

Article

Perspectives on Identity and d/Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students

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Abstract: The present narrative synthesis summarizes perspectives on the development of identity, or a sense of self, and the intersectionality of salient factors related to individuals who are d/Deaf and hard of hearing. Prior research indicates that identity encompasses the stories of an individual's experiences and relationships; identity development may not be static but rather dynamic and ongoing throughout an individual's lifetime. After this general background, the article focuses on identity and deafness, particularly for children in K-12 educational settings. There are a multitude of factors—physiological (e.g., hearing acuity, appearance, gender), psychological (e.g., memory, intelligence, affective behaviors), and social (e.g., education, home or immigrated environment, ethnicity, group membership)—that contribute to the development of identity. This discussion is based on a synthesis of a variety of published sources; however, as much as possible, the focus is on empirical research conducted with children and young adults who are d/Deaf and hard of hearing. Results of the narrative synthesis suggest several topics around which the extant research coalesce: traditional and evolving views of d/Dhh identity, d/Dhh identity as fluid, identity development through relationships, identity and children with cochlear implants and those who are hard of hearing, the role of educational experiences, and intersectional identity development. The article concludes with a summary and recommendations for further investigation.

Keywords: d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing students; identity development; personal identity; sense of self



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1. Perspectives on Identity and d/Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students

In this article, we present perspectives on identity development for students who are d/Deaf and hard of hearing (d/Dhh). This narrative review concerns students with diverse characteristics, including but not limited to, a range of hearing acuity levels (i.e., slight to profound), language modalities (e.g., visual, spoken, cued), and language preferences (e.g., English, American Sign Language). In light of the diversity and challenges of examining low-incidence populations, we take a cautionary approach to proffering generalizations. Nevertheless, it is possible to delineate emerging patterns of development, similar to the approach undertaken by scholars in the general field of identity research [1–3].

According to one group of scholars [4], who reviewed various perspectives on identity development across different cultures, one of the pioneer giants associated with identity is Erikson [5]—albeit, his psychosocial work focused mostly on development in Western contexts entailing individualism and White individuals. When appropriate, researchers on general identity development should start with a brief discussion of Erikson's work, which was extended by Marcia, whose work was also extended, as discussed by Luyckx and colleagues [2]. This might provide an initial framework for contextualizing identity research findings and, possibly, for indicating future areas for exploration. Regardless of the number and types of models, it is clear, as Erikson [5] argued, that identity formation is a life-long process, which emerges at a serious level during adolescence and continues into young adulthood and beyond.

In short, identity refers to the development of a sense of self—that is, a coherent or unified sense of self. At the least, this involves the amalgamation of memories, beliefs, experiences, emotions, reflections, relationships, and values [5,6]. Individuals attempt to understand, for example, “who they are”, “what they want”, “what they believe”, and make decisions regarding careers, relationships, political and religious affiliations, and so on.

A healthy sense of self can result in positive outcomes in education, careers, and psychosocial development [1,3,4]. A poor sense of self—perhaps due to the influence of serious crises, abuse, and extremely stressful life events—can lead to negative outcomes such as low self-esteem, mental illness, and even criminal behavior [7]. One of the major goals of education should be to assist students in developing critical traits such as self-advocacy, self-determination, and self-reliance as well as healthy interpersonal skills.

The plan for the present article is as follows. First, we discuss the methodology for our selection of sources, which is the result of a professional review and a systematic research review. We also describe our positionality as individuals and researchers. Then, we provide a few major thoughts or ideas about the development of a personal identity—starting with the work of Erikson [5] and including a few other selected scholars. In general, identity development entails processes such as commitment and exploration and is influenced by a multitude of intrapersonal (or internal) and interpersonal (or external) factors [1,4]. Internal factors are the products of biological, physical, and psychological processes whereas external factors refer to environmental/geographical, social, and cultural processes.

Given the complexity of the construct, identity, and the preponderant amount of research available on participants who are not d/Dhh, we can only provide a brief general overview. Following this overview, we synthesize findings from a selection of research investigations on students who are d/Dhh. As much as possible, we attempt to contextualize the findings within a general framework of identity development. The article concludes with recommendations for further research on identity and d/Dhh students.

