

Exploring the Identities of People who use Hearing Aids

Shea A. Long, Brittan A. Barker, Kristina M. Scharp, & Caitlyn R. Ritter
Utah State University, Logan, UT

Background

- When adults are diagnosed with hearing loss (HL), the **diagnosis can lead to a disruption in their sense of self or identity** (Ekberg, Grenness, & Hickson, 2014).
- Research shows that when establishing an identity, **people who can reinterpret negative emotional events (e.g., diagnosis of a HL) have improved subjective well-being** (Gross & John, 2003).
- Identifying and understanding the identities of people with HL who use hearing aids (HAs) could **facilitate patient-centered healthcare**.

Aim

...to determine and better understand the identities of HA users.

Methods

design: a non-experimental, qualitative study

data collection: We interviewed 29 English-speaking adults who reported no speech, language, or cognitive disorders who had been diagnosed with HL and wears one or more HAs

data analyses: We used **thematic narrative analysis (TNA)** to analyze the HA users' stories. We employed an adapted procedure developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). TNA analyses involved assigning one identity to each HA user's story.

verification procedures: we conducted **three verification procedures:** 1) investigator triangulation, 2) audit trial, and 3) exemplar identification.

Saturation was reached at interview #14.

Emergent IDs

HA users constructed five identities from their stories: 1) the satisfied user, 2) the overcomer, 3) the dispassionate user, 4) the frustrated and resigned user, and 5) the griever.

Findings

1) **Satisfied Users** are individuals who are excited about the benefits their hearing aids provide.

...one of the most fantastic experiences I had right off...I was out in the garden pulling weeds and stuff and the chirping—the birds chirping and the bees buzzing—and I could see them in the tree a half a block away and I could just see them buzzing away just going nuts and I thought, 'wow'. Oh I—you know—I was really shocked at how much I'd missed and was missing and um so that got me started...I tell you when I take them off everything stops. (Jasper, #3)

2) **Overcomers** are HA users who overcame large battles (generally internal) regarding their hearing aids, and display a lot of personal growth in their narratives.

...elementary school, middle school were really hard, socially...I was really self-conscious of it...[In college] I had friends that, umm, I would tell them my story, and they for once thought that it was amazing. And I had never had anyone tell me that. I was like, 'no I'm deaf, what's amazing about that? There is nothing cool about that.'...I just needed to realize [that] like no one cares and no one is spending their lives judging me because I have hearing aids. (Monica, #19)

3) **Dispassionate Users** described their stories regarding HL with little emotion tied to their diagnosis or use of HAs.

[It was about] 12 years ago and my wife recommended that I get it checked out and I met somebody who I took a liking to and who was [an] audiologist and so I decided to go with them and stayed with them for 10-12 years. Anything else? (Dennis, #19)

4) **Frustrated and Resigned Users** are HA users who reported feeling fed-up with the effects of the HL, but would rather not use HAs.

I should have technically had hearing aids throughout my entire life...I just decided that like, "I'll be fine without them, I've been fine this entire time, I don't need hearing aids."... [And then] I was in class and on the first day the teacher asked a quiz question and he's like, "Pull out a piece of paper and then I'm going to ask you a question." So, like, you know, I had my piece of paper ready and I was ready to really, like, write whatever it was down and I look around and everyone is writing something down, and I'm like, "Wait, what the heck? Did he say it already?"...I missed that entire quiz question and I was like really, really fed up with that. So I was like, "Dang it. Like I am going to at least try, like, do something." Cuz I'm really tired of, like, missing important stuff in class. (Leslie, #4)

5) **Grievers** are individuals who are still in a state of mourning over their HL diagnosis.

It was always disappointing to me as I learned later that, you know, I could have been given some medication that I would not have had to deal with this my whole life which hasn't always been easy (crying)...I would have much preferred to have my hearing my whole life. I feel like I would have accomplished more. (Janice, #14)

Discussion

- This work identified five emergent identities of adults who use HAs.
- It is important to recognize that this work is limited because it focuses on a group of individuals who use their HAs regularly.
- We plan to carry out a replication of this work with **individuals who have been diagnosed with HL but choose not to use HAs**.
- Because the way that people narrate both produces and reflects well-being**, it is our ultimate goal to examine how HA users and non-users' identities predict positive and negative outcomes of HL identification and HA use.

References

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