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***Title of assignment: Deaf Identity and Life Satisfaction in an Audism world***

***I certify that the material now submitted is entirely my own work and I have cited all sources used and have faithfully indicated their origin.***

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***Date: 30/11/2020***

## **Abstract**

This is a qualitative study investigating the relationships between Deaf identities and life satisfaction in an Audism world. This study aims at reflecting the complicated identity issues and challenges that faced by the Deaf or Hard of Hearing people in Hong Kong.

There are 18 participants in two groups: nine Signing Deaf and nine Oral Deaf. This study use the thematic analysis and there are 4 main themes: 1) Audism and Deafness; 2) Identity of Signing Deaf and their coping strategies; 3) Identities of Oral Deaf and their coping strategies; and 4) A journey of Deaf identities discovery. These 4 themes are expected to reveal the impacts of Audism society to the identities, self-esteem and life satisfaction of D/HH people with Deaf different identities and how they coping with every challenges.

## **Introduction**

A few months ago, a heartbreaking news reminds us the mental health and information accessibility issues that Deaf or Hard of Hearing (D/HH) people in Hong Kong are facing. A depressed Deaf person, Mr. Chan, committed suicide after being discharged from psychiatric hospital. His family complained that the hospital refused to provide Sign Language interpretation for him. They questioned if the doctor had sufficient communication with him before letting him discharge from the hospital. Since Sign Language is an essential way of communication for Deaf people, depriving their use of Sign Language is a form of discrimination.

This incident reveals the little understanding of D/HH people's needs and the lack of mental health support for D/HH people in Hong Kong.

Sign Language deprivation happens not only in hospital settings, but also in the education system. Deaf schools in Hong Kong mainly use spoken language as teaching medium, D/HH students are trained to learn by lip reading, to communicate in spoken language and rely on their remaining “hearing” ability in order to “fit into” the society. This

kind of hearing-centered society is described as an Audism society, where D/HH people live as an underprivileged minority group striving for a “normal hearing” life. When “deafness” is labelled as “disability” and “abnormality”, it is not easy for D/HH people to embrace their unique identity.

Back in 2008, Li Ching, the deaf top scorer of Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) committed suicide. She expressed in her blog and suicide note her identity confusion, refusal in accepting her hearing impairment, as well as her feelings towards the discriminations and unpleasant experiences throughout her life. Even though she was proud of her oral and lip reading ability, she was shocked to know a group of D/HH people freely communicate by using Sign Language. She was shocked that some D/HH people grow up together and make friends in the Deaf community while she was all alone in the hearing world. Her unfortunate story brings the identity confusion and life satisfaction issues to the light.

Would the above tragedies be prevented if being D/HH is not stigmatized or if D/HH people do not need to force themselves to fit into the hearing world? This qualitative study will explore the interaction of deaf identity and life satisfaction in an Audism society. If being deaf does not translate into hearing loss but deaf gain, it will enhance D/HH people's self-esteem and life satisfaction as they can truly embrace themselves as unique and complete human beings instead of being impaired and disabled.

## **Literature Review**

### **Audism**

In a hearing society, being deaf is often unacceptable, both socially and psychologically (Corker, 1996). This kind of hearing perspective is called Audism. Audism is a form of discrimination which assumes being hearing is more superior than being deaf. Audism people or society would judge D/HH people's achievement by the standards of

hearing culture, such as spoken language skills or hearing ability. They believe that D/HH people can lead a normal and better life only if they can live like a hearing person (Humphries, 1975).

In an Audism society, D/HH children are isolated from each other and are taught to adapt to the hearing culture with a hearing impairment label, hence, a positive deaf identity could hardly develop (Leigh, 2009b).

### **Deafhood**

Deafhood is a relatively new concept that created to disrupt medically oriented and oppressive viewpoints of deafness, by constructing a deaf-constructed model that bring out Deaf people's unique ontologies (i.e., deaf ways of being in the world), emphasizing positive views of deaf people (Ladd, 2003). According to Ladd, searching of Deafhood and Deaf identities is an ongoing process that D/HH people evaluate their ways of encountering the hearing world in daily life and try to liberate themselves from the Audism.

### ***Deaf community***

The Deaf community contains D/HH individuals who share a common language, experiences and belief, and a common way of interacting with each other, and with hearing people (Baker & Padden, 1978). In the Deaf community, the fluency of Sign Language is a very important element for the members of it.

### ***Deaf gain v.s hearing loss***

Some scholars suggested that deafness can be regarded as Deaf gain instead of hearing loss (Bauman & Murray, 2014). Deaf gain emphasizes the uniqueness of Deaf people, Deaf culture as well as Sign Language whereas hearing loss focuses on the pathological hearing impairment of D/HH people.

### ***Sign Language***

Sign Language is another important property for D/HH people as it is the barre-free language for them to communicate with each other. Sign Languages are natural languages that contain their own grammatical features, including the hand shapes, movements, palm orientations, locations and non-manual features.

### ***Signed-Chinese***

When comparing with natural Sign Language, Signed-Chinese is not a natural Sign Language as it mainly follows the syntactic structures of Chinese (or Cantonese, in the case of Hong Kong) and certain other grammatical features of natural Sign Language may be omitted.

### **Identity**

Identity is how ones define themselves (Burke 1991). According to Tatum (1997), one's identities are based on their perceptions of the biological, psychological, social and religious-spiritual aspects of their own being. It is not only about one's understanding of themselves, but also how they react with the social world (Carter & Mireles, 2016). Previous studies suggested that it is an essential need for human beings to identify with certain social groups in order to prevent social exclusion (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Twenge et al., 2003). Unlike hearing people who naturally identify themselves as hearing persons and enjoy living in the hearing world, most D/HH people experience a long journey of exploring their deaf identity to figure out which social group and identity they belong to (Leigh, 2009).

### ***Deaf Identities***

According to Andrews, Leigh & Weiner (2004) there are four basic types of deaf identities: (1) the Deaf identity, (2) the Hearing identity, (3) the Bicultural identity and (4) the Marginal identity.

**Deaf Identity.** People with a Deaf (with the capital D) identity embrace Deaf culture and values. They view deafness as a difference rather than an impairment. They consider

themselves acquired Deaf gain instead of hearing loss. They prefer using Sign Language and socializing with Deaf people.

**Hearing identity.** People with a Hearing identity adopt hearing cultures and values. They often consider deafness from a pathological view and prefer to be named as Hard of Hearing instead of Deaf. They prefer using spoken language with lip reading and socializing with hearing people.

**Bicultural identity.** Some people who are fluent in both spoken language and Sign Language developed a Bicultural identity. They appreciate both hearing and Deaf cultures and enjoy communicating with both hearing and Deaf friends.

**Marginal Identity.** People with a marginal identity do not specifically have a sense of belonging to the Deaf or hearing world.

### ***Ethnic identity***

Ethnic Identity is the social identity of a member from a particular social group based on their ethnicity (Irizarry & Hunt, 2016). Interestingly, Irizarry and Hunt (2016) found that when ones explore or engage more in their ethnic identity, the positive impact of affirmation of belonging on their self-esteem would increase.

Some scholars suggested that Deaf can be an ethnicity (Lane, Pillard & Hedberg (2011). According to Ladd & Lane (2013), Deaf people have their own languages, cultures, histories, institutions, kinships and a strong sense of belonging to the Deaf world which distinguish the Deaf ethnicity from the hearing world.

Since people with Deaf identity and Bicultural identity identify with the Deaf world, it seems the Deaf identity for them is more an ethnic identity. Does it mean that their increased engagement in the Deaf identity will bring more positive effects on their self-esteem as suggested in Irizarry and Hunt's findings?

### ***Stigmatized identity***

When negative meanings and expectations are attached to an identity, it becomes a stigmatized identity (Long, 2016). Stigmatized identity is often resulted from negative labels that cause negative outcomes such as shame and embarrassment. It is not hard to imagine that a stigmatized identity will affect ones' self image and self-esteem, as well as their life satisfaction.

In an Audism society, if D/HH people agree that their deafness is undesirable and is an impairment, the stigma will then become a self-stigma which leads to self-esteem and self-efficacy problems (Leigh, 2009b). Leigh suggested that if D/HH children are surrounded by similar others, the sense of stigmatization may diminish when mutuality is developed among them.

Since people with Hearing identity adopt more hearing perspectives about their deafness, they are more vulnerable to the stigmatized identity than people with Deaf identity and Bicultural identity as they are more likely to internalize the stigma of being impaired. Meanwhile, people with Marginal identity may also be vulnerable to the stigmatized identity as they lack strategies to achieve positive identity as a deaf person (Chapman & Dammeyer, 2017).