In our view, *deaf* (with a lowercase *d*) is often used to refer to an audiological condition. Traditionally, it has referred to individuals who have a hearing loss from severe to profound, though it might be recently aligned with individuals who have a profound hearing loss. The word *Deaf* (with an uppercase *D*) should be reserved for individuals who identify themselves as members of a culturally distinct group, who typically use a visual language and are said to have a “Deaf Identity”. We understand that there is considerable controversy around the use of the terms “deaf-Deaf”—including arguments against this use. There is no consensus on the use of these terms. We opt for this distinction because a number of individuals who have a severe to profound hearing loss and who speak or who speak and sign simultaneously do not identify as members of a “Deaf Culture” or have a “Deaf Identity”. We feel that this distinction is necessary to be not only inclusive but also respectful of the diversity of individuals with hearing loss.

2. Methodology

For general identity development, we searched PsycInfo and Education Full Text databases, which yielded about 33,000 references using terms such as “personal identity or self identity; children or adolescents or youth or child or teenager”. With the goal of providing only a broad overview of identity development, we decided to select a few narrative and systematic review articles within the first 1000 citations, covering the period from 2000–2022 [1,3,4,6,7]. Our selection is a type of professional review, the limitations of which are discussed in Section 6. It should also be mentioned that our selections contained references to major identity theorists such as Erikson [5] and Marcia [8]. As mentioned, the discussion of general identity development provides an initial framework for contextualizing the findings of studies on d/Dhh children and adolescents and for suggesting possible areas of further investigation.

Evidence of d/Dhh identity formation during childhood and adolescence may be found in a variety of published sources, from empirical research to book chapters, including,

importantly, works from d/Dhh individuals themselves. For this reason, we both conducted a traditional narrative synthesis of articles published in peer-reviewed journals (reported in the Results) and considered other published sources in the Discussion. A narrative synthesis is a form of systematic review of the literature rooted in storytelling that “relies primarily on the use of words and text to summarise and explain the findings of the synthesis” [9] (p. 5). As such, our review will lead to a summary of the major topics in the extant, peer-reviewed literature, as well as a discussion of the gaps in the literature and recommendations for future research. The following research question guided our investigation:

2.1. What Are the Perspectives (Both Historical and Contemporary) Regarding Identity Development in Children and Adolescents Who Are d/Dhh?

The narrative synthesis began with searches of the PsycInfo and Education Full Text databases using combinations of the search terms “deaf”, “hard of hearing”, “identity”, “development”, “children”, and “students”. Sources were included if (a) they addressed the identity(ies) of d/Dhh individuals (b) in childhood, adolescence, and/or during elementary, middle, or high school, and (c) were articles published in English-language, peer-reviewed journals. The reference lists of articles found during the initial search and a search of Educat+, the comprehensive record of the library holdings at REDACTED, which includes databases in sociology, deaf and disability studies, and anthropology, returned several additional articles that met our inclusion criteria. The results of the narrative synthesis of peer-reviewed research are presented in the section titled Narrative Synthesis of Identity and d/Dhh Students.

Of course, information regarding identity formation for d/Dhh children and adolescents may not be limited to that contained in empirical articles. References to a selection of seminal non-peer-reviewed works, including books and book chapters, are included in the Discussion.

2.2. Positionality

The topic of d/Dhh identity development is of both personal and professional interest to both authors. Before delving into the results of our search, we now turn to a brief discussion of our positionality as individuals and researchers. The first author (Smolen) is a hard-of-hearing woman. Hard of hearing since birth, Smolen grew up in mainstream educational settings using spoken English. She began learning ASL as a teenager, which sparked her interest in DHH education. Close relationships with other d/Dhh students during her college years led her to fully embrace her hard-of-hearing identity, including proudly showing off her binaural hearing aids. She has over 15 years of experience as a d/Dhh educator, providing direct service to culturally and linguistically diverse children and families from birth through high school. These experiences have had a profound impact on her philosophy of d/Dhh education, which is squarely situated in the “Radical Middle” [10], a commitment to supporting the linguistic, academic, and social-emotional strategies that work for individual d/Dhh learners. Her current research work is centered around parents and their d/Dhh children as they co-construct identity and communication in the early childhood period.

For most of his life, the second author (Paul) possessed a severe to profound hearing loss. Receiving one cochlear implant in 2012 and another in 2014 certainly changed the dimensions of his hearing and interpersonal interactions. As an “insider-extended scholar”, Paul has had more than 40 years as an educator and researcher in the education and development of d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing children and adolescents. In general, he favors the scientific approach and its focus on objective methodology. However, he asserts that no single research method or paradigm can address all questions or issues adequately. In his view, individual differences (related to disability, ethnicity, etc.) do not alter the importance of fundamentals or general trends—in fact, they contribute to the enrichment of these entities. In essence, individual differences should not impede the development

of a working theory or hypothesis, which can generate or lead to critical research or educational implications.

