

Book Review

Preston, P. (1994). *Mother Father Deaf: Living Between Sound and Silence*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

She shook her head, "It's all there, the good and the bad. Wow!" (hearing woman with deaf parents)

"Had to stop, and stop. Had to keep asking my son, 'Is it like this for you?', 'Did you feel that way?'" (deaf mother of a hearing child).

In reviewing *Mother father deaf*, comments such as these confirmed my own thinking and responses as a hearing child of deaf parents. This ethnographic work captures the complexities of the lives of hearing children of people who are deaf (CODAs) in a way that reveals their diverse experiences and similarities. In so doing, the author lays out a variety of templates against which CODAs and their families can compare and explore their experiences and understandings. Beyond the individual level, in revealing a little known, and unusual pattern of relationships, this book challenges the given notions of cultural identity formation, consistently defying the norms and the literature, and reveals some of the cultural differences between the Deaf and Hearing cultures.

Preston has culled themes and stories from interviews with 150 diverse, adult, hearing children of deaf parents from across the nation. He has woven a tapestry of the literature and research relating to CODAs, their experiences and stories, and his own interpretations and metaphors, into a powerful presentation which is, in both depth and scope, unlike any previous work in this area. The result is an excellent resource with a wealth of information presented in a storytelling manner that richly illustrates each point made. The book incorporates research findings from linguistics, anthropology, psychological development, and sociology. The Postmodern

theoretical base is clear but not overstated.

This book is organized into four sections. The first introduces the characters and the author's approach to this cultural story, through their own words, and through descriptions of his research methodology. The second explores the unusually intense and profound relationships between CODAs and other members of their extended families of several generations, as well as the broader Deaf community. The third section turns to the day-to-day routines and experiences of childhood and adulthood as a CODA: the differences in meaning of sound and silence between the Deaf and the Hearing worlds; roles and responsibilities; and the constant negotiation of similarity and difference between self and family and between self and Deaf and Hearing cultures. The final section turns to issues of identity and marginality.

Mother Father Deaf is not an easy book to read despite the fascinating stories and the excellent metaphors. The sometimes heavy organization of a dissertation is apparent and sometimes breaks the flow of the narrative, particularly in the early chapters. Yet the elaboration on the careful research design and implementation also lends credibility to this work, particularly in a field in which the ethnographic literature is composed almost exclusively of individual narratives, and where most other literature takes a psychological perspective which focuses upon the ways in which CODAs have been "damaged" or how they "cope" with their unusual situation. The reader may wish, however, that this information could have been an appendix. Further, sometimes the very thoroughness of the varied perspectives presented

leads to a sense of an overwhelming "list" of experiences that makes it difficult to separate and recall the major from the minor findings. In fact, I would think that it would be quite interesting and useful if the author were to write a follow-up book aimed at the lay audience.

One important theme that might have been addressed in more depth is that of older informants' synthesis and transcendence of the polarity between the Deaf and Hearing worlds. Though mentioned briefly this is not discussed. This would be a very interesting subject for future reading.

In summary, this book is an important resource to a wide variety of people. Preston says, "We speak to hearing parents and hearing educators who never fully understood or accepted deafness, to deaf parents who were shut out of a hearing world and learned to reject and mistrust Hearing ways, and to the vast majority of others who may learn from our struggles at finding out who we are" (p. 237). This book will be useful for educators, researchers, rehabilitation counselors and social workers in dispelling many common stereotypes and myths regarding CODAs and deafness. Researchers will also find the research design to be of interest. Finally, this book will be an important resource for CODAs themselves who often have little opportunity to clarify or compare their own experiences. Preston finds that CODAs stand in between the Deaf and Hearing worlds, as interpreters, as bridges, and as unique individuals who can access both worlds. Preston's book itself also serves this function.

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