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Uniting divided worlds

A study of deaf and hard of hearing youth



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Preface

The aim of the “Children of the Normalising Ideology” project is to give an overview of some aspects of the living conditions of Deaf and hard of hearing people in Norway in the age group 16–20 years old. The Research Council of Norway (Velferdsprogrammet) funded the project.

During the first phase, Åsmund Arup Seip was the project leader and supervisor while Hilde Haualand and Arne Grønningsæter took care of the concrete work, data collection and analysis. In the later phase, Inger Lise Skog Hansen joined the team.

Several people were involved in the implementation of the survey. We want to thank Opinion and Gunhild Rui for their contribution to the production of the questionnaire and the data collection. We thank Døves Media and Paal Richard Peterson who translated the questionnaire into sign language and produced the video version of the questionnaire. We are grateful to Skådalen kompetansesenter, Nedre Gausen kompetansesenter, Vestlandet kompetansesenter, Møller kompetansesenter, Briskeby skole og kompetansesenter and Bodin videregående skole for distributing and collecting the questionnaires for us. Our thanks also go to Fafo's publication department.

The most important thanks, however, must go to the respondents and informants. They have given us their time as well as insight into their lives. Our meetings with these young people have been powerful experiences for us. We hope that they will regard our presentation of their life stories as fair, and that they will find our analyses helpful. We hope that the project will contribute to a better understanding of their needs, and further hope that our work can contribute to a better understanding of the diversity among these young people.

In order to link the research process as close as possible to the actual social and political environment, we established a reference group. For this input we express our thanks to Grete Høie, Eva Simonsen, Sonja M. Holten and Steinar Birke-land.

The “Transnational Connections in Deaf Worlds” project has run parallel to ours. Hilde Haualand has been in both project teams and there has also been an overlap among the informants (Stein Rokkan Centre for Social Studies Working Paper 2 – 2002).

“Children of the Normalising Ideology” has two stages, the first of which is now complete. The next stage will take the form of follow-up interviews with our informants in two years’ time. We trust that this first report will provide some insight into the issue at hand, and we hope to deepen this insight during the second round of interviews.

Oslo, August 2003

Arne Grønningsæter, Hilde Haualand and Inger Lise Skog Hansen

Background

Children of the normalising ideology

“Deaf people are a cultural minority, but also a part of something larger. It is a bit provocative when people who claim they are “normal” say that we are special, when we really are like them.” (Marianne, 16)

Marianne’s response captures the reaction of many of the participants in this research project. She perceives herself as an ordinary girl who lives a life just like another person at her age. Like some of the informants, she did not see herself as ‘special’ in any significant way, but rather perceived herself as representing a desired diversity in the population. The quote above highlights one of the dilemmas we have faced in this project. The youth are officially labelled disabled, and are entitled to special rights and welfare services because of this. At the same time, they look at themselves as ordinary youth, who perhaps go to a different school, but do not necessarily lead lives which are not ‘normal’. Our task is to find out how the youth cope with being labelled ‘special’ or disabled, while simultaneously being members of a cultural minority, and how this influence their world views and identities.

The project

“Children of the Normalising Ideology” is a research project which aims to give an overview of some aspects of the living conditions of Deaf and hard of hearing people in Norway in the age group 16–20 years old. In addition to a general living conditions approach, the project has focused on identity and belonging, family relations, language, education and ambitions. An underlying concern throughout the research has been to learn how these young people perceive their lives, their identities and the world around them. The study is exploratory because there is little knowledge and few data on living conditions and quality of life among Deaf and hard of hearing youths. A major question posed in the project is whether there

is an implicit and inherent normalising ideology in the welfare state which consider welfare services to be successful whenever the users adopt a 'normal' lifestyle. This question is asked especially because strong social networks have been built on the use of sign languages. Members of these networks do not always embrace a normalising or a single person integration approach to Deaf and hard of hearing people.

The normalising ideology

Deaf and hard of hearing youths in the age group 16–20 years old have grown up at a time when public disability policy has been led by what is referred to in scientific and professional terms as 'the normalising ideology'. During the 1960s and 70s normalising and integration became leading principles within welfare policy on the disabled. These principles are based on the idea that persons with disabilities have the same value as others and the right to 'normal' living conditions and a 'normal' lifestyle. Of course what is meant by the concept 'normal' is debatable. In this context normal and normalisation is connected with establishing 'ordinary' living conditions for the disabled. This emphasis on ordinary living conditions in the normalising ideology can be considered to be a reaction to the politics of segregation. Over this period, numerous stories of harassments within institutions for disabled were exposed. For more than 20 years it has been a political goal that the disabled should have a life as similar to the life of the majority as possible. This was understood to mean, for example, living in their own houses as most citizens do, and going to the same schools as non-disabled children. In many ways, the normalisation policy aims to achieve equality through sameness, where the majority sets the standard for a homogeneous normality. For the past 30 years, disabled children growing up in Norway have, with few exceptions, attended the same schools as their non-disabled siblings and the children in their neighbourhoods, and they have experienced the same everyday life. These children have never experienced institutional segregation, and this generation is therefore often referred to as the children of the normalising ideology (Hansen 2001).

Deaf and hard of hearing children in Norway are, like other disabled children, entitled to a vast range of welfare services from the moment the hearing loss is diagnosed. The means are constructed to compensate for, or correct, the impairment, or they are structured to compensate for the disadvantage that comes as a consequence of mismatches between the person's abilities and the social and material environments. These welfare services include technical, medical and social aid services, social (economic) benefits, special schools, counselling, courses for parents, and so on. Single integration has been implemented at a large scale, and most special schools have closed. Since the reform of special needs education in

1991, Deaf and hard of hearing children have the right to attend a local school. However, many of these children have continued to receive their education in sign language in a centralised school for the Deaf. Parliament's decision not to proceed with closing schools for the Deaf was taken after strong representations from associations of the Deaf, parents and experts (Haualand 2002). This shows that the integration ideology was not embraced in its entirety. The Deaf community stressed the importance of developing a rich sign language in an environment for Deaf and hard of hearing children. They argued that this language development would be hard to accomplish in milieus where there were no other Deaf or hard of hearing children. The community managed to convince the authorities that schools for the Deaf should not be closed along with schools for other disabled children.

Two systems of knowledge

Embracing or challenging normality?

It could be said that there are two diametrically opposed socially and culturally constructed realms of interpretations regarding the normalisation and integration of deaf and hard of hearing children into the broader society. On one extreme, normality can be taken for granted as a major positive goal. On the other extreme, the normality concept can be challenged by asking the question 'normal for whom?'

The Norwegian welfare system moved away from establishing special groups for disabled people, partly in response to stories of harassment in special institutions which emerged in the 1960s and 70s. It now aims to compensate for the impairments of disabled people so that they can live a 'normal' life. This implies that non-disabled people will continue to set the standard for a normal life. The philosophy that 'ghetto formations' should be avoided among disabled people has gone together with the tradition of choosing a spoken language of instruction for Deaf and hard of hearing children (also called the 'oral education' or 'oral' philosophy). Among the arguments used in support of oral education are that society is based mainly on spoken language, and that the use and promotion of sign language causes segregation among the hearing and the Deaf.