3. Overview of Identity Development

Given its complexity, any attempt to provide a definitive description of the formation of identity is as difficult as nailing gelatin to a wall. There is a general agreement that identity development is characterized by individuals endeavoring to establish a unique view of self, which may be manifested by an implicit or explicit awareness [5,6]. It is not clear whether such development reflects continuity or inner unity, especially when viewed during the lifespan.

There does not seem to be one all-encompassing factor that dominates identity formation; thus, multiple aspects of identity can and do exist. It is possible that some individuals may decide to or may assert that their identity is shaped by a specific variable such as disability, ethnicity, gender, etc. Different aspects of identity may become salient or dominant during various times and situations; these aspects interact and intersect with each other. Most likely, identity formation is not static but dynamic; however, general theories of identity development can be confounded by philosophical disagreements on the construct of personhood and the use of language [6,11].

Regardless of the challenges, it is still important to discuss general perspectives on the formation of identity—as long as some context is provided (e.g., sample characteristics, philosophy or approach of the scholar). These perspectives should reveal cultural, logical, and research approaches to the study of personal identity [4,6,12]. It might be the case that any general framework cannot or should not be applied indiscriminately to specific cohorts of individuals (e.g., Deaf, Blind, Black, LGBTQIA+) or be inconsiderate of specific timeframes (children, adolescents, adults), cultures, or geographical locations. Nevertheless, even if a strong narrative (i.e., storytelling, person-related, or autobiographical) approach is preferred, such an approach still needs to be contextualized to minimize limitations due to the memory or biased perceptions of individuals. This does not undermine the value or importance of such perceptions but does emphasize the limitations of one viewpoint or interpretation.

One place to start with this discussion is to highlight some of the basic tenets of the work of Erikson [5]. It has already been mentioned that Erikson's work is influenced by Western contexts and the sample was mostly White individuals. Erikson provided a conceptual view of identity but did not provide operational definitions of his terms [13]. Erikson proffered a psychosocial theory of identity formation and applied it specifically to the period of adolescence, which he considered to be a transitional period leading into adulthood. Later, although he believed that identity was relatively fixed during adolescence, Erikson did assert that identity formation occurs across the lifespan of individuals (i.e., his eight developmental stages). He proposed a process associated with “crisis”, which is interpreted as opportunity—that is, referring to a development sense or turning point, not a catastrophe.

Erikson [5] provides a summary of this process:

I shall present human growth from the point of view of the conflicts, inner and outer, which the vital personality weathers, re-emerging from each crisis with an increased sense of inner unity, with an increase of good judgment, and an increase in the capacity ‘to do well’ according to his own standards and to the standards of those who are significant to him. [5] (pp. 91–92)

There is little doubt that Erikson's work has influenced the subsequent generation of researchers on identity development. For example, Marcia [8] extended Erikson's work by proposing four means or processes for decision making: identity achievement (commitment following exploration), moratorium (exploration in process), foreclosure (commitment without exploration), and diffusion (no commitment with little or no exploration). This can be simplified by categorizing the formation of identity into two broad processes: exploration and commitment. Exploration is an ongoing process of selecting and investigating (a la

Erikson's 'crisis'), and commitment typically involves an investment or decision, which can also become dynamic. In essence, Marcia's model focuses predominantly on process not content. This indicates a dichotomy of content and process.

Although there is no consensus regarding a complete or adequate identity model, there is little doubt that identity formation is influenced by social and cultural variables. The social or cultural models seem to be a reaction against the earlier focus on individual or personal factors. This dichotomy is similar to the content–process one mentioned previously. Nevertheless, there are recent attempts to minimize these dichotomies or, rather, to assert that this is not an 'either-or' situation. The focus should be on the intersection of the individual with society/culture, involving the understanding of both intrapersonal and interpersonal factors [14]. Another focus is to determine the extent of specific factors that contribute to identity development. Regardless of the emphasis, it is clear that identity formation is subjective, personally and socially constructed, and evolving. Any attempt to state a specific static "identity" is, indeed, as possible as nailing gelatin to a wall. In the ensuing sections, we synthesize the research on identity and individuals who are d/Deaf and hard of hearing.

