Coda(D)]. This may have been a positive contribution in that participants may have answered more openly if they felt a shared identity. Conversely it may have been negative if they felt the identity was not similar. Participants did however, responded openly, eager to share experiences, and to be acknowledged. In addition, the researcher was at all times aware of approaching the subject matter with bias and every care was taken to provide as neutral a setting as possible.

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