### **Self-esteem and life satisfaction**

Subjective well-being is a person's own view of their life considering the life satisfaction or emotional reactions (Diener & Diener, 2009). Self-esteem is the feeling of self-worth that one values or likes oneself (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). Life satisfaction and one's self-esteem are essential to a good quality of life and well-being (Hintermair, 2008).

In this study, only self-esteem and life satisfaction will be discussed among the complicated and abundant mental well-being concepts.

According to Bat-Chava's study (1994), the connection between group identity and self-esteem of Deaf people is significant. The finding suggested that D/HH people had a higher levels of self-esteem if they identified strongly with other D/HH people when compare with those who preferred to identify with the hearing.

However, the relationships between deaf identities, self-esteem and life satisfaction were inconsistent in previous studies. Some studies suggested that people with Bicultural and Deaf identity have a higher self-esteem and life satisfaction (Bat-Chava, 2000; Maxwell-McCaw, 2001; Cornell and Lyness, 2005). On the other hand, a study of Chapman & Dammeyer (2017) found that only Marginal identity has significantly low self-esteem and life satisfaction while the other three identities show no difference. What would be the case in Hong Kong?

### **Research objectives**

In Hong Kong, a typical Audism society, only a small group of D/HH people grow up in Deaf schools while the majority of them study in a mainstream setting. Since the development of Deaf identity is shaped by life experience, normally those who grew up in Deaf schools would identify themselves as Deaf due to the use of Sign Language (Signing Deaf) and the recognition of Deaf culture while those who grew up in mainstream schools are more likely to develop a Hearing identity as they rely on spoken language and lip reading (Oral Deaf) and have no chances to learn Sign Language and interact with Deaf people (Leigh, 2009a).

This study is interested in investigating the difference between Signing Deaf and Oral Deaf people as the deaf education systems in Hong Kong is a bit complicated and we cannot simply divide the D/HH people by their education background. By the meaning of Signing Deaf, it is the D/HH people who prefer to use natural Sign Language (in this study, HKSL) to communicate while Oral Deaf means the D/HH people who mainly use Oral language

(Cantonese in this study) and lip read to communicate. Most of the Signing Deaf acquire Sign Language as their mother tongue and most of the Oral Deaf acquire spoken language as their mother tongue.

Nevertheless, some D/HH people have a higher life satisfaction even though they live in the same audism society. What are the possible explanations? The theories of ethnic identity and stigmatized identity can help illustrate the relationships between self-esteem and life satisfaction and deaf identities. What are the implications of ethnic identity and stigmatized identity on deaf identity?

Since there is a lack of qualitative study examining the relationships between deaf identities, self-esteem and life satisfaction, this study will adopt the qualitative approach to investigate the relationships among these constructs in an in-depth way to reveal the situation in Hong Kong.

### **Research questions**

There are two main research questions in this study:

- (1) Can Deaf identities affect their self-esteem and life satisfaction?
- (2) How do the concepts of Deaf gain or hearing loss influence Deaf identities, which then impacts on self-esteem and life satisfaction?

### **Methodology**

This is a qualitative study where individual semi-structured interviews with 20 D/HH people were held for investigating the relationships of their deaf identity and life satisfaction. The interviews were conducted in HKSL or Cantonese, depending on the languages the participants use in their daily life.

### **Design**

Individual Semi-structured interviews.

### **Participants**

The 18 D/HH participants between age 25 to 45 are divided into two groups - 9 Signing Deaf and 9 Oral Deaf with education levels varying from secondary school to master graduates. There are 5 female and 4 male participants in the Signing Deaf group while 7 female and 2 male in the Oral Deaf group.

### **Recruitment**

This study adopted a convenience sampling method to recruit participants from different backgrounds. Some of the participants are colleagues of the researcher, and the rest are their friends or family members.

### **Interview questions and research tools**

#### *What are their deaf identities?*

**The Deaf Acculturation Scale (DAS).** The DAS (Johnson, 2011) is used for measuring one's Deaf and Hearing identities. There are 58 items in the DAS, each item is a 5-point Likert scale and participants will be asked to rate their degree of agreement of each item (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). By calculating the marks of the DAS, two independent scores will be obtained. Score of DASd shows one's level of Deaf identity and score of DASH shows one's level of Hearing identity and these two scores together reveal one's identity type. Scores above 3 is a high score and below 2.9 is a low score. One of four types of acculturation would be assigned to the participants according to their scores: 1) hearing acculturated = a high DASH and low DASd score; 2) marginal = low DASH and low DASd; 3) Deaf = low DASH and high DASd; or 4) bicultural = high DASH and high DASd. As the official DAS is only available in English, it will be translated into written Chinese by the researcher. The DAS will be given to the participants together with a background information questionnaire by the format of Google form after signing the consent form and prior to the interview.

**Two circles.** Pieces of circular cards are used to represent the participants, their parents, siblings, lovers, friends, Deaf people, hearing people and people who are Hard of Hearing. Participants are asked to place the card representing themselves next to the card representing others according to how close or how far they feel with those people. The closer the two circles are, the closer their relationships are, or vice versa. This tool is used to illustrate their identities and their relationships with people around them.

***How do Deaf identities affect their life satisfaction?***

**Life story timeline.** Participants will be asked to mark down important incidents that are related to deaf identity on the life story timeline. The horizontal timeline starts from the left to the right, representing the day they were born to the present moment. Remarks above the timeline indicate happy experiences while remarks below indicate unpleasant experiences.

***Does Deaf identities affect their self-esteem?***

**Ladder diagram.** On a vertical line, participants need to point out the positions of themselves, Deaf people, Hard of Hearing people, their parents, family and friends according to how they view the status of those people. Higher position means higher status. This reveals their self-esteem by comparing the positions of people around them.

***Ethnic identity and stigmatized identity***

Questions related to these two topics will be asked during the interviews.

**Data collection and Location**

The researcher of this study is responsible for the interviews. Interviews with HKSL were video recorded and interviews with Cantonese were voice recorded. Also, photos will be taken to record the results of three pictorial tools. The interviews were held either at the recording studio of CSLDS, at participants' home or office, or at a café that is convenient for the participants to go. Permission from the person in charge of CSLDS will be obtained in

advance. If the interviews were taken in a café or any other public area, the researcher had ensured that the distance of the others nearby are far enough and no other people would hear what the participants say nor disturbed the interview.

### **Data analysis**

Thematic analysis is used for analysing the interview data. Thematic analysis is a flexible approach in analysing qualitative research data (Haug et al. 2017). Researcher need to be familiar with the interview data then coding the interview to identify the most common themes across all 18 interviews. These themes were extracted with the related quotes from the participants.

According to Stone and West (2012), the traditional approach of Deaf qualitative study is transcribing the entire interview on video editing software like iMovie and then analysing the interview via the transcripts. Two main types of transcribing methods are used by hearing researchers : Glossing and Translation. Glossing means to mark down each sign in the sentences and keep the original syntactic structures of the Sign Language. Translation means to translate the meaning of each sentence to written language literally.

The advantages of Glossing are it shows the glosses and original syntactic structures of the sentences and it is closer to the original meaning. However, since the grammars of Sign Language and written language are different and some grammatical features such as the movement path and non-manual features may not be included in the gloss, both transcription and interpretation skills in glossing require competence and caution, otherwise the researcher may interpret the content incorrectly.

For translation, although it is more convenient for researchers to analyse the content by written language, a main concern is that there may be translation bias and the meaning may not be as accurate as the original sentences in Sign Language.

Time is another concern for both transcription methods. Stone and West stated in their work that it takes ten hours to transcribe just an hour of British Sign Language (BSL). In my own experience, transcribing HKSL to written Chinese may need even more time.

To analyse the HKSL data in a more accurate and efficient way, this study will analyse the content in HKSL directly. According to Anderson and his colleagues (2018), it is more ideal to analyse Sign Language data directly since the analysis is based on the original meaning.

In this study, a coding software named Elan will be used and the researcher will mark down the keywords in the timeline of the video so that she can easily refer to the contents she needs. She will then analyse the contents based on the HKSL interviews.

Anderson and his colleagues suggested that the analysis should be checked by different native signers to make sure it is interpreted correctly. However, as confidentiality is one of the main ethical concerns of this study, the analysis will not be checked by other native signers. It is one of the foreseeable limitations of this study.

For Cantonese interviews with D/HH people who prefer spoken language, the analysis will be based on the full transcription of the voice recording.

### **Ethical concerns**

Normally, the common practice in Deaf studies is to use a Deaf researcher to interview the Deaf signers so that participants could express themselves naturally and freely.

However, since this study involves different topics of personal feelings and private issues, participants may not feel comfortable to reveal those sensitive information to another Deaf person considering the small Deaf community in Hong Kong, so this study will only be conducted by a hearing researcher.