The concepts of 'normalisation' and 'integration' are not always seen in a favourable light by the sign language community. Deaf communities often associate these terms with unilateral personal adaptation to vocal-auditive communication modes. Distinct social networks have emerged through sign language. Sign

language users regard the Deaf community both necessary and desirable, and as an important arena for access to social, informational and cultural resources, both inside and outside the community of sign language users. Deaf communities have for decades increasingly referred to their languages and cultures with pride.

In the polarised realms of interpretations about integration and normalisation sketched above, different values are assigned to concepts like 'normalisation', 'integration', 'Deaf' and 'hard of hearing'. Where 'normalisation' and 'integration' is considered desirable in one realm, the implicit devaluation of difference is criticised in the other. In the community of sign language users, 'Deaf' is a positive value, in the other realm, it is regarded as a serious disability. The realms are examples of what can be called *figured worlds*, or systems of knowledge where certain acts and outcomes are valued over others (Holland et al. 1998). People acting in them learn their values, and there will always be varying degrees of identification with these conceptual worlds. The identification may change over time (for example, with age) and with regard to place (for example, the situation a person finds himself or herself in).

The 'special school' dispute in 1991

The 1991 dispute about the need for special schools for the Deaf and hard of hearing illustrates the differences between the two systems of knowledge. Through special needs reform, the government aimed to integrate disabled children as well as Deaf and hard of hearing pupils through individual education in local schools. Among the associations of disabled people, the only association that opposed this reform was the Norwegian Association of the Deaf. This body engaged in intense lobbying to prevent the closing of schools for the Deaf. Parliament became convinced by the argument that only by continuing to offer a rich signing milieu to Deaf and profoundly hard of hearing children would they be able to receive both the formal and the peer-based social education needed for sound personal and intellectual development. Attempts to integrate these children individually into the mainstream would deprive them of the opportunity to be a part of a larger group of Deaf and hard of hearing peers. This would eventually lead to assimilation and weaken the sign language community – a community that is critically important to most Deaf people. When the government proposed that all children should attend normal schools, the Norwegian Association of the Deaf replied by asking 'Normal for whom?' The association argued that schools for the Deaf were the 'normal' school for a sign language-using child (Haualand 2002).

This controversy pitted the ideology of individual integration and normalisation against the ideology promoting the need to respect and support members of cultural and linguistic minorities. Where the first ideology operates with normal-

ity as a positive value, the second viewpoint not only accepts, but *celebrates* difference. A major research question was how the youth perceive these realms of interpretation and where they position themselves in relation to the different viewpoints. Another question was about how the different approaches affected the identities of informants with regard to being a Deaf or hard of hearing person, and how they understand what being Deaf or hard of hearing is about.

The minority discourse in the Deaf movement

Hearing impairment is traditionally viewed as one of the classical disabilities. Over the past 25 years there has been a change in the way that Deaf people understand and describe themselves from being disabled (in the medical and pathological sense) to belonging to a cultural and linguistic minority (Breivik 2001; Ohna 1995; Hjulstad 1999; Haualand 1993, 2002). Rather than perceiving deafness as being deviant, many members of the Deaf community want to emphasise being Deaf as a dimension of difference in a multicultural society. It then becomes a source for cultural identity and self-respect rather than a social stigma (Breivik 2000). British researcher Paddy Ladd (2003) suggests 'Deafhood' as a concept to highlight the human diversity aspect of Deaf lives and as a counter-position to the 'deafness' concept, which has a heavy biological-pathological flavour. Constituting the Deaf community as a cultural and linguistic minority has been a major project within both the national and international deaf movement for the last 20–30 years. A general impression is that a majority within the Deaf community do not perceive themselves primarily as disabled, but as belonging to a cultural and linguistic minority. In English, a distinction between a medical/ pathological view of deafness and the cultural/ social/ linguistic approach is made by using lowercase deaf to refer to the medical state while uppercase Deaf refers to the social and cultural aspects. This distinction is made in this report as well.

A common language is the main factor for declaring Deaf as a linguistic minority, but the cultural minority discourse was not established assertively in the Norwegian Deaf community until the mid- to late 1970s. This was in part a reaction to the normalising and integrationist approach that emerged at about the same time. The culturalist discourse eventually led to a consolidation of what was perceived as Deaf culture. The strategic essentialism has been effective in order to keep a strong stance against attempts to close the schools for the Deaf and other consequences of the integration ideology. At the same time, this may have led to stereotypical ideas about Deaf identity and Deaf culture. The process of developing a strong stance against suppression of sign language as a strategic move towards recognition of Deaf cultures may require clear-cut ideas of Deaf culture. One example is to say that the Deaf community may be ossified or stop developing on

its 'own' terms if too many hearing people enter the Deaf field or Deaf community (Murray 2000). However, young people who have grown up without much experience of suppression of sign language may be more open to participating in several worlds simultaneously, and eventually also reject some of the extremes established in a minority-majority discourse. Many have never experienced real suppression of their own language – a right to communicate the generation before them had to fight for – so many may take this right for granted. The views of the youth in this survey, who resist narrow categorisations and groups for identification, are similar to those of the disabled youth interviewed by Sandvin (2003). They have experienced more options, wider access and have rarely been segregated from participation in society. The obstacles and cultural categories that were challenged one generation earlier are:

“...hardly understood by the youngest generation. The youngest generation reflects a much more individual differentiation, or a differentiation that mirrors more or less the same variation of interests, preferences and lifestyles that are likely to be found in the rest of the young population.” (Sandvin 2003:18)

Nevertheless, language competence is important to enable interaction with other sign language users and to benefit from the social milieu of Deaf people. Since the Deaf minority is based on a common language – sign language – deaf and hard of hearing youth who do not use sign language may be marginalised from this community. There is no clearly identifiable community of non-signing hard of hearing people. Most of the hard of hearing youth will therefore be faced with a choice of participating in a community of sign language users and/or groups based on auditive languages. In this research project it is interesting to focus on how Deaf and hard of hearing youths relate to minority-majority issues, Deaf identity and belonging. Even though Deaf people have sought recognition as a cultural and linguistic minority for 20 years, most of the welfare services for the Deaf and hard of hearing are provided on the basis of impairment. In this research project we have not chosen an either/or approach to seeing the Deaf and hard of hearing as belonging to a cultural and linguistic minority or as disabled. Like other major groupings of impairments, a hearing loss have various functional and presentational impacts, which in turn have differing individual and social implications (Shakespeare & Watson 2002). We have used a minority approach where it is useful and applicable to the situations described by the youths we have interviewed, and a disability approach in other situations where it is useful and applicable. The approaches do not necessarily contradict one another.