4. Narrative Synthesis of Identity and d/Dhh Students

4.1. Results of Search of Peer-Reviewed Journals

Database searches with combinations of the keywords "deaf", "hard of hearing", "identity", "development", "children", and "students" returned 415 works published between 1971 and November 2022, with more than half the results published since 2000. Eliminating duplicate results, those that focused only on d/Dhh adults, book chapters and unpublished dissertations, and those that dealt only with identification of hearing loss (e.g., through newborn hearing screening)—not identification with one or more identity groups—yielded 47 peer-reviewed articles that met the inclusion criteria. Many excluded works were from non-peer-reviewed sources; several of those works are nonetheless relevant and are therefore included in the Discussion. The publication dates of the 47 total works included in the narrative synthesis span 1979 to 2022. While just eight works were published in the 22-year span between 1979 and 1999, thirty-nine works were found between 2000 and 2022. A broad range of publication dates was included in order to situate the narrative synthesis within a historical frame and provide context to the ongoing discourse around d/Dhh identity in childhood and adolescence. All included works were published in English; though most studied d/Dhh populations in North America, several others included participants in Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Articles that reported the results of empirical studies included as few as one participant (in an auto-ethnography) and as many as two-hundred and eleven participants. While a systematic analysis of the quality of each included study is beyond the scope of this narrative synthesis, the research designs of these studies did vary widely; others might consider incorporating a framework of quality indicators into a future systematic review or meta-analysis. Participants' ages ranged from 12 to adulthood, with adult participants recalling or reporting details of their identity formation in childhood or adolescence. Studies used a variety of methodological approaches, from qualitative interviews and semi-structured questionnaires to quantitative designs using measures of identity, acculturation, and/or satisfaction with life.

4.2. Summary of Findings

Despite differences in methods, measures, and participant details, commonalities in topics, themes, and findings were observed across groups of the 47 works included in this review. These findings, which are described below, illustrate a changing understanding of d/Dhh identity across time and highlight special considerations for the increasingly diverse population of d/Dhh children and adolescents in North America and, indeed, worldwide.

4.2.1. Traditional View of d/Deaf Identity

Several of the earliest works dealing with identity and d/Dhh students set up d/Deaf and hearing cultures as opposing groups of “insiders” and “outsiders” [15]. In this view, d/Dhh identity in children, as in adults, forms in response to challenges encountered in a hearing world not designed for visual communication and learning. Whether d/Dhh individuals are insiders or outsiders depends, of course, on perspective; while the general public may position deaf children and adults as outsiders in a hearing world [15], insider d/Dhh identity can also be defined in opposition to the “outside” hearing/speaking world [16]. In the latter view, a d/Dhh student’s identity can be situated along a continuum of “cultural captivity” to either the Deaf or hearing culture(s) based on early exposure to d/Deaf culture, relationships with other d/Dhh individuals, and facility with sign language. Holcomb [16] proposed seven categories of d/Dhh identity (i.e., balanced bicultural, deaf-dominant bicultural, hearing-dominant bicultural, culturally separate, culturally isolated, culturally marginal, and culturally captive), asserting that the development of one of the bicultural identities is “crucial” to achieve a “productive, rewarding life” (p. 89). Glickman [17] similarly situated identity along a continuum of hearing to deaf, positing four types of Deaf cultural identities—culturally hearing, culturally marginal, immersion, and bicultural—measured using his Deaf Identity Development Scale. Other researchers emphasized the importance of establishing a bicultural identity by early adolescence, finding that d/Dhh students who identified with both d/Deaf and hearing cultures had fewer teacher-reported academic and behavioral problems [18] and better academic, social, and psychological outcomes [19]. Though early studies acknowledged some complexities in identity formation during childhood and adolescence, the use of discrete categories based largely on insider/outsider identities suggested that identity formed mostly as a result of experiences with and exposure to the d/Dhh community.

4.2.2. Evolving View of d/Dhh Identity

Since 2010, the literature on identity formation and d/Dhh students has wrestled with a view of identity that is increasingly complex, fluid, and subject to a diverse set of influences that differ for each d/Dhh individual [20]. McIlroy and Storbeck’s [21] bicultural dialogue model, for example, positions d/Dhh identity as a process of negotiation and renegotiation between the signing and speaking worlds that may evolve in response to a young person’s educational and personal experiences. The authors coin “DeaF” (with capital D and F) to highlight the fluid, bicultural identity in which d/Dhh individuals, who have increasingly used hearing technology and attended mainstream schools from an early age, carve a place for themselves between the traditionally dichotomous social or medical definitions of what it means to be d/Dhh. In this view, being DeaF is “the lifelong journey of a deaf person through [their] identity narratives” [21] (p. 498). This journey may be influenced by many factors during childhood and adolescence, including degree of hearing acuity, educational experiences, family, and communication modality (all of which may change over time) [20,22]. While traditional views of d/Dhh identity associate less profound deafness with a “hearing” identity (often, but not always, viewed negatively) [16,23], a DeaF view recognizes the ways in which d/Dhh young people actively construct and re-construct identities as they move among (usually hearing) families, mainstream schools, and culturally Deaf spaces [21]. While DeaFness is at its heart a qualitative construct, a recently developed quantitative measure has also moved beyond monolithic dichotomies with a focus on specific aspects of social and/or medical acculturation, including self-labeling, cultural involvement, cultural preferences, cultural competence, and language (ASL and/or English) competence [22].