The hearing researcher of this study has been learning Hong Kong Sign Language (HKSL) for more than five years. Since working with many Deaf colleagues in the Centre of

Sign Linguistics and Deaf Studies (CSLDS) in the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), she is equipped with fluent HKSL and sufficient knowledge of Deaf culture to communicate with Deaf people. Besides work, she joins the gatherings with Deaf people and assists them to handle some daily routine in her leisure time, such as accompanying them to see a doctor or a vet, or helping them handle bank issues via phone calls. As she maintains good relationships with her colleagues as a Deaf researcher, Sign interpreter and friend, the participants would feel more comfortable to reveal personal issues and feelings to her, which would make the interview process easier to manage.

Before conducting the interviews, she will consult her native Deaf signer colleagues to make sure she can articulate each question naturally in HKSL. As a native speaker of Cantonese, she can also interview with those participants who use Cantonese.

At the beginning of the interviews, the researcher will explain the purpose of this study to the participants and confirm with them that all interview contents will only be used for research purpose of this study. When the interview ends, the researcher will never mention the interview-related contents in her daily life with the participants or any third party. Participants can reveal the information only if they want to. They can request to stop the recording or the interview at any time. Interviews will only begin after they agree and sign the consent form.

After the interview, participants have the rights to request not to include any parts of the interview in the study. They can request to delete the record if necessary.

If participants make any strong emotional reactions during the interviews, the researcher bears the responsibility to call the police or accompany the participants to seek help from mental health professionals, as well as being a voluntary sign interpreter for them in those scenarios. If the emotions are triggered by the researcher, another hearing interpreter who is fluent in Hong Kong Sign Language would accompany the participant to seek help

from related professionals when necessary. The researcher is not responsible for the emotional issues of the participants that are not caused by the interview.

## Results

Demographic characteristics of the participants are represented in Table 1. All 18 participants are either born deaf or being deaf since toddler stage. All the interviews with the Signing Deaf participants were conducted in HKSL and six interviews with the Oral Deaf participants were conducted with the mixing form of HKSL and Cantonese as required by the participants. Only three Oral Deaf participants chose to use Cantonese only in the interviews.

Table 1

*Demographic characteristics of participants*

Informant Code	Age	Gender	Education level	Deaf school/Mainstream	Parents' Haring status	Mother tongue	Hearing status	DASd Score	DASh Score	Identity in DAS	Self-claim
S01	41	M	Master	Deaf school	Deaf	HKSL	Profound	4.62	2.62	Deaf	Deaf
S02	44	F	Bachelor	Deaf school	Hearing	HKSL	Profound	4.72	2.69	Deaf	Deaf
S03	36	F	Bachelor	Both	Deaf	HKSL	Profound	4.48	2.55	Deaf	Deaf
S04	41	F	Tertiary	Deaf school	Deaf	HKSL	Profound	4.59	2.38	Deaf	Deaf
S05	43	F	Secondary	Deaf school	Hearing	HKSL	Profound	4.28	1.79	Deaf	Deaf
S06	42	F	Tertiary	Deaf school	Deaf	HKSL	Profound	4.72	2.17	Deaf	Deaf
S07	35	M	Master	Deaf school	Deaf	HKSL	Profound	4.93	2.79	Deaf	Deaf
S08	37	M	Tertiary	Deaf school	Hearing	HKSL	Profound	4.52	2.34	Deaf	Deaf
S09	30	M	Tertiary	Deaf school	Deaf	HKSL	Profound	4.31	2.86	Deaf	Deaf
O01	42	F	Secondary	Mainstream	Hearing	Lip-read	Severe	3.52	3.76	Bicultural	HH
O02	43	F	Secondary	Mainstream	Hearing	Lip-read	Profound	3.34	2.55	Deaf	Deaf
O03	36	M	Bachelor	both	Hearing	Cantonese	Profound	4.52	3.41	Bicultural	Deaf or HH
O04	30	F	Tertiary	Mainstream	Hearing	Cantonese	Profound	3.93	2.72	Deaf	Deaf or HH
O05	31	F	Tertiary	Mainstream	Hearing	Cantonese	Profound	3	3	Bicultural	Deaf or HH
O06	41	F	Tertiary	Mainstream	Hearing	Cantonese	Profound	3.59	3.10	Bicultural	HH
O07	32	F	Secondary	Mainstream	Hearing	Cantonese	Profound	2.55	4.17	Hearing	HH
O08	28	F	Tertiary	Mainstream	Deaf	Cantonese	Severe	3.41	4.28	Bicultural	HI
O09	28	M	Bachelor	Mainstream	Hearing	Cantonese	Profound	2.03	4.21	Hearing	HI

*Note.* Profound = 91 dB or above; Severe = 71-90 dB; HH means Hard of Hearing, and HI means Hearing Impaired

In the Signing Deaf group, most of the participants studied in the same Deaf school except one switched to a mainstream school after F.3 and one came from another Deaf school. Three participants came from Hearing families and six of them came from Deaf families. All nine participants call themselves “Deaf” people with a Deaf identity shown by the results of DAS.

On the other hand, backgrounds and Deaf identities among the Oral Deaf group are more diverse. Most of the participants came from Hearing families and only one of them came from Deaf families. There are six participants studied in mainstream school; two studied in a special class for D/HH students in a mainstream school from F.1 to F.3 and then switch to another mainstream school after F.3; one studied in mainstream school and switched to a Deaf school after P.6.

There are five participants with a Bi-cultural identity: 2 self claim as “Hard of Hearing”, 1 “Hearing impairment”, 1 “Deaf or Hard of Hearing” and one no specific preference; two with Deaf identity: 1 self claim as “Deaf” and 1 “Deaf or Hard of Hearing”; two with Hearing identity: 1 self claim as “Hard of Hearing” and 1 “Hearing impairment”.

These findings suggest that Signing Deaf people in Hong Kong are more align of their self claim and Deaf identity while Oral Deaf people in Hong Kong do not have a uniform self claim and their interpretations of “Deaf”, “Hard of Hearing” and “Hearing Impairment” maybe vary according to their diverse background and Deaf identities. However, it should be kept in mind that the uniform Deaf identity of Signing Deaf participants in this study may not represent all the Signing Deaf in Hong Kong as there is only a very small sample size in this study and this study is conducted by a convince sampling method.

There are four main themes reveals by the interviews: 1) Audism and Deafness; 2) Identity of Signing Deaf and their coping strategies; 3) Identities of Oral Deaf and their coping strategies; 4) A journey of Deaf identities discovery.

The themes of 1) Audism and Deafness and 4) A journey of Deaf identities development are the shared themes of both Signing Deaf and Oral Deaf, while 2) Identity of Signing Deaf and their coping strategies and 3) Identities of Oral Deaf and their coping strategies are the common themes revealed by the two groups respectively.

## **Themes**

## *1) Audism and Deafness*

**Audism Society, oppression and discrimination.** As most of the population in Hong Kong are hearing, people mainly use oral language to communicate and seldom notice the need of D/HH people, especially when D/HH people looks no different from hearing people:

There are lot of inconvenience in our daily life. For examples, most of the bank services require us to contact them on phone, most of the restaurants only provide phone booking, but we cannot hear. (#S04)

In my job, we need to take turn in taking minutes of meetings, I am not an exception. It is not an easy task for me because I cannot hear clearly, and it is hard to lip read when there are more than one person speaking simultaneously. Now, under the pandemic situation, everyone is wearing mask which make it even harder for me to take minutes as I cannot lip read at all, so I have to seek help from my colleagues to finish the task. (#O08)

Since our society have a low awareness of the existence of D/HH people and the most people assume that everyone is able to hear and speak, they focus only on D/HH people's hearing ability or speaking ability, rather than considering their talent on other aspects:

It is hard to find job as employer prefer to hire someone who can pick up phone call or communicate with customers and co-workers by oral language smoothly. (#O05)

Once my friend helped me to call the employer of a designer company, asking for a chance of interview, they were first interested in my portfolio but hang up the phone right after knowing that I am Deaf. (#S09)

I think most of the employer focus only on our hearing loss without considering our real ability in doing the jobs. (#O06)

As the society favored hearing people, D/HH have fewer chances when compare with the hearing and they often experience discrimination in daily life:

I worked in one company for three years and my salary never increased. My boss told me that they cannot afford to pay me more. However, all my hearing colleagues told me that they got an increased salary. I was so angry, then I resigned the job. My boss told me to think clearly because he knew that I can hardly find another job as I am Deaf. Three weeks later, my boss contacted me and ask if I was interested to go back and work, because they lacked staff, he told me that he could add an extra \$9000 HKD for me. It means that I was so underpaid. (#S07)

**Education and Language preference.** There are Deaf schools and integrated education for D/HH students in Hong Kong. However, these two different modes of Deaf education were designed in the hearing point of view and both favored spoken language. In Deaf schools, Sign Language was forbidden, the teachers use spoken language as the only teaching medium. The D/HH students could hardly learn anything in schools. Also, all the participants who studied in Deaf schools think that their teachers favored students who could speak better.