Theoretical approaches

A relativistic perspective on disability

For the last 20 years several official documents have had a relativistic understanding of disability as a premise (NOU 2001:22). This may be different for parts of the Deaf movement who also emphasise the embodied difference as a basis for pride and identity formation. In this research project the meaning that disability acquires in social contexts was more interesting than the impairment itself. The focus is not on the individual's inabilities, but rather on a society which is not made accessible to all citizens – a perspective built on a social model of disability. The purpose is not to overlook or ignore the impairment or physical difference, but to look at the physical characteristics as being only one of many given premises. The focus is on how disability is interpreted and given meaning in social interaction. This study therefore has a social constructivist theoretical approach towards disability.

There is no direct line between the physical difference/impairment and disability. Disability is understood to be constructed in the relation between the act of the individual and the physical and social environment the individual is acting within. This moves the focus from the individual's problems to fulfil roles assumed as 'normal' to the space between the individual's acts and the social reality within which these acts are taking place (Söder 1989; Froestad et al. 2000). From this perspective it is not taken for granted that being deaf also means being disabled. Disability is constructed in social settings, in interaction with others by the interpretation of the embodied difference, by the meaning ascribed to this impairment, and this meaning or significance eventually constructs the disability (Hansen 2001). A social constructive approach allows a critical approach to all taken-for-granted knowledge, to question categories and meaning (Burr 1995).

A major principle within social constructivism is that social reality is maintained and reconstructed through social practice. The social construction of reality depends on material conditions, available discourses and the reflexive human being's capacity to raise alternative discourses. Disability is not seen as given or static, but something which is being constructed and negotiated through social practice within a historical and cultural context. This perspective helps us to explore how the Deaf and hard of hearing perceive their situation, and how this relates to questions of belonging and identity. The Deaf community is also taking part in the struggle around the social construction of disability, but may have a slightly different approach. By arguing that Deaf people belong to a cultural and linguistic minority, the Deaf community challenges the hegemonic discourse on Deafness as a

classical disability. Instead of joining the rest of the disability movement in trying to extend or transform the homogenous presentation of normality, it may be that Deaf people dissociate themselves from the concept and insist on difference as a positive value. However, this could also be viewed as a difference in the use of words, and the goal will in both cases be to increase the tolerance or acceptance for greater human variety.

Constructing identity

Even though the Deaf community claim recognition as cultural and linguistic minority, we have been very careful about using a cultural approach to analysing identity in this research project. Like Breivik (2000:140–1) we are afraid to make the youths more similar than they actually are, since a culturalist approach where a certain similarity among members of a group exists may conceal the differences between them. Being Deaf or hard of hearing is not a fixed identity or state. The approach in this study takes into consideration the continuous flux in human lives. Identity and agency are inevitably connected to the social contexts and milieus people experience and live in. Giddens (1991) stresses that a consequence of high modernity is that the self becomes a reflexive project. High modernity, where nothing is given, gives everybody a larger room, and responsibility for, constructing self-identity. Body, appearance and lifestyle become expressions of self-identity, and therefore it is important to control these (Giddens 1991:99–103). In this approach individuals create their own identity; they construct the identity. From this view it is easy to think of constructing self-identity as an independent personal project, but it is more complicated than that. Social frames, available discourses and personal resources will guide the choices made and the presentation of identity. It is important to keep in mind that individuals are not free to choose how other people look at them. How individuals are viewed and categorised tells us something about our society (Hansen 2001). From this point of view, what social milieu or realms the individuals are part of will be of crucial importance for how they perceive themselves. The different realms of interpretations we have sketched here can be called figured worlds, or systems of knowledge in which certain acts and outcomes are valued over others. In different figured worlds, different discourses or frames of understanding will be prevalent. Which figured worlds the youths relate to will form social frames for the construction of identity.

“These understandings – these identities – are unstable, especially as people are first inducted to a figured world, and they continue to undergo heuristic development in concert with people’s acclimation to new spheres of activity. They remain multiple, as people’s trajectories through figured worlds neither

take one path nor remain the ambit of one cultural space, one figured world. Nonetheless, identities constitute an enduring and significant aspect of history-in-person, history that is brought to current situations. They are a pivotal element of the perspective that persons bring to the construal of new activities and even new figured worlds.” (Holland et al. 1998:65)

Realms of interpretation will also influence how parents relate to their child's hearing impairment and how they understand the fact that their child is Deaf or hard of hearing. Their attitudes and involvement in the child's everyday life will in this perspective be important for the child's identity as parents in most cases are part of constituting the first world views and values children experience. As pointed out earlier, Deaf communities now talk of their language and culture with pride, and among sign language users, 'Deaf' is a positive value. From the point of view of the hearing majority, being Deaf usually continues to be perceived as a serious disability. The identification process many go through before reaching adulthood might be obscured or delayed due to the more or less subtle normalising pressure from the majority in the society, following a dissociation of many of the same values from the Deaf world (Breivik 2001). This research project aims to focus on how the young people find their own trajectories through these several figured worlds, how they present themselves, their identity, their world views and how they perceive their future.

The living conditions approach

Fafo has a long tradition of living condition studies. The institute has specialised in studies of living conditions for marginalised groups. Examples of this approach are studies of people with asthma and allergies as well as studies of people with HIV. In our approach, 'living condition' is defined as a “function of personal resources and arena options” (Ringen 1995:4). Good living conditions imply a high degree of personal freedom to make choices based on individual expectations and preferences. The living condition approach is a central element of this study of Deaf and hard of hearing youths, partly because it is often assumed that disabled people have less freedom to make choices based on their individual preferences in a society that is not constructed to take their specific functionality into consideration in planning and organisationally. However, personal resources can be developed through, for example, education or linguistic competence. Arena options could be exemplified by accessibility to the labour market, information, education and health services. Increased arena options, or accessibility to structural services, can thus compensate for lack of personal resources, and the living conditions of the person may still remain satisfying. This is a dynamic approach, which does

not only measure well-being as direct outcomes like housing, consumption or impairment. The ability to make independent choices based on personal expectations and preferences are considered equally significant for an individual sense of well-being and self-realisation (Fyhn & Dahl 2000).

It is sometimes assumed that, due to their loss of hearing, Deaf and hard of hearing young people are heavily dependent on a well-functioning chain of welfare actions. As mentioned earlier, we wonder whether these welfare actions might implicitly carry with them a normalisation agenda. It is important for the project to see how the welfare services approach Deaf and hard of hearing young people, and to study the meetings between the welfare state and these young people. Crucial arenas are, among others, where the young people come into contact with the education system, the labour market and health services. Many will consider hearing loss as the lack of a personal resource. This is a perspective anchored in a medical tradition where a normality/ deviance approach to the human body still remains strong. Ringen (1995) argues for preference neutrality and respect for personal preferences in welfare research, but still labels 'handicap' as a negative resource without any further discussion or argument. In contrast, another view holds that the society has been constructed in a manner that excludes people with certain ways of functioning from participation in that society. Disabled people are primarily given a client role in the welfare state because of society's exclusive organisation. The welfare services may also confirm and reinforce a *dis*-ablist attitude towards people with certain physical or psychological characteristics of the body, features that are culturally and socially recognised as deviant.