4.2.3. d/Dhh Identity as Fluid

Key to the concept of DeaF identity is the understanding that identification with the social (i.e., signing) or medical (i.e., listening/speaking) view of deafness is not static but fluid as an individual moves through time and space [21]. As d/Dhh children mature,

the ways in which they define their identity along a continuum from Deaf to hearing may change many times as they integrate new people, ideas, and situations [24]. While Holcomb [16] appeared to view this process as unidirectional, toward the ultimate goal of a static, bicultural identity, more recent works emphasize fluidity from day to day and environment to environment [24–26]. Leigh’s [27–29] significant body of work over the past 20 years, in particular, has explored evolving notions of d/Dhh identity as fluid and multicultural, beginning in childhood. Other research suggests that how d/Dhh children identify and how strongly they express this identity can depend on context, including the people with whom they are interacting [24,25]. A child may use spoken language and references to hearing culture when interacting with a hearing friend at school, for example, and later use sign language and visual pragmatics to communicate with a Deaf mentor, all while identifying as DeaF [21].

The rate at which d/Dhh children become comfortable expressing strong identity preferences may also differ based on educational experiences. For d/Dhh children attending schools for the deaf, development of an identity (very broadly defined) may develop faster than for hearing students in mainstream schools, though differences in commitment to identity disappear by the end of high school [30]. For d/Dhh children in mainstream settings, the ways in which they express a DeaF identity may be influenced by their ease of communication with others (hearing and/or d/Dhh) and their peer friendships, both current and in the past [26,31].

4.2.4. Identity Development through Relationships with d/Dhh and Hearing People

The traditional continuum of hearing and Deaf identities traces ideal identity development through increasing exposure to d/Dhh role models [16]. In Holcomb’s [16] initial “conformity” stage, for example, a d/Dhh child in a mainstream setting attempts to conform to expectations of the hearing world and rejects a Deaf identity because of the perceived differences between them and an abstract idea of who Deaf people are. Meeting what they perceive to be a successful signing Deaf person might cause the child to question their beliefs in the “dissonance” stage, and increasing exposure to others who identify as Deaf can lead to “resistance and immersion”. Through “introspection”, the child or young adult begins to integrate their new understandings of both Deaf and hearing cultures, leading to the final “awareness” stage in which they identify as bicultural [16] (p. 91). Ohna [32] positions becoming what he terms “deaf in my own way” as an ongoing mediation of experiences in alienation from and affiliation with both deaf and hearing people.

Current research delves more deeply into the mechanisms by which the role of friendships and other relationships shape fluid d/Dhh identity in young people. Interactions with other d/Dhh children and adults facilitate identity development as children grapple with the question of who is most “like me” [33]. For d/Dhh children whose siblings and/or parents are also d/Dhh, these familial relationships can facilitate a positive sense of self [34]. Young [33] emphasizes the importance of d/Dhh role models in developing an identity through affinity, rather than contrast, with others:

In the case of deaf children, it is important to consider whether they are exposed to enough experiences in which it is possible to distinguish others as like me or not like me. The alternative is experiences in which the deaf child internalizes a sense of not being like the rest. If your identity becomes cast in terms of what you are not, how will you know who you are? [33] (p. 65)

Proactively identifying with signing Deaf culture has also been framed not in opposition to hearing culture but as its own set of Deaf strengths in visual cognition, language, and worldview [35]. Interactions with members of the Deaf community, whom Mauldin and Fannon [36] call “Deaf guides”, help impart a strengths-based identity with a strong Deaf community, which may be protective against perceived anti-d/Dhh discrimination in the “outside” world [37].

4.2.5. Identity and Children with Cochlear Implants

In addition to scholarship focused on visual-based Deaf identity for d/Dhh young people, recent research has increasingly focused on a growing population of severely and profoundly deaf children: those with cochlear implants (CIs). Children who received CIs early in life and are educated in mainstream settings may not follow the traditional stages of acquiring a Deaf identity that were theorized well before infants were routinely implanted before their first birthday [16,25]. One study suggests that adolescents with CIs identify as more hearing acculturated than their peers without CIs [27]. Other research emphasizes the heterogeneity of the population of students with CIs, with some identifying as deaf or Deaf, others as hearing, and others as hard of hearing; still others express no strong preference toward one of the d/Dhh identity labels [25]. This flexible attitude may be related to the flexibility in accessing sound that CIs can afford; adolescents can choose to converse in spoken language with their devices on in one situation and then take them off to access information visually in another [38]. Anecdotal evidence from teachers who work with d/Dhh students suggests that children with CIs who use spoken language may become more interested in Deaf culture in secondary school [39].