On the other hand, all the participants who studied in mainstream schools experiences bullied by the hearing schoolmates, because they have inaccurate pronunciation (Deaf accent) in Cantonese and they can hardly understand what their teachers and classmates said.

**Family and Deafness.** Most of the participants came from a hearing family (3 Signing Deaf and 8 Oral Deaf), since their parents are hearing people, they know very little about Sign Language and deafness, they basically listen the advices from doctors and schools. Most of the participants revealed that their parents forbid them to learn Sign Language or use HKSL in home, spoken language is their main way to communicate. Most of the Oral Deaf participants are lucky enough to have a good relationship with their parents or siblings, however, the three Signing Deaf participants can hardly communicate with their family members:

When I was small, I love to watch cartoon, but there was no subtitles and I can hardly understand anything, I asked my siblings to explain to me and they refused to do so because they think that I am troublesome. (.....) No one would communicate with me in HKSL in my home, because they believe that using oral language is better than Sign Language. (#S02)

I am quite upset that I can never have a deep conversation with my mother, because she does not know Sign Language, and I have limited expression in Cantonese. I always want to know more about her life story, and I want to share my thoughts with her if I can. (#S08)

As the hearing parents prefer to use spoken language to communicate with the D/HH family members, they prefer their son/daughter to choose a partner that can use spoken language to communicate with them as well. On the other hand, the D/HH people would also

worried about if their dating partners' parents mind their hearing status and speaking ability, which may limited their choice and stop them from choosing their partners freely as the hearing people.

**Impacts on D/HH people's self-esteem.** We can see that the Audism society focus on the hearing and speaking ability of D/HH people, which emphasis their weaknesses and ask them to be as similar as hearing people as possible. These kind of every day experiences generally lower their self-esteem and life satisfaction:

I thought that being Deaf is a fault and my Deaf identity meant negative to me. (#S01)

The society told us that if we cannot hear or speak well, we our status are lower than the hearing people, they made us believe that we are stupid if we cannot speak well.  
(#S02)

It seems that if one can speak or hear better, they have a higher value, isn't it? (#S03)

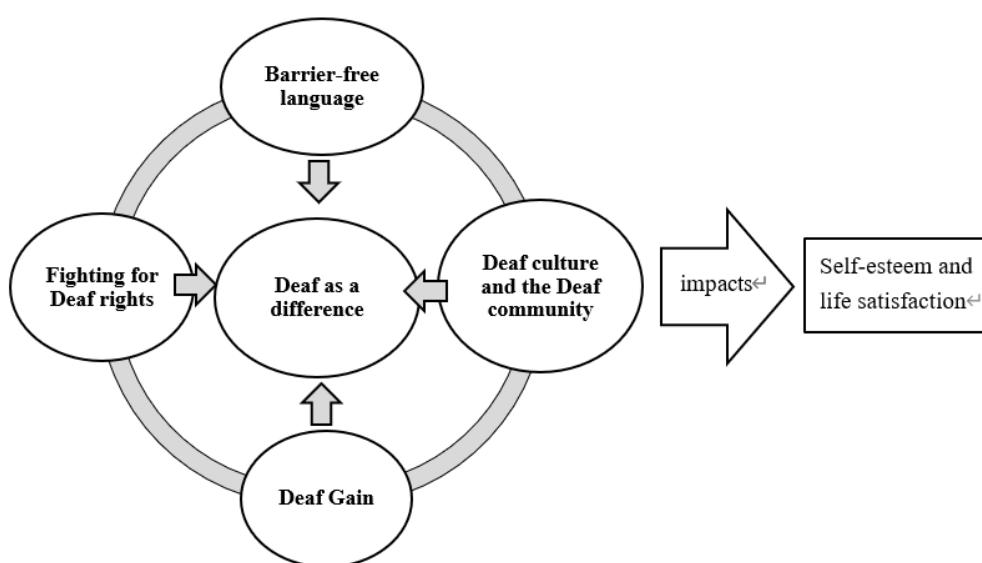
These two quotes summarized the whole experience of being D/HH people under the Audism world, being a D/HH people is stigmatized in this hearing society. However, if this is the whole story of D/HH people, we can simply assume that their self-esteem and life satisfaction should be very low and Deaf identities is nothing more than a stigmatized identities, but it is not true.

Most of the Signing Deaf people are proud of their Deaf identity and most of the participants in both groups is quite satisfied with their life right now. What are the reasons behind? What are the coping strategies helping them to encounter the Audism world? Are there any differences of self-esteem and life satisfaction between different types of Deaf

identities? In the sessions below, we investigate different Deaf identities and coping strategies of the two groups.

## 2) *Identity of Signing Deaf and their coping strategy*

All the Signing Deaf participants have a Deaf identity in this study. The way how they think about Deafness, Sign Language, Deaf culture and Deaf community are quite consistent, these shared beliefs and behaviors are their coping strategies when encountering the Audsim society. Figure 1 shows the relationships between the subthemes.



*Figure 1. Interrelationships of the core identity belief, coping strategies, self-esteem and life satisfaction of Signing Deaf.*

The central circle is their core belief regarding deafness and their Deaf identity, while the four circles outside is their coping strategies. Since they think that Deaf is a difference rather than a disability, they cope with everyday challenges which brought by the Audsim society by creating unique ways that can cater their needs. These coping make them a more independent and self-sufficient individual and community. So, the Deaf people and their community standalone from the hearing world. The arrows pointing from the coping strategies towards their core belief: Deaf as a difference, meaning that there is a centripetal

force among these strategies, bringing them towards and embrace their deafness. Their identity and coping strategies eventually impact their self-esteem and life satisfaction.

**Deaf as a difference.** All the Signing Deaf participants believe that Deaf is not disability but a difference. As they have their own language and unique culture, they believe that they are only a language minority and they can do what hearing people can do if suitable language is provided for them:

Just to imagine you need to move to Russia and you do not know Russian language at all, what would you do? How would you communicate with the Russian? You are not much different from me in that case. We just need our own language (Sign Language), and then we can do what hearing people can do. (#S07)

We have our own language, Deaf culture and community, we have our own world. I feel that we are very self-sufficient, and we can live well apart from the hearing world. We would like to learn how to get along with the hearing people when it is necessary, for example, our colleagues and boss, but they are not a big part of our life. (#S08)

It shows clearly that the Deaf world is separated from the hearing society in their eyes.

**Barrier-free language.** Rather than using spoken language to coping the communication problems in daily life, all the Signing Deaf participants think that Sign Language is a very important properties for them because it is a barrier-free language for them to communicate, they can express themselves freely when using Sign Language but not

spoken language. They also emphasize the importance of Sign Language in Deaf culture and Deaf community.

All of them revealed in the two circles and ladder diagram that their closest friends must know fluent HKSL, and they would only consider to be friends with hearing people when they are fluent in HKSL or showing their efforts in learning it. Interestingly, all of them showed in the ladder diagram that those who do not know HKSL have a relatively lower positions in their mind.

In addition, Signing Deaf people can easily communicate with foreign Deaf signers even if they communicate in their own Sign Language and body language. They can learn another Sign Language within a few weeks or even few days in the process of interacting with each other.

Their unique way of communication making the Deaf people stand alone from the hearing world.

**Deaf culture and the Deaf community.** To the Signing Deaf participants, these two things are as important as the Sign Language. Most of them think that they would only choose a hearing person to be their lover only if they are fluent in HKSL as well as understand deeply about the Deaf culture. Deaf people choose to build a Deaf world together by using their unique language and culture instead of fitting in the hearing world.

Moreover, they all think that participating in the Deaf community is an important aspect of their life. Interestingly, the Deaf community is not just limited to the local one, they also make friends with the Deaf people worldwide:

In terms of making friends, we are quite different with the hearing people. Hearing people may be more passive when meeting new friends, especially when they are in a foreign country. But we will say hi to the strangers on the street if we meet a Signing

Deaf people aboard, and then share about our life experiences and our own Sign Language. (#S09)

I went to Canada for working holiday, I tried hard to find if there are any Deaf people on the street at first, then I really met a Deaf people and introduced myself to him. We were so excited, we went to a café to chat, he even offered me to stay at his place. It may seem dangerous to you to stay at a strangers' place, but Deaf people would do so. We are the same community in some sense and we naturally want to show our foreign Deaf friends a great hospitality even if we just met them. (#S08)

It seems that the international Deaf communities are connected by the shared experiences of being Deaf and using Sign Languages. They may feel that the international Deaf communities are even closer with them than the local hearing society.