Most welfare actions are based on the idea that the welfare state should compensate for the lack of resources, and provide the individual with opportunities to achieve self-realisation. The welfare state is therefore given the role of being a compensating agency, and the means are general changes (for example, legislation on accessibility to public buildings, transportation and education) as well as individual support through provision of technical aids, special education and economic compensation through various kinds of pensions (Solvang 2001). The well-being of these young people is perceived as more or less dependent on the ability of these actions or services to compensate for their assumed lack of resources. However, a policy of improving living conditions does not only compensate for given kinds of disabilities, it also contributes to the social constructions of the same kinds of disabilities.¹ In order to plan and budget for individually appropriate amounts of

¹ The concept "disability" as including a variety of impairments or chronic diseases is not found in all languages or cultures. Talle (1995) and Ingstad (1995) discuss how various impairments might be given names, whereas equivalent concepts to "disability" (or "handicap") might be hard to find in different African communities. Solvang (2001) also states that it has been suggested that the disability category has been constructed by the welfare state.

assistance or support, some quantification of the need of assistance is necessary. The measurements are often based on medical standards and means, which are heavily rooted in a more or less idealised notion of the normality of the body and of conditions for well-being. Through the measurements, an exclusion from 'normality' is constructed. Special efforts are then needed to re-include those people in society (Moser 1998). Compensation through transfers from the welfare state to the individual may be based on an ideology which holds that politics is successful whenever the individual or the group has been included or assimilated into a majority culture or adopted the majority's 'way of life'.

This report

Chapter 1 provides some of the theoretical and empirical background for the project, as well as some of the perspectives that have influenced our interpretation of the survey and the interviews. This chapter discusses methodological approaches and challenges. In Chapter 3, topics related to identification, language and belonging are highlighted. This chapter also includes a discussion about their views of various welfare services, as many discuss these topics in relation to their own identification and status as disabled, hard of hearing or Deaf. Chapter 4 is about the youths' relations to arenas for social interaction, such as peer groups, organisations and acquaintances abroad. In the last empirical chapter, schools, instructions and future education plans are discussed. Chapters 3–5 each have a short conclusion. In the concluding remarks, we discuss issues that need further investigation, and which eventually also will be of core interest in the next phase of this project.

Some of the content of this report has been or will be presented at a paper session at the Nordic Network of Disability Research conference in Iceland, August 2002, at the Nordic Social Policy Research Meeting in Finland, August 2002, for the department of ASL and Deaf Studies at Gallaudet University, Washington DC, April 2003, at the research conference on Marginalization and Social Exclusion in Norway, May 2003, at a Nordic conference for sign language education for parents of deaf and hard of hearing children in Norway, September 2003 as well as in an article in the Spring 2003 issue of *Disability Studies Quarterly*.

Methods

An exploratory study

“It was a nice talk, indeed. Made me think and gave me an occasion to make reflections about my life and about other things. I enjoyed the interview.” (Girl, after camcorder was turned off)

The project must be seen as exploratory. We have used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. A questionnaire was sent out to the whole population of Deaf and hard and hearing youths in the age group 16–20 years, and we did qualitative in-depth interviews with 13 Deaf and hard of hearing youths using semi-structured interview methods. We used the following issues as basis for the data collection:

- living conditions and quality of life
- contact with the welfare apparatus
- language and identity
- how each person experienced the process when they discovered that they were different or when they found out that they were not able to hear.

The quantitative approach

The questionnaire was sent to all Deaf and hard of hearing students in upper secondary schools. The survey covers a population defined as Deaf and hard of hearing pupils in the special education support system. The figures therefore only apply to the portion of Deaf and hard of hearing young people who receive some kind of upper secondary education.

The questionnaire was sent to 152 pupils. We received 77 answers, a response rate of 52%. The group of respondents is biased both when it comes to gender

and geography. A total of 29 (38%) of the respondents were men, while 48 (62%) were women. Almost 2/3 of the respondents were women, while there are more hearing impaired men than women in this age group (Sunnanå 2001). There also seems to be an over-representation of youths from western Norway. We believe that this is because the school for the Deaf in this part of the country was very active in encouraging students to fill in our questionnaire.

The questionnaire was printed on paper in Norwegian, with a video translation in sign language. The respondents were asked to fill in the questionnaire themselves. Issues covered included family, housing, education, work, income, language, health, contact with welfare service providers, opinions/ attitudes towards Deaf and minority issues, network/ integration/ marginalisation, society and community activities and media.

The qualitative approach

The survey was succeeded by 13 qualitative semi-structured interviews, centred on topics related to education, language, family relationships, socio-economic data, the significance of peers and future expectations.

We considered three ways of reaching informants for the qualitative interviews. The first was to use the network of the Norwegian Association of the Deaf and The Norwegian Association of the Hard of Hearing. The second was to go directly to the schools, and the third was to ask the respondents of the questionnaire whether they were willing to be interviewed as well.

The informants were recruited through the survey and were interviewed in a language of own choice (Norwegian Sign Language or Norwegian). The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and two hours. A camcorder or a cassette tape recorder was used during the interview, depending on whether the respondent preferred to respond verbally or through sign language. We used two interviewers, one using Norwegian Sign Language and one using spoken Norwegian. The youths themselves chose which language they wanted to use in the interview.

The interview guide for the qualitative interviews followed the same pattern of issues as the questionnaire. We did, however, ask the interviewees to tell stories from their childhoods as well as more recent times. The focus fell on two kinds of issues: contact with the welfare apparatus and situations where they felt pressure to 'be normal'.

Some methodological problems

Cultural understanding and network

Deaf and hard of hearing communities are minorities in Norwegian society. In order to understand the situation of these groups, it was necessary to understand and get to know their cultures and networks, and to establish confidences between the informants and the researchers. The first phase of the project therefore involved making contact with the Norwegian Association of the Deaf and the Norwegian Association of the Hard of Hearing as well as other research institutions working with related issues (for example, Skådalen Kompetansesenter and the University of Oslo Institute for Special Needs Education).

One of the researchers in the project team is Deaf. This helped us in our attempts to be more sensitive to the Deaf and hard of hearing youth's own perspectives in the research process.

Interview methods and language

The practical challenges linked to language were more difficult than expected. It was important to let the respondents have the opportunity to answer the questionnaire in their first language. The original plan was to let people with knowledge in sign language do the interviewing, both in the survey and the qualitative part of the project. However, this would have been a very resource-consuming way to conduct the survey. We discussed the possibility of producing the questionnaire in both sign language and Norwegian on CD-ROM or on the Internet. However, some respondents might not have the necessary equipment to answer the questionnaire, and the costs of these options were too high. If persons other than the researchers were to do the qualitative interviewing, the possible distance between the researchers and the interviewees would make analysis of the interviews complicated and time-consuming.