This fluidity and flexibility in self-identifying may explain why many young people with CIs adopt a dual (deaf and hearing) identity [25,40,41]. Those with a dual identity see the complexity in their being an audiologically deaf person who can “hear” with technology as positive [38]. In fact, self-described dual identity has been found to be associated with higher life satisfaction, better mental health, and more positive attitudes toward CIs in adolescent CI users [41,42]. While one study found higher psychological well-being among children with CIs who described themselves as most similar to hearing peers than to their deaf counterparts [43], “passing” as hearing may itself be psychologically harmful [44].

4.2.6. Special Considerations for Hard-of-Hearing Students

Students who are hard of hearing, much like those with CIs, may exhibit “passing” behaviors that influence the extent to which they identify as d/Dhh [45]. Despite general acknowledgement that a “hard of hearing” identity exists apart from hearing and Deaf identities [46], very few studies have examined identity development in the specific group of young people with mild to severe hearing levels who might identify as hard of hearing. In one study, a majority of hard-of-hearing students in mainstream schools did not identify as having what the author termed a “hearing disability” [45]. Many who did not express a d/Dhh identity perceived that having such a label would put them at risk for social and physical maltreatment at school, evidencing the stigma that d/Dhh young people may perceive in hearing spaces [28,44,45]. However, hard-of-hearing students who perceive their use of hearing aids as “normal” report more positive personal identities [47]. Little is known about how hard-of-hearing children construct “normality” through their life experiences. Theories of Deaf identity construction emphasize the role of exposure to deaf adults and the Deaf community [16,21], suggesting that exposure to hard-of-hearing role models may facilitate the adoption of a positive hard-of-hearing identity in children; however, more empirical research is needed in this area, particularly for the majority of d/Dhh children who are now educated in mainstream settings [46].

4.2.7. The Role of Educational Experiences in Identity Development

School placement for d/Dhh children may have far-reaching effects beyond academics, including influencing the ways that identity is constructed [27,48]. Traditional models of Deaf identity construction decried the damaging “conformity” to hearing standards that mainstream education may have encouraged in d/Dhh children, instead holding up schools for the deaf as spaces where strong cultural Deaf identity flourishes [16]. However, the mainstream educational experiences of many of today’s children who had early access to the spoken language(s) of their communities through hearing technology may be very different from this historical model [41]. Indeed, the evidence appears to be as complex as the process of identity development itself. While one recent study describes some students

with CIs as feeling more “at home” in the Deaf world of schools for the deaf [48], another found no clear link between d/Dhh or hearing identity and school placement for children with CIs [38]. For children who are hard of hearing, interactions with hard-of-hearing peers and teachers in self-contained classrooms may engender strong hard-of-hearing identity [46]. Though such interactions may be limited outside specialized schools and classrooms, opportunities to interact with d/Dhh adults outside of school may facilitate a dual deaf-hearing identity for children who attend mainstream schools [49].

4.2.8. Intersectional Identity Development for d/Dhh Students

Most of the extant literature in identity development for d/Dhh children and youth focuses on the ways in which young people negotiate (and, in many cases, continually renegotiate) deaf, Deaf, hard-of-hearing, or hearing identities. “Dual identity” or “bi-cultural” labels most often refer to combinations of these d/Dhh-focused identities, not to d/Dhh-focused identities plus other personal identities [19,41]. However, Sue’s [50] Tripartite Model posits that an individual has multiple identities simultaneously and that these identities can develop on individual, group, and universal levels. Several early works concerning identity development for d/Dhh children acknowledge potential gaps in the literature. The introduction to a special issue of the *American Annals of the Deaf* in 1997 exhorted readers to recognize ethnic diversity and multiple identities in d/Dhh education [51]. Another early paper acknowledged that children from families who speak a language other than English may have multiple identities aside from being d/Dhh [52]. Several studies have investigated identity development for d/Dhh children from minoritized groups in an attempt to quantify the relative importance of their d/Dhh and racial and/or cultural identities. One French study found children’s d/Dhh identity to be “primary” over other ethnic and cultural identities [53], while another explored “racelessness” among Black d/Deaf adolescents [54].