**Deaf Gain.** This is another important coping strategy that contributing to their core Deaf identity belief: Deaf as a difference. By turning their viewpoint from hearing loss to Deaf gain, they focus more on what they have as a unique individual and community:

I can always sleep well as I am Deaf regardless of how noisy the environment is.  
(#S03)

After accepting my Deaf identity, I realized that there is no disability in the world, everyone is different and unique, they have their own strengths and needs, and Deaf people is one of the unique groups in this diversity world. (#S09)

The viewpoints of Deaf Gain help them to embrace more of their Deafness and Deaf identity, as it helps them to think about their uniqueness and enhanced their life satisfaction.

**Fighting for Deaf rights.** Since Deaf people are aware of their needs, they fight for their rights when facing the unfair issues. They would work hard to do well but they would also fight for a fair treatment and they would explain their needs to the hearing people when necessary:

Before, I would speak and try hard to lip read when communicate with the hearing people in order to cater the hearing world, but now I would tell them I am Deaf, please provided me a fair communicate method so that we can understand better.

(#S09)

I believe that we should not tolerate the inequity in the society, we should fight against it instead. (#S06)

By fighting for Deaf rights, they deny compromising with the hearing world and emphasis their unique needs.

**Self-esteem and life satisfaction.** All the Signing Deaf participants said that they are proud of being Deaf after knowing the deeper meaning of Deaf identity and learning Sign Language is a natural language. The above finding suggested that the Signing Deaf people with Deaf identity regard themselves a distinct ethnic group with different language and their Deaf identity can be view as an Ethnic identity. By having their own ethnic group, Deaf people are proud of their own language and culture. This finding is consistent with the study of Irizarry and Hunt (2016) that when people are more engaged with their ethnic identity, they can be benefit from it and have a more positive impacts on self-esteem.

Interestingly, 7 out of 9 participants in this place themselves on top of the ladder diagram showing that acknowledge their own importance and self-love when none of the Oral Deaf participants place themselves on top. We can see that the Signing Deaf participants' life satisfaction raised when experiencing empowerment events and learning about the uniqueness of Deaf people which make them truly embrace their deafness and Deaf identity:

Being Deaf, I am not impaired, I am unique and extraordinary. (#S09)

### 3) *Identities of Oral Deaf and their coping strategy*

Although the Deaf identities are diverse in the Oral Deaf group: 2 with Deaf identity, 5 with Bicultural identity and 2 with Hearing identity, there are some common themes that shown in their interviews regarding of how they view deafness, their language preference and the coping strategy encountering the Audism society. These shared values or behaviors are obviously different from the Signing Deaf participants. Figure 2 shows the relationships between the subthemes.

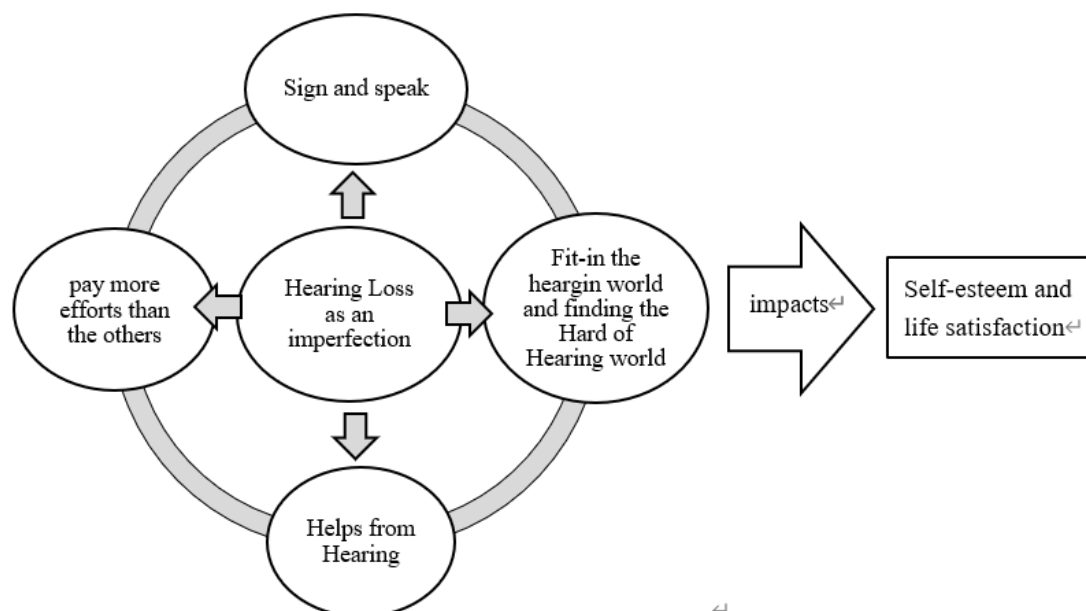


Figure 2. *Interrelationships of the core identity belief, coping strategies, self-esteem and life satisfaction of Oral Deaf.*

The central circle is their core belief regarding deafness and their Deaf identity, while the four circles outside is their coping strategies. Since they think that hearing loss is an imperfection, they cope with everyday challenges which brought by the Audism society by cooperating and compromising with the hearing world or seeking help from the outside world. These coping help them to assimilate or symbiosis with the hearing world, in order to fit in and survive in the Audism society. The arrows pointing from their core belief: Hearing loss as an imperfection towards the coping strategies, meaning that there is a centrifugal force coming out from their core identity belief, bringing them to break away their deafness and living towards the Audism society. Their identity and coping strategies eventually impact their self-esteem and life satisfaction.

**Hearing loss as an imperfection.** Even though there is one participant who have an Deaf identity holds a very positive view of being Deaf (her case will be discuss more in the session 4) A journey for Deaf identities discovery), most of the participants in this group reveal their thoughts of being hearing loss is kind of imperfection in some extend. Those who with Hearing identity express their thoughts on hearing loss more explicitly and they straightly said that they would like to be a hearing or “normal” people if they can choose:

You cannot request people who surround you accept your defect unconditionally  
 (.....) Being Hard of Hearing is being imperfection, if people have choice, why  
 would they choose one with defect? There are plenty of good choice out there (.....)  
 I wish that I could be a hearing person because I can have more chances if I am one.  
 (#007)

Deaf or Hard of Hearing people have more limitations and difficulties (.....) I wish  
 that I could be a “normal” person if I have choice, they are the majority in this world.

If you are parts of that 99.9% of population, your road would be much smoother, you would not be embarrassed when communicating with your friends, and you don't need to consider if your girlfriend's parents can accept you [with hearing loss] or not.

(#O09)

These two participants shared the believe that if they were hearing people they would have a smother life as they can get more chances and they would not have the concern of being rejected by the others because of their hearing impairment. On the other hand, those who have Bicultural identity express their thoughts about the imperfection of being D/HH in a more implicit way, but still we can see that from the meaning behind:

I thought about choosing a hearing boyfriend, however, I was afraid that his parents would not accept me [as a Hard of Hearing person], I did not want to be his burden and give him pressure. (#O01)

I wish my son or daughter to be a hearing people, as a mother, I want my baby to be a healthy one. (#O06)

I think hearing people are more mature than Deaf or Hard or Hearing people and they can help me if I am in need. (#O03)

Form the above examples, we can see that these Oral Deaf participants seeing themselves or D/HH people as burden, unhealthy, and less mature (the contradictory meanings of health and more mature hearing people). Although they did not saying that they are imperfect, nor they did not indicate that they want to be a hearing people as the

participants who have a Hearing identity, their wording revealed their negative thoughts of being a Hard of Hearing people and indicated that Hearing people are better explicitly.

**Sign and speak.** In this section, we investigate how Oral Deaf people view Sign Language differently when compare with Signing Deaf people. We also see how Oral Deaf people coping with the everyday communication challenges with hearing people.