As noted above, we chose to produce a printed questionnaire in Norwegian with a video translation in Sign Language, and we used two interviewers for qualitative interviews – one using Norwegian Sign Language and one using Norwegian.

Definition of the population

We had to find a definition that combined three criteria: the definition had to be as close as possible to the group we wanted to study; it had to be possible to solve

the practical problems of reaching them; and it had to be possible to count the members of the group for the purpose of generating statistical information.

In the project plan we estimated the 'socially Deaf' in the age group 16 to 20 years to consist of approximately 130–160 individuals. There is no register of the socially Deaf and no official statistics are available. In addition, the size of the actual population will differ according to what kind of definition we use for deafness and hard of hearing. The National Association of the Hard of Hearing has estimated the number of hearing aid users to be 170 000 people, and says that there are 4 000 people who have been medically diagnosed as 'deaf' in Norway. Our estimate of 130–160 Deaf and very hard of hearing youths was derived from school system statistics (Alford et al 1998).

To make the quantitative methods meaningful, we had to precisely define our target group. We defined our population as pupils in secondary schools (*videregående skole* in Norwegian) who are in contact with the special education support system for the Deaf and hard of hearing. Since Norwegian law provides a right to secondary education, we believe that most youths in the targeted age group were included, and that the special education support system would be in contact with most Deaf and hard of hearing individuals. The question arose about the extent to which pupils in secondary schools are representative of the target group. We believe that we have managed to include most of the target group, with the possible exception of a small group of people – those with the least resources. We do not have figures that tell us what kind of biases this definition creates. A total of 152 questionnaires were sent out.

Recruiting respondents and interviewees

Since we defined the population to be pupils in the special education system, we co-operated with the regional schools linked to the Norwegian Support System for Special Education.² However, this meant that we depended on teachers to distribute the questionnaires and do follow up work. At some schools the teachers required pupils to answer the questionnaires; at others, they just handed the forms out and left it up to the youths to decide whether or not to respond. As can be expected, the response rate was different from region to region. Those who had completed the questionnaire were encouraged to submit their details for a possible interview by being included in the draw for a hand-held computer (personal digital assistant – PDA).

² The English equivalent of Det statlige spesialpedagogiske støttesystem.

A total of 26 respondents sent in their names and addresses and signed a paper saying that they were interested in being interviewed. However, the recruitment of interviewees was more difficult than expected. We put a lot of resources into finding interviewees, contacting them and making appointments with them. Fifteen interviews were conducted. Two of the informants were too young to give legal consent and, because their parents had not given their consent before the interviews were conducted, we had to omit those interviews from this report. Unfortunately, only three of those interviewed used spoken Norwegian as their first language.

The lack of reference data

Because research into the lives of the target group is limited, the project is exploratory in nature. It should also be borne in mind that the population of Deaf and hard of hearing youths is small (130–160 individuals), and the number of individuals who responded is smaller still (77 written responses and 13 useable interviews). We make use of percentages in this report to ease reading, but readers are urged to remember that the number of individuals represented by the percentages is very small.

The development of a questionnaire and interview guide was in itself a challenge. What kind of data represents relevant comparative aspects? What kinds of groups are relevant for comparison? The most important reference seem to be other studies of disabled people. Most of these are qualitative studies. We have also used national studies of youths and their living conditions for comparison.

We believe the data from the qualitative interviews are more interesting than those from the survey. However, the actual group of respondents is too small to give a proper basis for statistical analysis. The tables therefore always show the actual figures in addition to the percentages. We have used the qualitative interviews as a basis for our interpretation of the quantitative data. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, we hope to have captured some important phenomena.

A short presentation of the respondents

A total of 29 (38%) of the respondents were men, while 48 (62%) were women – almost two thirds. Of this, 91% of them were in the age group 16–20 years of age. Table 1 shows the age spread.

Table 1 Age of the respondents

	N	%
15	1	1
16	20	26
17	15	20
18	20	26
19	10	13
20	5	7
21	3	4
22	1	1
Total	75	98

Table 2 Geographical distribution of respondents

	N	%
Oslo, Akershus	19	25
Østlandet outside Oslo/Akershus	12	16
Sør - vestlandet	4	5
Vestlandet	32	42
Trøndelag	8	10
Northern Norway	1	1
No answer	1	1
Total	77	100

About 40% of the respondents live in Oslo/south-eastern Norway, 45% of the respondents live in western Norway, and the rest live in mid- or northern Norway. Table 2 shows the geographical distribution.

A total of 30 (39%) of the respondents say that they are Deaf, while 46 (60%) say they are either hard of hearing or hearing impaired.

Presentation of the informants

The 13 interviewees have the following characteristics:

Table 3 Age of the informants

	Numbers
16	3
17	3
18	4
20	3

Gender balance: 2 boys and 11 girls

Deaf or hard of hearing: 8 are characterised as Deaf while 5 are characterised as hard of hearing

Language of the interview: We used Norwegian Sign Language in 9 interviews, spoken Norwegian in 3, and signed Norwegian in one of the interviews.

When we use quotes in the report we have given each informant a new name. She or he is also characterised by age. Maintaining the anonymity of the informants has been emphasised, so, in some cases, it has been necessary to change direct or indirect information about them.

Language, identity and belonging

Who am I?

“I feel that I am becoming more and more Deaf. But to be honest, I must admit that I miss hearing people. I belong to both worlds, but I also fall between two stools. I am concerned to find my place, to learn who I am...” (Helene, 16)

Young people, whether Deaf, hard of hearing or hearing, are of an age where many are in an intense identity formation process. The sense of belonging or questions about own identity might be more pressing during the teenage years than any other time. Helene alternates between describing herself as Deaf and hard of hearing. She received her elementary education in a local public school, and is now in an upper secondary school for the Deaf. She says she is in a process of moving between two worlds.

To many, crafting a sound identity as a young adult *and* as Deaf or hard of hearing is an ambitious task. Questions of belonging to Deaf or hearing worlds seem to add pressure to the anxiety often associated with the teenage years. The identification process many go through before reaching adulthood might also be obscured or delayed due to the more or less subtle normalising pressure from a majority in the society, following a dissociation of many of the same values from the Deaf world (Breivik 2001).

Self-identification and hearing

Along with question about basic facts like age and gender in the survey, we also asked the question “What would you most often label yourself?” The question had three alternatives: Deaf, hard of hearing and hearing impaired.

Table 4 What would you most often define yourself as?

