



Writing the Hearing Line: Telling Family Stories of Deafness

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Introduction: Family Albums and Subjectivities

Focus on
intersubjectivity/relationship

Telling family stories

Exploring the hearing line:
the boundary that exists
between deaf and hearing
people (Krentz, 2007)

Creative practice work:
memoir titled 'A Sense of
You'





The Problem: Invisibility

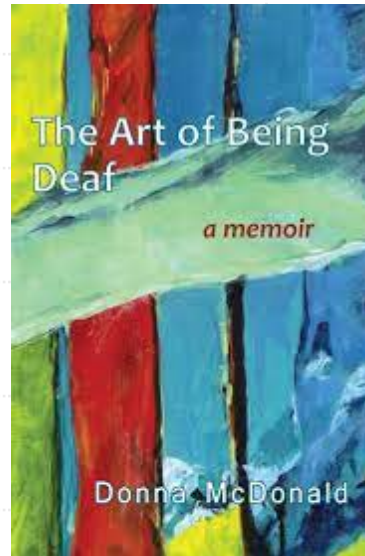
'the lives of deaf people seem to be invisible to the general population, and [. . .] the field of literary studies is largely silent about representations of deafness and deaf lives in all genres of literature' (McDonald, 2011, 64).

Only five memoirs published by Australians about Deafness

Memoirs about deafness by Australians



2007



2014




2015



2019



2021



Literature and Deafness: Representational Pitfalls

- In fiction, deafness has been romanticised, demonized, portrayed as innocence and even as a threatening savagery (Krentz 2007, p.17).
- Problematic representational tropes: grief, trauma, horror, and triumph over tragedy.
- Literature is both a rich resource and a blunt instrument in conveying identity, in particular the elusive deaf identity' (McDonald, 2010, p. 464)

Barriers to 'Deaf Writing'

English is often a Deaf person's second language

Sign Language has no written form

A cognitive disconnect between Deaf people and English as a majority language

(Grushkin 2017; Harmon 2007; Lindgren 2012)



Adopting a Deaf Studies Lens

- Concerned with the oppression of d/Deaf people throughout history
- “A history of misunderstandings” (de Saint-Loup 1996).
- Deafness as a discursive construction is marked by suggestions of muteness, dumbness, infirmity and lack (Bauman 2004; 2008; Brueggemann 1999; 2009; Davis 1995)



Deaf Epistemology

Many Deaf people consider themselves as part of cultural and linguistic minority group rather than 'disabled'

Argues for the socio-cultural model of deafness/disability

Critical of Audism: 'the notion that one is superior based on one's ability to hear or behave in the manner of those who hear' (Humphries, 1977, p. 12).

Resistant Utterances: Creative Nonfiction as a Vehicle



Deaf Studies +Creative Nonfiction = critically informed personal narratives



[Li]terature is a record of human consciousness, the richest and most comprehensive we have. Lyric poetry is arguably man's most successful effort to describe qualia. The novel is arguably man's most successful effort to describe the experience of individuals moving through space and time (Lodge 2003, p. 10).



Framing the familial: Family History and Ethics

- No ethics approval needed for memoir
- Research subjects are often embroiled in an exchange that is inherently weighted in the researcher/writer's favour (Carey 2008).
- Filial narratives written by children and grandchildren of deaf adults are less likely to pathologise deafness but might inadvertently objectify (Couser, 1997, 249).
- Consent, approval, and consultation with family members was essential for my process.



Navigating the Hearing Lens

Confronting hearing identity/privilege

My hearingness is, as Sutton- Spence and West might describe, 'the elephant in the room' (2011, 425).

Value in sharing histories that would otherwise be lost or remain inaccessible to readers.



Navigating the GODA Lens

- The GODA or 'Grandchild of Deaf Adult' – a unique perspective?
- 'CODA autobiographies not only show us that the distance can be bridged in both directions, but also that another culture lives within the gap' (Dow Adams, 1997, 154).

Confronting the Self

- In encountering deafness, I had to confront my own sensory framework and identity. I am an audiophile...
- Growing up, the thought that I was a hearing person had never crossed my mind; hearing was so normal it went un-noticed. It was just the way things were. I became *hearing* at the age of twenty-one[.] ... Suddenly, my world changed: it was no longer *my* world (Bauman, 2008, viii-ix original emphasis).



Relational Autobiography

Relational autobiography explicitly aims to tell stories about relationships or kinships, rather than an individual (Barnwell, 2017, 486).

Multi-vocal component to writing. Alternation between perspectives

Use of direct quotation

Use of free indirect style: when the 'narrative seems to want to bend itself around that character, wants to merge with that character, to take on his or her way of thinking and speaking' (Wood, 2008, 8).

Confronting Grief

- Grief altered the tone and focus of the work
- Death ends first-person writing, though first-person writing can survive the death of its writer; death also occasions third-person writing about the deceased, in genres that give different shape and meaning to an ended life' (Brant, Metcalf and Wildgoose, 2020, 9).
- Family narratives as common culprits for "raining blows of grief" in their narration McDonald 2011, 19).





'The Long Goodbye'

Taken from 'A Sense of You'