Among nine participants, only one of them, whom with a Deaf identity, see Sign Language as a unique language that contain the Deaf culture and is an important property of the Deaf community. Three of them mainly speak and lip read in their daily life, the other five prefer to speak or lip read supplementary with some lexicon signs, as HKSL can help them express themselves clearer or it can provide them extra information. All the Oral Deaf people use oral language or lip reading to communicate with hearing people, they would tell them their needs in advance, making sure the hearing people slow down their speech and let them lip read clearly:

When I introduce myself, I would tell them that I cannot hear, and they may need to slow down their speech or even repeat to me sometimes when I cannot understand their meanings. (#O07)

I would apologies to them and ask them to repeat one more time so that I can lip read clearly. (#O08)

Being polite and try hard to understand the others' meaning is one necessary and fundamental way to cope with the hearing world, but one could easily imagine that this survival method may bring self-esteem challenges to the D/HH people. They may feel sorry

and think that they bring troubles to the others or keep border the hearing people because of their hearing loss:

When I was in primary school, every year I had to explain my needs to my teachers of each subject, sometimes I chose not to tell them because I did not want to be too troublesome (.....) I am especially thankful to whom willing to communicate with me patiently because not many people can do so, it is touching to me. (#O07)

Because the information omission problems is a challenges that D/HH people facing every day, some Oral Deaf people (in this study, all the Oral Deaf participants with Bicultural identity) choose to cope with the communication challenges by using HKSL when it is possible. Even though they may use HKSL to communicate with other D/HH people or with the hearing people who know HKSL, they do not pay much attention on the grammatical features of HKSL and they prefer to use signed-Chinese than natural HKSL. They see Sign Language simply as a communication tool other than emphasis its language properties or its importance to the Deaf culture:

Deaf people and we the Hard of Hearing people are different when using Sign Language, for example, they use a lot of facial expression and tongue posture, but we do not, their culture is different. (#O06)

I prefer to use Sign Language together with Cantonese or lip read, I do not understand natural Hong Kong Sign Language, and I do not understand if you omit the mouth gesture when signing with me as well, because I cannot lip read if you do so. (#O02, with Deaf identity in the DAS)

**Fit-in the hearing world and finding the Hard of Hearing world.** Since hearing people is the majority in our society, it is hard to avoid any cooperation or even compromise with it, and it is indeed hard to separate with the hearing society. Oral Deaf people try hard to fit-in the hearing world in order to cope with the everyday challenges. Learning how to speak and wearing hearing aids is one of the essential methods to fit-in the hearing world. Apparently, that is the reason why Oral Deaf people often emphasize their hearing and speaking ability, because these abilities are what they rely on and this is how they survive in this Audsim society. And it is the distinction between Signing Deaf and Oral Deaf as well:

Although I cannot hear anything when I take off my hearing aids, I do not think “Deaf” is a suitable identity to describe myself, because “Deaf” have a lot of different meanings, and I can speak to communicate with the others and I can hear when I am wearing my hearing aids. (#O07)

I do not consider myself a Deaf person because I can still hear, and I can speak.  
(#O08)

Interestingly, almost all the participants in the group emphasize they can hear and speak except the two participants who have a Deaf identity, even though five of them are profound hearing loss (91 dB or above), which is the same with all the Signing Deaf participants, and the other two are severe hearing loss (71-90 dB). It means that the hearing ability among the Oral Deaf group should not be significantly different from the Signing Deaf group. But still, the Oral Deaf participants emphasize their remaining hearing ability while the Signing Deaf participants emphasize they cannot hear, why? Implicitly, hearing ability and speaking ability are important to the Oral Deaf people because they need to communicate

with the hearing people everyday and these are the abilities that help them to fit-in the hearing world.

Besides, finding a hearing lover is another way that may help Oral Deaf people fitting into the hearing world. 4 out of 9 participants has a hearing lover, and they are glade that their partner can help them to handle some issues that they can hardly do as a D/HH people. Some of them think it is touching that there are a hearing people who choose to love and accept them as they have hearing problem and it may bring their lover everyday challenges as well:

I never though hearing people would choose me to be their girlfriend, it feels like I won the lotto when I got a hearing boyfriend, because I never thought one can accept my disability (.....) I think a hearing partner can widen my horizon as they can hear, and they gather information quicker than D/HH. (#O07)

It seems that a hearing partner can open a door for them to truly enter the hearing world and bring them back from the marginalized and stigmatized world to the mainstream.

On the other hand, some Oral Deaf people also exploring the Hard of Hearing world at the same time of trying to fit into the hearing world. Most of them have a group of Hard of Hearing friends and they think that they are the one who can deeply understand their feelings, because they share similar experience, they understand each other's needs and they use a similar way to communicate (i.e. speaking and lip reading, or speaking, signing and lip reading).

However, unlike the Signing Deaf people, the Oral Deaf people do not immerse themselves completely in a Hard of Hearing world, they do not simply give up fitting into the

hearing world after seeking the Hard of Hearing friends. It seems that the Hard of Hearing world is inseparable from the hearing world:

I think the Hard of Hearing world is embedded in the hearing world, but the Deaf world is separated from us. (#O07)

**Helps from Hearing.** Oral Deaf people tend to seek help from hearing people to help them to cope with daily difficulties:

My brother always take care of me and he would attend job interviews with me, help me to explain my situations and ask them to give me a chance. (#O03)

I prefer choosing hearing people to be lover, because they can help me to pick up the phone or handle something that I cannot do due to my hearing loss. (#O08)

It may be a good feeling that someone can help them and understand their needs, however, this maybe a double-edged sword, as they may get used to the feelings of being in need to be helped. Because it may also be a disempowerment experience that they experience every day, making them feel that they are the weak one, which may bring them a stigmatized self-image and lower their self-esteem and life satisfaction.

**Pay more effort than others.** It is not never easy for the minorities to survive, so do the D/HH people. The Oral Deaf participants tend to pay more effort than hearing people to face the difficulties. It does not mean that Signing Deaf people do not pay much effort when facing the difficulties, they do pay a lot of efforts, even more than hearing people, but they tend not to accept the unfair situations in daily life while the Oral Deaf people tend to accept the reality and keep working hard silently:

The world is unfair, a lot of people are facing inequity, it is useless to focus only on the inequity, you can only pay more effort to bring you to a better position. (.....) If the hearing people need to pay 100% of effort in study or work, we may need to pay 200%, or even 300% to have the same results. (#O09)

The hearing colleagues think that it would be troubled to communicate with me, I totally understand and I paid a lot of effort in doing my job, I always apologies for any inconvenience caused, even it was not my fault sometimes, eventually I gained their trust. (#O01)

I paid more efforts than the others in doing my job, my boss eventually sees my strength and give me a promotion. (#O06)

From their perspectives, even though they know it is unfair that they need to pay more effort than the hearing people in order to get the same results or to prove their ability, they bear the unfair and work hard for a better outcome.

**Self-esteem and life satisfaction.** In the above sessions, Oral Deaf people shows their efforts and coping strategies to cater the hearing world, regardless of their Deaf identities. It seems that their Bicultural identity and Hearing identity is more a stigmatized identity than an ethnic identity when compare to those who have a Deaf identity. Even though most of the Oral Deaf participants reveal that they dislike to be called “Hearing Impaired” because this name focus on their hearing loss, they still show that hearing loss is imperfect as their core belief towards deafness and Deaf identities implicitly during the interview, it is especially true for those who have a Bicultural identity or Hearing identity. Since they have a

stigmatized identity as a D/HH person, their self-esteem seems lower when compare to the Signing Deaf people. Interestingly, in the task of drawing a ladder diagram, no Oral Deaf participants place themselves on top of the diagram while 7 out of 9 Signing Deaf participants do so.

However, although the Oral Deaf participant shows a slightly lower self-esteem, most of them quite satisfied with their life and only one of them who have a Hearing identity reveals that she is somehow dissatisfied in certain aspects of her life.

Most of them reveal in the life story timeline that their life satisfaction raised mainly because of earning recognition in their job, when the Signing Deaf people felt a higher life satisfaction when they knew the deeper meaning of Deaf identity, committed to the Deaf world, learned the uniqueness and linguistics nature of Sign Language and started to feel proud of being a Deaf person.

It seems that the higher self-esteem and life satisfaction of Oral Deaf people are more depends on the successful coping with the hearing world, when the higher self-esteem and life satisfaction of Signing Deaf people is more about the embracement of deafness and Deaf identity.

#### ***4) A journey for Deaf identities discovery***

According to Ladd (2003), searching for Deafhood and Deaf identities is an ongoing process that D/HH people keep evaluate their life and try to find a way that is the most suitable for them to live.

For D/HH people, Deaf identities discovery can mean that they discover different types of Deaf identities, it can also mean the process of learning how to accept or embrace their Deaf or Hard of Hearing identities. Please note that in this session, we do not discuss the Deaf identities concepts by the categories and scoring in DAS, we discuss it by the self-claim

of the participants instead: Their preference to call themselves and to be called “Deaf” or “Hard of Hearing”.

**Struggles of having a stigmatized identity.** Among the Signing Deaf and Oral Deaf participants, they show their effort in searching for their own identities. Although all the Signing Deaf participants grown up in Deaf schools and surrounded by Deaf peers, they did not pay less efforts in searching Deafhood and Deaf identity, since being D/HH can be a stigmatized experience in the Audism society:

I always know that I am deaf, but I did not understand the meaning of being Deaf.