Recent scholarship has been situated in intersectionality, or a framework for understanding the ways in which race, gender, disability, and other identities overlap and produce multiple models of discrimination and privilege [55]. Pearson [56], a hard-of-hearing Korean writer who was adopted, shares the following perspective:

Focusing on one or multiple forms of oppression, but not all, cannot lead to true social justice change and transformation because all forms of oppression interact in a convoluted manner that reinforce or undermine each other in an entangled labyrinth. [56] (p. 341)

The interaction of many forms of oppression may influence the ways in which d/Dhh youth from minoritized groups construct their d/Dhh identities, according to the limited research in this area [29,57,58]. Foster and Kinuthia [59] were among the first to delve deeply into the experiences of Black, Latinx, and Asian American d/Dhh college students, many of whom emphasized the fluid nature of intersectional identities and recalled complicated childhood feelings related to their racial and cultural backgrounds. Many of the participants, who would have been born around 1980 or earlier, believed language barriers with their families and schooling outside their neighborhoods prevented them from developing the same strong racial and cultural identities that their hearing siblings and peers did.

This points to the need for supports and measures that are sensitive to experiences outside those of White d/Dhh individuals from middle-class backgrounds [29]. Asian d/Dhh adolescents and their families, for example, may need culturally sensitive supports in navigating education and transition systems [57]. Two recently published articles advance frameworks for understanding the intersectionality of deafness, and race and ethnicity [60,61]. García-Fernández’s [61] Deaf-Latinx Critical Theory (Deaf-LatCrit) advances intersectionality, storytelling, and consciousness raising within d/Dhh education research, while challenging dominant ideologies and dual linguisticism. Chapple’s [60] Black deaf feminism challenges traditional deaf-hearing binaries and calls future researchers to interrogate the complicated ways in which gender, deafness, and race influence an individual’s performance of identity across contexts.

Gender identity and sexuality intersect with d/Dhh identity in emerging literature. d/Dhh young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA), particularly those from minoritized racial backgrounds, might engage in processes of “resocialization” as they experience affiliation or marginalization in groups of others who share one or more of their identities [36]. Lesbian and gay Deaf adults who use ASL describe experiences of both “coming out” as queer and “becoming Deaf” in young adulthood [62]. LGBTQIA d/Dhh adolescents of color experience these processes in the context of systemic racism and colorism, further complicating early notions of binary Deaf or hearing identities.

Finally, one study added another layer to intersectional identity development by investigating the development of a “STEM [science, technology, engineering, and mathematics] identity” in Black d/Dhh high schoolers [63], although at least one response asserted that racial, LGBTQIA, ethnic, and cultural systems of oppression must be addressed before focusing on developing STEM and other academic identities [58]. Indeed, more work is needed in the former area.

5. Discussion

Research in the past half-decade on identity development for d/Dhh students has been limited; works range from theoretical pieces to qualitative ethnographies to attempts to quantify the effects of certain elements of identity through rating scales and questionnaires. Many studies identified through our initial search focused on the ways in which d/Dhh adults describe their identities, sometimes retrospectively drawing upon details from their childhoods and/or educational experiences. Few studies focus on d/Dhh children and adolescents at the time they are developing their identities; fewer still follow these young people longitudinally during this sensitive period in development.

Holcomb’s [16] stages of bicultural identity represent one early attempt to describe a trajectory for development of d/Dhh identity. Both Erikson’s [5] and Holcomb’s [16] stages are associated with crises, or turning points, in which the individual—often an adolescent—integrates evidence that does not fit into their current understanding of themselves and others. A d/Dhh mainstream student who has always distanced themselves from the Deaf community, for example, may begin to question their assumptions upon meeting an adult who identifies as Deaf and who has achieved the personal and professional success that the student envisions for themselves. This turning point may lead the student to seek opportunities to interact with other d/Dhh people, which many scholars identify as a key facilitator of positive self-concept and self-esteem [33,35,37]. The general literature describes personal identity development as a coalescence of experiences, reflections, relationships, and values [5,6]; in the case of d/Dhh identity, experiences being an “insider” or “outsider”—the same as or different from d/Dhh or hearing people—coalesce to form a student’s understanding of themselves as a d/Dhh person [33].