	N	%
Deaf	30	39
Hard of hearing/ Hearing impaired	46	60
Not answered	1	1
Total	77	100

Nine of the respondents said that they would call themselves 'hearing impaired'. In order to analyse the data, in several cases we divided the answers into two categories: 'Deaf' and 'hard of hearing/hearing impaired' since the group calling itself 'hearing impaired' had a similar pattern of replies to questions as the group labelling itself 'hard of hearing'. Thirty respondents (39%) defined themselves as 'Deaf', and 46 (60%) defined themselves as hard of hearing or hearing impaired.

When asked about the extent of their hearing loss, 37% indicated they did not know, but only one did not reply to a question regarding his or her identity. This is a strong indication that the identity label seems to be more important to the young people surveyed than the extent of hearing loss. In this matter we take a constructivist perspective on identities and identification – we believe the youth are the foremost crafters of their own identities and choose the groups with which they associate themselves.

Table 5 shows that there are more hard of hearing than Deaf in the group reporting hearing more than 60dB at the right ear, and there are more Deaf than hard of hearing reporting a hearing less than 95dB or who are not aware of how well they are able to hear. A hearing loss of 60–95dB is most common in both groups, except those who were uncertain about the extent of their hearing loss. Even though two persons may have the same measured hearing loss, the functionality of their residual hearing may vary greatly, as well as the profile of their hearing loss. Thus, one person with an average hearing loss of about 80dB may be able to function like a hard of hearing person, while another person with the same hearing loss may be profoundly deaf in day-to-day life. Another interesting aspect

Table 5 What is the extent of hearing loss in your right ear?³

	0		<60dB		60-95dB		>95dB		Uncertain		No reply			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Hard of hearing	4	9	9	20	12	26	4	9	14	30	3	7	46	100,0
Deaf	0		1	3	8	27	7	23	14	47			30	100,0
Total	4	5	10	13	20	26	11	15	28	37	3	4	76	100,0

³ The difference between hearing loss in the right and left ear was minimal, so only one table is shown here.

of this table is that a relatively large number of the Deaf respondents do not know what their hearing loss is, which may indicate that the actual measurable hearing loss is of less importance to them. The fact that such a large group was uncertain about the extent of their own hearing loss supported our decision to use self-identification as a point of departure for analysis rather than reported hearing loss.

The survey indicated that, unlike the majority of people, young Deaf and hard of hearing people do not see themselves as being disabled.

Table 6 "I am disabled because of my hearing loss"

	Totally or partly agree		Partly or totally disagree		No reply		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Hard of hearing	43	20	50	23	7	3	100	46
Deaf	30	9	60	18	10	3	100	30
All	38	29	54	41	8	6	100	76

Of those who identified themselves as Deaf, 60% did not agree with the usual assumption that they are disabled, while 50% of those identifying themselves as hard of hearing or hearing impaired disagreed with the statement that they were disabled. This slight difference is in accordance with a pattern which has been observed elsewhere:

"More generally, we can observe that late deafening and moderate hearing loss tend to be associated with the disability construction of deafness, while early and profound deafness involve an entire organisation of the person's language, culture and thought around vision and tend to be associated with the linguistic minority construction" (Lane 1997:155).

It might seem like the youth questioned in this survey have adopted a similar set of identities. However, what is more important is that the majority of the respondents distance themselves from an identity as 'disabled', despite the traditional status of deafness/hearing loss as a classical handicap. It is reasonable to expect that the youth are highly aware of the 'objective' status of deafness/hearing loss as a disability. It is thus not clear why they subjectively dissociate themselves from the disability label. They may have adopted the traditional stigmatising ideas of disabled people as needy, in receipt of care and vulnerable. They do not perceive themselves as any of these things, and it may therefore be difficult for them to identify with disability in general.

Both groups also seem to give solid support to the minority discourse in the Deaf movement. Almost 90% of those labelling themselves Deaf and 80% of those labelling themselves hard of hearing agree that Deaf people belong to a linguistic and cultural minority.

Language competence seems to be densely connected with self-identification. A total of 91 % of those identifying themselves as hard of hearing/ hearing impaired said Norwegian was their best language, while 80% of those describing themselves as Deaf had considered Norwegian Sign Language (NTS) to be their best language. Approximately 80% of all respondents know both NTS and Norwegian in their written and/or spoken forms.

Families and belonging

Deaf, hearing, signing and speaking families

Most respondents still live at home (60%), and see one or both parents every day, but the quality of contact with parents varies, as does language use. Twenty percent live in dormitories at school, while the rest live alone, or with friends and partners.

A little more than 60% have no other Deaf or hard of hearing family members, 19% report that they have Deaf or hard of hearing siblings, while about 10% have Deaf or hard of hearing parents. The latter coincides well with the rule of the thumb that approximately 90% of all deaf and hard of hearing children are born into families who neither have much insight in the consequences of a hearing loss nor know any sign language. Parents of Deaf and hard of hearing children have traditionally not been given many opportunities to learn sign language. Our research indicates that this has changed: 42% of those who only have hearing family members report that sign language is used at home.

Of those who state that NTS is their best language, 76% says that sign language is a home language. This includes respondents who have Deaf parents.

Table 7 Language used at home and “best” personal language

		Home language					
		Norwegian/ spoken language		NTS/ sign language		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Best personal language	Norwegian	34	79	9	21	43	100
	NTS	5	24	16	76	21	100
	All	39	61	25	39	64	100

Learning sign language as an act of inclusion

These numbers indicate that the language barriers between the Deaf young people and their hearing families have weakened. Insiders in the Deaf community and employees at the county college which has offered family courses in sign language and Deaf culture for three decades report that since the 1980s there has been a gradual increase in social pressure on parents to learn sign language if any of the children are Deaf or hard of hearing. In 1996, one of the world's most thorough sign language education programmes for parents of sign language-using deaf and hard of hearing children was launched in Norway. All parents of sign language-using children born after 1992 are entitled to receive at least 40 weeks of free instruction in sign language and Deaf culture before the child reaches 16 years old (Liltved 2002). To ensure sign language education for parents with children born earlier than 1992, too, parents of these children have been offered two weeks of sign language education annually until the child turns 16. Some parents, however, have done far more than attending the offered courses to learn sign language, and have actually moved to the county college where there is an extensive sign language environment for an extended period. Hanne (17), Trine (16) and Maja (16) belong to the new generation of young Deaf people who have grown up in a hearing sign language-using family. The signing milieu at home, gives Hanne a sense of equality and belonging:

“I know I am very lucky to have such a supportive family as mine. They have all learned sign language, and I have never got any special treatment at home because I am Deaf.” (Hanne, 17)