(#S01)

When I was young, I never thought about the identity issues, because I studied in Deaf school, we are all the same. Until I graduated from secondary school and enter IVE, I realized that it is difficult to communicate with hearing people. When I finish my study and start working, it is very hard to communicate with my colleagues, I wished that I can be a hearing person (.....) I spent a lot of time to think about what the meaning is being Deaf and what is my identity after my Deaf friends share their thought of the related topics to me. (#S08)

The story of S08 is a typical one for most of the Signing Deaf, they struggle about how to accept their Deaf identity since they encounter the hearing world, thought that being Deaf seems negative to them and they were not happy about it:

Before, I did not care about being called Deaf or Hard of Hearing, because I did not think about the difference between these words. However, since I started working, I

cared if people calling me “Deaf”, I emphasized that I am not Deaf, I am Hard of Hearing instead, because I want to emphasized I can speak. I wanted to show to the employers that I could do the job and I could communicate with them. (#S07)

Before the Signing Deaf participants gain a deeper understanding of “Deaf”, most of them struggled in how to fit in the hearing world and confused about their identity, just like the struggles of the Oral Deaf people.

For the Oral Deaf people, they may also struggle about what their identity is and how to accept it when exploring the meaning of being Deaf or Hard of Hearing:

When I was young, it was hard for me to accept that I am Hard of Hearing, because I was not happy in my school life, being bullied and having great pressure in study. (.....) When I was about F.5, I accepted my Hard of Hearing identity unwillingly, just because I have no other choice. (#O01)

I am still confused about if I am a Hard of Hearing person or a Deaf person, because when I take off my hearing aids, I am deaf, but when I am wearing it, I can hear. (#O05)

I am still struggling in between Deaf and Hard of Hearing and I am not clear about if I am a Deaf person or not. Since I learned about what Deaf and Deaf culture is, I wish that I am a Deaf rather than a Hard of Hearing person, because I feel like I eventually found my own world. But I am not yet able to be parts of the Deaf community since my HKSL is not fluent enough and I cannot freely express myself in HKSL. I can still feel the distance with the Deaf community, but I will try hard to know more about the

Deaf culture and wish that one day I can be a Deaf person. (#O04, with a Deaf identity in DAS, revealing her struggles to fit in the Deaf world.)

The sharing of O04 shows that changing from Hard of Hearing to Deaf is an ongoing process that including a lot of learning, to learn how to be a Deaf people and how to embrace their deafness and identity. Most of the participants revealed that they were unclear about their identity at first, some of them found it hard to truly accept their identity as a D/HH person, and then they discovered different types of Deaf identities and possibilities later in their life.

**Empowerment experiences and self-acceptance.** For most of the participants, they truly accept or embrace their Deaf or Hard of Hearing identity after some empowerment experiences. For the Signing Deaf participants, these empowerment experiences including study or living abroad, study about Sign linguistics and Deaf identities, and work in a research centre that advocate Deaf rights. For the Oral Deaf participants, these experiences are meeting the first Deaf friend in their life, learning HKSL, and joining a Deaf rights or Deaf identities workshop. No matter what their identities and what these empowerment experiences are, all of them who have these kinds of experiences feel relives after gaining insight about their identities and when they can truly accept who they are:

After accepting my Deaf identity, I feel relieved. To me, accept the Deaf identity means that we know what we really need as a Deaf people, embrace our unique lifestyle, and we are truly proud of being Deaf. (#S08)

When I was studied in the industrial school, I met my first group of Deaf friends.

They were friendly to me and they taught me Sign Language, I enjoyed watching their

signing and I realized that there is a language that can let me communicate freely and deeply. It feels like I found my own world. I became happy since then and I truly accepted my Hard of Hearing identity after that. (#O01)

From their experiences, it seems that D/HH people can only truly embrace their Deaf identities or deafness when they have come across the stigmatized identity of being a D/HH person in the Audism world.

For the Signing Deaf participants, their Deaf identity can be view as an ethnic identity and they embrace themselves as a unique language minority group who built their own world apart from the hearing society.

For the Oral Deaf people who have such empowerment experiences (i.e. all the participants who have Deaf or Bicultural identity), they can truly accept their needs and enjoy their life as a Hard of Hearing person that they are unwilling of turning to be a hearing person even if they can choose to do so.

There are two Oral Deaf participants who have a Hearing identity, they did not mention that they have such empowerment experiences, and both reveals that they wish to be a hearing people if they have choice. Back to the reality, they accepted their weakness and willing to work hard when encountering challenges in daily life. It seems that they have a more stigmatized identity than those who have a Bicultural identity.

## **Discussion**

### **The choice of being Deaf or not**

After all, being Deaf or not is just a matter of choice, there is no right or wrong of choosing what Deaf identities. Because no one should be told how to live and who they are, we are the only one who know how we feel and in what way we can enjoy our life to the fullest. We can see that most of our participants is leading a satisfied life and they can

cope with the Audism society quite well regardless of what their identities and coping strategies are.

However, the problem is whether enough non-bias information is provided for the D/HH members in this Audism society before they decide how to live and realize their potential as a unique person? Are there any other possibilities that they can get a whole picture of what being Signing Deaf, Oral Deaf, or other possible identities means to them?

### ***Bimodal bilingualism***

Bimodal bilingualism is a new way to educate D/HH people. In the setting of a bimodal bilingual program, D/HH students are provided both Sign Language and spoken language by a native signer and a native speaker at the same time. So that they can acquire sign language and spoken language simultaneously, and they can explore both Deaf and Hearing world with role model from the two worlds and choose which language or which lifestyle they want when they grow up. This may be a more ideal way to educate D/HH students as they can explore different possibilities of Deaf identities in early years.

## **Limitations and strengths**

### **Limitations**

#### ***No marginal identity was found in this study***

In this study, no marginal identity was found among all the participants. Since this study adopted a convenience sampling method and D/HH people with marginal identity may not have any contact with other D/HH people, it would be hard to include them in this study. As most of the D/HH people studied in the mainstream schools, maybe they are the silence majority of D/HH population, but we can hardly find them out.

#### ***Limited and bias samples***

Since this study adopted a convenience sampling method, the participants may be interested in the topics of Deaf identities and they may think about it for a long time in their life before joining the interview. So, their thoughts may not represent those who are not interested in this topic. Also, the convenience sampling method limited the samples background and the D/HH people from different social groups or friend groups may not be represented in this study and their thoughts may be more diverse.

### ***The reliability and validity of DAS***

Since DAS is invented in America and there is no official translated version in Hong Kong, the reliability and validity are a question in this study. There are some items that may not be suitable to ask in the local content, such as asking if the D/HH people familiar with Deaf politician or Deaf artist when there is none in Hong Kong. So, the score of DAS may not truly reflected the Deaf identities of the participants.

### **Strengths**

Since this is the first and only qualitative study of Deaf identity in Hong Kong, this study provides a basic understanding for both Signing Deaf and Oral Deaf people in the local society.

Moreover, there is not many researchers in Hong Kong who know Sign Language and working in the Psychology field, the findings in this study may help to promote mental health to the D/HH people in Hong Kong as we can understand more of their self-esteem and life satisfaction.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, there are four main themes reveals by the 18 participants in this qualitative study: 1) Audism and Deafness; 2) Identity of Signing Deaf and their coping strategies; 3) Identities of Oral Deaf and their coping strategies; 4) A journey of Deaf identities discovery.

Theme 1) Audism and Deafness tell us about the challenges and struggles that D/HH people face every day and how the oppression experiences shaped their self-esteem; 2) Identity of Signing Deaf and their coping strategies and 3) Identities of Oral Deaf and their coping strategies shows us the common beliefs or experience and coping strategies of the two groups of participants. These two themes tell us about how they encounter the Audism world: either creating their own world or fitting in the hearing world. 4) A journey of Deaf identities discovery shows us how the D/HH explore and discover different possibilities of Deaf identities and it tell us the importance of having empowerment experiences in searching for Deafhood.

In this study, the Signing Deaf participants all have a Deaf identity and they seems benefited from the ethnic identity nature of being Deaf, they shows a slightly higher self-esteem and life satisfaction while the Oral Deaf people may be more influenced by the stigmatized nature of their Deaf identities brought by the hearing world. however, the most important implication is that D/HH people can cope with the difficulties quite well regardless of their identities.