Marcia’s [8] model of personal identity development emphasizes the process of exploring possible identities, positioning identity not as static but fluid. This view is exemplified in McIlroy and Storbeck’s [21] work on Deaf identity, in which the final capital F in fact stands for *fluid*. For today’s d/Dhh students, many of whom use CIs, d/Dhh identity may not proceed through discrete steps to become fixed at Holcomb’s [16] “awareness” stage. Instead, a d/Dhh young person might engage in a continual internal dialogue between the social and medical models of d/Deafness, the external presentation of which may shift depending on context and linguistic environment [21]. Adolescents with CIs seem especially likely to develop a bicultural identity with values rooted in both Deaf and hearing cultures [25,40]. For hard-of-hearing children, who are very likely to use hearing aids to access spoken language in their neighborhood schools, the process of self-identifying as d/Dhh (or not) may be complicated by issues of “passing” and stigma toward hearing technology in mainstream settings [45–47]. Recent research in this area, however, is sparse.

Personal identity can be influenced by a diverse range of factors, both intrapersonal and interpersonal [1,4]. For children and youth who are d/Dhh, intrapersonal factors

specifically related to deafness include hearing acuity, the possible use of hearing technology, and early language acquisition (whether visual, spoken, or a combination thereof) [20]. Interpersonal factors stem from the ways in which these intrapersonal factors interact with the environment, including both hearing and other d/Dhh people. Experiences interacting with d/Dhh children and adults, others' reactions to the child's hearing and/or hearing technology, perceived stigma, and educational experiences may all influence the extent to which a student reports a d/Deaf, DeaF, hard-of-hearing, hearing, and/or bicultural identity at a particular point in time [44,45,48,49].

Nearly all scholarship in the area of identity development and d/Dhh students has relied on data from just one time point, belying what may truly be a fluid process. Different aspects of personal identity may be more salient from day to day or situation to situation [6], suggesting that the ways in which an individual expresses their d/Dhh identity may differ by context and communication partner. This raises challenges for empirical research, which would need to collect detailed data across time and contexts to gain a fuller picture of what the process of developing a d/Dhh identity truly means. Sheridan's [64,65] seminal books, which followed deaf children and adolescents at the turn of the 21st century, describe identity development through experiences of challenge and success at home, with peers, and at school. This longitudinal work contrasts with most of the cross-sectional studies published in peer-reviewed journals and may provide a framework for future research with contemporary d/Dhh students, whose schooling and technology use may be quite different from those of Sheridan's participants.

It is possible that the very act of asking a participant to discuss and/or rate their identity as a d/Deaf or hard-of-hearing person artificially increases the salience of d/Dhh-related aspects and suppresses other aspects of their identity. However, a person may construct and express multiple individual-, group-, and universal-level identities simultaneously [50]. The fluid nature of identity is highlighted in many retrospective autobiographical life accounts of d/Dhh adults, including those included in Breivik's [66] book. Students may and, indeed, do have both d/Dhh *and* other identities at any given time. The intersections of multiple minoritized identities, including d/Dhh identities, can increase their experience of discrimination and marginalization. Scholarship on this intersectionality has highlighted the need for specialized support for d/Dhh students of color [59,61,67], those who identify as LGBTQIA [36,62], and those whose families speak a language other than English [56–58,68]; however, research is limited. Twenty-two years after Parasnis [51] wrote about the importance of recognizing diverse intersections in the population of d/Dhh students, O'Brien and Leigh [69] called for increased scholarship on intersectional d/Dhh identities. We echo this call.

6. Concluding Remarks

All narrative reviews have limitations that should be kept in mind. For example, it is possible that a few relevant studies were overlooked in the search process. In addition, the interpretations of the findings in this article were influenced by the biases of the present authors. Other researchers, adhering to the methodology of the present article, may proffer different interpretations. These limitations, however, do not detract from the important points rendered in Section 5.

It is clear that identity development is a complex, fluid, mostly life-long constructive process, affected by intrapersonal and interpersonal factors. Research on d/Dhh identity development has evolved from the use of monolithic, discrete categories such as "sign-oral" or "deaf-hearing". Although hearing status and communication modality continue to be critical factors, it is important for researchers and educators to consider the complexities and fluidity associated with the notions of intersectionality and the existence of multiple identities—areas that are becoming predominant in the larger literature on general identity development. There is also a need for further research on ethnic and language diversity, gender, and sexuality in d/Dhh individuals as well as on cohorts who are hard of hearing or those who wear cochlear implants. It should be instructive to explore how the construction

of identity influences or is influenced by controversial social issues such as gun control, abortion, and individual rights, to name a few in American culture. Other controversial issues pertain to a specific country or culture. As researchers, we implore scholars to not only respect the diversity of students who are d/Dhh but also to continue to demonstrate the relation of positive identity development to social and academic achievement in schools.

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