When Hanne was a little girl, her parents, siblings and grandparents went to a county college for the Deaf for six months to learn sign language. The story Hanne tells about herself is one of being included and being able to participate as a result of the family's knowledge of sign language. She has a hearing boyfriend, whom she taught sign language. While her Deaf friends from school go home for the weekends, she spends her time with her boyfriend and his hearing friends. Trine (16) and Maja (16) also spoke of their Deafness and family relationships as a matter of course. During the interviews, they could not remember any incidences at home marking them off as deviant or 'special' in the family setting. These girls say they feel like any of the other family members. That seems to reflect their subject position in general – related to both Deaf and hearing people. The 'normal' family bonds seem to have influenced their world views. They have not been put under pressure to be 'integrated' in a structure where they do not really fit in. Instead, their closest surroundings have transformed to fit the prerequisites of the child. Several of the youth did not question own position, identity or rights, and are in a position in which they are able to change the consciousness of their hear-

ing surroundings. They are aware of differences, but also discuss the differences as matter of varieties. A Deaf world or a hearing world is not rendered more 'normal' than the other, like Marianne, who has Deaf parents says:

“Deaf people are a cultural minority, but also a part of something larger. It is a bit provocative when people who claim they are 'normal' say that we are special, when we really are like them.” (Marianne, 16)

It is as if these girls take their identity as Deaf for granted. Their parents have accepted them for what they are through learning sign language, and in this way contributed to a high Deaf confidence. Much focus has earlier been on teaching Deaf and hard of hearing children to speak, because it was believed this enabled them to communicate with their family and the surrounding world. They were, as Ladd (2003) writes, perceived as potential hearing children who could not hear. Seen from a perspective associated with Paulo Freire, this has been an attempt to position these children within a structure, which made them “beings for others” (Freire 1970:55). To some Deaf and hard of hearing youths, communication on a one-to-one basis may have been made possible through the medium of speech, but this has not allowed them to take part in the spontaneous and intimate communication often taken for granted in a family setting. The teaching of sign language to parents of Deaf and hard of hearing children seems to have brought down barriers within families. The children (youth) consider themselves as insiders, and expect to be treated so, even in a hearing society. Hansen (2001) finds in her study of young wheelchair users that these young persons have been raised to have confidence in their own positions as contributing family members. In this study, we find that the families, who have learned sign language and use it at home when the child is present, have changed their structure to fit the Deaf or hard of hearing child. The structure has then been changed so the children have become “beings for themselves” (Freire 1970:55), and allowed to function on their own terms.

Communication struggle – identity struggle

Some interviews revealed that family communication is still is a source for personal frustrations and intra-familial conflicts, especially among hard of hearing youths. Some parents may have felt that the child was able to hear so well that sign language was not necessary for family communication, while others may not have had the opportunity to learn sign language. Parents of deaf and hard of hearing children who do not have sign language as their first language, are not entitled to the same courses as parents of sign language-using children. Frode (20), who identifies himself as hard of hearing, is an example of feeling left out in his own family:

“I am not very close to my siblings. They were all talking at once. Even though I asked them again and again what they were talking about. I often ran away and walked out for hours. Or I sat in my room listening to music.” (Frode, 20).

Helene (16) conveys a message of being the different child, the child who does not feel she is like the other even though she admits she likes her family and also feels like a part of her family.

“I am also quite left out, compared to my sisters. I am in one sense one of them, but there have always been problems with me who is hard of hearing. I do not understand what they are talking about when we are eating dinner. I appreciate my mom using voice and signs, and that she shows me some consideration. Still, I feel left out, and I quarrel a lot with my little sister since there are so many misunderstandings. I have always been the bad girl at home, while my big sister is so calm and I look up to her. I have always felt left out at home, indeed.” (Helene, 16)

During the interview, she repeatedly spoke about her need to find her own place. She express that she does not really feel at home anywhere. She feels content about being hard of hearing, but says that she will have to find her own place. Frode however, conveys a negative message about the hearing loss itself.

“I do not like to be hard of hearing. It is better to be hearing. I do not understand what people are talking about. If the physicians find a cure, I want to become a hearing person. I do not feel good with Deaf people, it is better to be with hearies.” (Frode, 20)

Anne (18), however, is very clear about *not* wanting to use sign language, even if she has a profound hearing loss and her parents and teachers have encouraged her use sign language. During the interview (which was conducted in spoken Norwegian, according to her preference), both she and the hearing researcher had to repeat questions and answers in order to make themselves understood. Despite the obvious communication problems, she insists that she neither wants to use nor needs sign language.

“My parents thought that I was dependent on sign language. They gave in, but the school was more difficult. I had to fight. The school wanted me to change my decision. I have no regrets with regard to the choices I’ve made.” (Anne, 18)

Anne speaks of a struggle vis-à-vis her parents that is different to that of Frode and Helene. She insists on being identified as hard of hearing, not Deaf. Keeping

aloof from sign language – despite the communication problems with her surroundings – seems to be a part of her identity construction. By this she also reveals that she (as well as many of her age peers) is a strong agent in her own identification development, a process in which language seem to be a crucial factor.

The young people whose parents have learned sign language seem confident in their identity as Deaf. They do not convey the same expressions of being in search of an identity or place to belong as those who have experienced more difficulty with family communication.

A generation of Deaf youths with multiple belongings

The young Deaf informants of this research project have a very reflexive approach to their own identity and belonging. Those identifying themselves as Deaf seem to be very confident in their identity as proudly Deaf. At the same time, they reject being put into boxes, or discuss their identity as a question of belonging to exclusively a Deaf or a hearing world. All of them stress the need to be a part of both worlds, but those Deaf informants who have grown up in Deaf families are more ambivalent towards the hearing world than Deaf youths with hearing parents.

Mia grew up in a Deaf family, with sign language as her first language. Most of her childhood she was in a ‘Deaf world’ and she says that she was quite old before she ‘discovered’ hearing people. The first time she really thought about being Deaf was when she was 17 years old and got a hearing boyfriend. She says that as a child she did not like hearing people. Even though she appears to have a strong Deaf identity, she does not want to reject the hearing world.

“When I grew up I always had sign language around me, but today I can see that the Deaf community is also is dependent on hearing people, even though we have a strong Deaf culture.” (Mia, 20)

Marianne, who also grew up in a Deaf family, marks more distance to the hearing world and emphasise that she wants to have Deaf children, and adds that this also may contribute to a development of the Deaf community.

“It is me to be Deaf. Hearing people may find it strange that I am Deaf, but they are hearing. In a way hearing people are living in their own world.” (Marianne, 17)

At the same time Marianne told us about activities that she participate in within the hearing world, courses where she and a friend are the only Deaf participants, and she explicitly states:

“We live in a hearing world and need to have contact with hearing people.”
(Marianne, 17)

As pointed out above, the survey shows that a large majority of both those labelling themselves Deaf and those labelling themselves hard of hearing agree that Deaf people belong to a linguistic and cultural minority. But the interviews show that this does not mean that the youths want an isolated minority. These young Deaf people give the impression of regarding both the Deaf world and the hearing world as natural arenas for participation. Even though some of the youth with Deaf parents express more ambiguity about the hearing world, they are also critical about what they perceive as ‘learned helplessness’ among some of their peers with hearing parents. Marianne’s parents have told her they don’t like her or her sister to have attitudes like ‘I can’t because I am Deaf’. So Marianne is determined to not blame her Deafness for the hindrances she may encounter in the future. Mia is determined to reach for whatever she aims for, and admits that she feels pity for some of her Deaf friends.