After all, being Deaf or not and choosing which Deaf identities is a matter of choice and there is no correct answer for this question. D/HH people should be the only one to decide how to live their life to the fullest when they have enough exposure to different identities and our society should provide them enough non-bias information and experience rather than limited them in.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Informed Consent Form for Adults**

#### Deaf Identity and Life Satisfaction in an Audism world

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by *Lau Tsz Lui (18p605m)* in the *Department of Counselling & Psychology* under the supervision of *Dr. Lau Hi Po* at the Hong Kong Shue Yan University.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This study aims at investigate the relationships between deaf identity and life satisfaction by doing an individual interview with Deaf / Hard of Hearing people in Hong Kong.

#### **PROCEDURES**

Questions about deaf identity and life satisfaction will be asked in the interview and there will be three pictorial tools in order to help to illustrate the related-scenarios better. The whole process will be around 1 hour. Interviews with HKSL will be video recorded and interviews with Cantonese will be voice recorded. Also, photos will be taken when using the three tools mentioned above. No other people will be present during the interviews.

#### **POTENTIAL RISKS / DISCOMFORTS AND THEIR MINIMIZATION**

Participants may find expressing their personal experience during the procedure somewhat uncomfortable and upsetting. Such discomforts, however, should be no greater than what we experience in everyday life

If there are any strong emotional reactions of the participants during the interviews, researcher bear the responsibility to call the police or accompany the participants to seek help from mental health professionals, as well as being a voluntary sign interpreters for them in those scenarios. If the emotions is triggered by the researcher, another hearing interpreter who are also fluent in Hong Kong Sign Language would come to accompany the participant seeking help from related professionals when necessary. Researcher is not responsible for the emotional issues of the participants that are not caused by the interview.

### **COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION**

It is a voluntary participation. There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS**

There are no direct benefits to you. However, the research project may help you to know more about your deaf identity and life satisfaction.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

All the interview contents will only be used for research purpose of this study. When the interview ends, researcher will never mention the interview related contents in daily life with the participants themselves or any other third party. Participants can reveal the information only if they want, they can request to stop the recording or interview at any time. After the interview, participants have the rights to request not to include any parts of the interview in the study, they can request to delete the record if necessary.

Interviews will only begin after they agree and sign the consent form voluntarily.

### **\*DATA RETENTION**

All the data will only be kept for no more than 1 year for the research purpose of this study. A code name will be given to all the participants in this study in order to protect their real identity. All the data will be saved in a specific external hard disk with password to prevent any data leakage.

### **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Your participation is voluntary. This means that you can choose to stop at any time without negative consequences.

### **QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Lau Tsz Lui (Whatsapp: 61795073 and kloristl@gmail.com) or Dr. Lau Hi Po (Tel: 2570 7110 (extension: 141 and hplau@hksyu.edu).

### **SIGNATURE**

Ø I \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of Participant) understand the procedures described above and agree to participate in this study; and

Ø I ^would / would not like to be identified.

*For the research study where audio / video recording will be made*

Ø I ^agree / do not agree to audio / video recording.

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

Date of Preparation: 3/8/2020

HREC Approval Expiration date:

*\*The whole paragraph shall be removed if the data does not contain personal identifiers*

*^Delete as appropriate*

Revised in October 2017

## Appendix 2

### Interview questions

**有關聾人身份認同的問題:**

你有沒有曾經因為不知自己屬於聾人，弱聽，還是聽障而感到困擾？

你會常思考自己的身份是甚麼嗎？

你認為你可以選擇這個身份嗎？

**Two circle**：以下這個圓形代表你自己，其他圓形分別代表父母，兄弟姊妹，情人，朋友，聾人，健聽人和聽障人士，你覺得他們與代表你的圓形關係有多近？完全重疊代表關係極之緊密，放得愈遠代表沒有關係。

你會選擇健聽人成為伴侶嗎？為甚麼？

如果有下一代，你會希望他們是聾人/弱聽嗎？為甚麼？

### 有關聾人身份與生活滿意度的問題:

Life story timeline：請將和你的聾人/弱聽身份相關的重要事件標示在圖上，線的上方為高興的事，下方為不愉快的事，左邊的起點是你出生的時候，最右邊是現在可以分享一下這些事嗎？

聾人/弱聽身份為你帶來了甚麼好處？

聾人/弱聽身份為你帶來了甚麼壞處？

身為聾人/弱聽，你遇過甚麼不公平的事嗎？

### 有關聾人身份與自信的問題:

Ladder diagram: 以下有一條直線，愈高代表地位愈高，請試標示你，聾人，聽障人士，父母，家人，朋友的位置。

你認為健聽人士有甚麼優勢是聾人/弱聽沒有的？

如果可以選擇，你會做聾人/弱聽，還是健聽人士？

你的朋友當中，聾人/弱聽較多還是健聽較多？

## Appendix 3 Deaf Acculturation Scale (DAS) (Johnson, 2011)

### 1. Please indicate the appropriate answer for the comments below.

I call myself deaf.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

I feel that I am part of the deaf community.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

I am comfortable with deaf people.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

Being involved in the deaf world (and with deaf people) is an important part of my life.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

My deaf identity is an important part of who I am.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

I am comfortable with hearing people.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

I call myself hearing-impaired or hard-of-hearing.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

Being involved in the hearing world (and with hearing people) is an important part of my life.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

I often wish that I could hear better or become hearing.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

I feel that I am part of the hearing world.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

## 2. How much do you enjoy:

Reading magazines/books by deaf authors.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

Going to deaf events/parties/gatherings.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

Going to theater events with deaf actresses/actors.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

Watching ASL video-tapes by deaf story-tellers or deaf poets.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

Participating in political activities that promote the rights of deaf people.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

Attending Deaf-related workshops (e.g., workshops on Deaf culture or linguistics in ASL)

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

Going to theater events with hearing actresses/actors.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

Attending professional workshops in the hearing world.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

Participating in hearing political activities.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

Socializing with hearing people.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

Attending hearing gatherings/events/parties.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

Participating in or attending hearing athletic competitions.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

**3. If you could have your way, how would you prefer the following situations in your life to be like?**

I would prefer my education to be at a deaf school.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

I would prefer if my roommate was deaf.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

I would prefer that my church/temple is mostly deaf.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

I would prefer my date/partner/spouse to be deaf.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

I would prefer my closest friends to be deaf.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

I would prefer my children to be deaf.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

I would prefer my work environment to be deaf.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

I would prefer my children to be hearing.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

I would prefer my work environment to be hearing.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

I would prefer that my education to be in a hearing school or a mainstream environment.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

I would prefer my roommate were hearing.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

I would prefer my closest friends to be hearing.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

I would prefer my date/partner spouse to be hearing.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

I would prefer that my church/temple is mostly hearing.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

**4. How well do you know (agree means you know it well, disagree means you do not know it well):**

Traditions and customs from Deaf schools.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

Names of deaf heroes or well-known deaf people.  
 1            2            3            4            5  
 strongly disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree

Important events in Deaf history.  
 1            2            3            4            5  
 strongly disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree

Well-known political leaders in the Deaf community.  
 1            2            3            4            5  
 strongly disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree

Organizations run by and for Deaf people.  
 1            2            3            4            5  
 strongly disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree

Names of national heroes.  
 1            2            3            4            5  
 strongly disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree

Names of popular hearing newspapers and magazines.  
 1            2            3            4            5  
 strongly disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree

Names of famous hearing actors and actresses.  
 1            2            3            4            5  
 strongly disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree

Important events in American/world history.  
 1            2            3            4            5  
 strongly disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree

Names of famous hearing political leaders.  
 1            2            3            4            5  
 strongly disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree

**5. Please indicate the appropriate answer for the questions below (agree means you do it well, disagree means you do not do it well).**

How well do you sign using American Sign Language (ASL)?

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

How well do you understand other people using ASL?

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

When you sign using ASL, how well do other deaf people understand you?

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

How well do you finger-spell?

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

How well can you read other people's finger spelling?

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

How well do you know current ASL slang or popular expressions in ASL?

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

How well do you speak English, using your voice?

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

In general, how well do hearing people understand your speech?

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

How well do you lip-read?

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

How well do you read English?

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

How well do you write English?

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

How well do you know English idioms or English expressions?

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

#### **Appendix 4 Debriefing Form**

1. This study aims at exploring the relationships between deaf identity and life satisfaction.
2. It is expected that D/HH people with a positive deaf identity would have a higher self-esteem and life satisfaction.
3. There are 4 types of deaf identities : (1) the Deaf identity, (2) the Hearing identity, (3) the Bicultural identity and (4) the Marginal identity
4. This study is interested in which types of identity will lead to a higher life satisfaction. Because it is important to explore how can we promote a more positive self-image to D/HH people in Hong Kong.
5. If being D/HH is not necessarily a negative label, it should bring more self-esteem and life satisfaction than harm as D/HH people can truly embrace themselves as a unique and complete human being rather than thinking they are an impaired and disabled person.