“I feel pity for Deaf people who are so dependent on others. They cannot be alone and are always in a group of 2–3 persons. They undertake education programmes that are especially designed for Deaf people. Why can’t they do something different? Something that may not be as accommodating, but which they may be more motivated for or which may suit their abilities better? There are so many who have this kind of ‘I can’t because I am Deaf’ attitude. It seems like they lack self confidence or belief in themselves.” (Mia, 20)

Deaf youths with hearing parents seem to have a more established relationship with the hearing world. Being born into a hearing family, these youths are more exposed to the hearing world from birth. Some have experienced inclusion and participation in their hearing family in a totally different way than earlier generations of Deaf did. Maja (16) states: “Deaf and hearing, that is really the same, they are alike”. Hanne, also Deaf with hearing parents, says:

“I reckon that I will be part of both the hearing and Deaf world. I need both milieus and there are no big differences between hearing people and Deaf people.” (Hanne, 18)

Hanne’s statement illustrates a tendency of a new generation of multicultural young Deaf. They are confident in their identity as Deaf, but are, through their family, related to the hearing culture as well. Their self-confidence as different, but just as

good – or Deaf as a positive value – seem to give them the confidence needed to demand the right to be a full participant in the hearing society as well. These Deaf informants show the contours of an emerging generation of Deaf youths with multiple belongings to different fields and milieus of people.

Hard of hearing commuters

“I do not feel that I fit in neither with Deaf or hearing people. Deaf people use sign language so much and so fast, I often feel more hearing than Deaf. But, I do not understand what hearing people are saying, and I was often tired and in a bad mood when I had been with hearing people. One and one is ok, but not many at a time. My mother wanted me to participate more in the Deaf club, but I did not quite like it there.” (Helene, 16)

Helene is hard of hearing and quite ambivalent about her own identity and belonging. She doesn't feel that she fit in with Deaf signing milieus, people talk too fast, but at the same time she cannot participate in a conversation with more than one hearing person. She illustrates a very clear tendency. While young Deaf signers have a milieu where that can be full participants on their own terms, hard of hearing youths do not have this “free space”. Where do they belong? Of the six informants interviewed who label themselves as hard of hearing, three know sign language and three do not know sign language. Hard of hearing youth who do not know sign language, or who do not know it well, will have problems being included in a signing community. At the same time, some of them do not fit in with hearing people either, because they have problems understanding what they say. Being introduced to a signing world often follows being diagnosed Deaf as a child and being defined as a person with sign language as the first language. The child will learn sign language; parents are offered courses in sign language and offered information and advice about having a Deaf child. If the child is diagnosed as hard of hearing there is no such “clear path”. They do not get what Lane (1997) calls an entire organisation of the person's language, culture and thought around vision – a linguistic minority member construction.

Among the informants, there is a tendency that those labelling themselves hard of hearing are more ambivalent about their own identity and belonging than those labelling themselves Deaf. Having a hearing loss seems to be associated with problems and limitations to a much higher degree for hard of hearing youths than for those labelling themselves as Deaf. Seventy percent of those labelling themselves hard of hearing in the survey agree totally or partly with the statement “It is hard

to be hearing impaired". Among those labelling themselves Deaf, 46 % agree that it is hard to be hearing impaired.

The material of this research project gives the impression that during their adolescence many hard of hearing children are commuters between different kind of schools; hearing schools, hard of hearing classes, Deaf schools and so on. Many of them experience shifting participation in different worlds. The sign language milieu may construct a shelter around Deaf children while the pressure for normalisation is harder on hard of hearing youths. Tone, who will be further introduced in the chapter on education, said that, when she returned to her hearing school after a course in the schools for the Deaf or hard of hearing, some of the teachers thought she was making herself more hard of hearing than she really is. Tone is a confident hard of hearing girl, and the courses in the schools for the Deaf or hard of hearing have contributed to her believing in herself and accepting that she is hard of hearing.

Helene received her elementary education in a hearing school with hearing peers. During the first years she was in a hard of hearing class, but in lower secondary school she decided to go to hearing classes where she was the only hard of hearing pupil. After lower secondary school she started at an upper secondary school for the Deaf. She has really been a 'commuter'. She also said that, in the beginning, she did not fit into the Deaf milieu because her views were different. It seems that she started out as an outsider. She describes her identity as one of being on the move.

"I feel that I am becoming more and more Deaf but, to be honest, I must admit that I miss hearing people. I belong to both worlds, but I also fall between two stools. I am concerned with finding my place, to learn who I am." (Helene, 16)

Helene seems to be in a process of moving between the two worlds, but her identity is becoming more and more Deaf. Helen seems to have found a place in the Deaf milieu, but still she says that, if she could choose, she would perhaps become hearing.

Attitudes towards welfare services

Discussing categorisation as 'disabled'

The young people in our survey seem to approach the welfare system in the same way as most other young people in the Norwegian society – they take it for granted. They go to school like their age peers, but perhaps to a different school. If they can benefit from the offers of the welfare state in order to realise their potential or following personal interests, they do. The Norwegian welfare system is universal – all citizens, independent of income, are entitled to benefit from, and are dependent on, the welfare state (Esping-Andersen 1990). The relevant questions in our survey are not whether Deaf and hard of hearing youth are extensive consumers or users of welfare services, or more dependent on them than hearing youth, but how they view and relate to the services they are entitled to on the basis of their impairment. Unlike earlier generations of disabled people, the young generation take their rights to services made specifically to render integration or inclusion possible for granted (Hansen 2001; Sandvin 2003). They do not question their rights to, for example, interpreters or technical aids at home (flashing lamps and so on), but they do have some questions about whether they may be entitled to other support or services:

“If I accept rehabilitation support, does that mean that I accept I am disabled? In one way, we are perhaps disabled, since we don't hear. I can understand the concept, but I do not feel that I am disabled.” (Marianne, 16)

Also, they do not necessarily adopt for themselves the categories the entitlements are based upon, like Marianne, when she discusses whether she should apply for rehabilitation support (*attføring*) when she enters college.

The youths surveyed do, to a varying degree, consider that they have the right to services especially designed to meet the needs of disabled people. Some are quite ambivalent about their actual need for different services, some have no problem with accepting the categories, and still others overtly state that they are taking advantage of a system that gives them entitlements or services they really do not need. Jon and Hanne speak about their earliest years:

“I felt I was ‘overserviced’ when I was a little boy. It was too much. Now I get what I ask for, not more.” (Jon, 18)

“I wonder if I am a little spoiled? I do, for example, get a free text telephone, basic financial support, and I have grown up with taxi transport to school. The

latter was unfair to the neighbourhood children who had to walk to school themselves. But my school was so far away, so I guess I had no choice, anyway.” (Hanne, 17)

Both give an impression of feeling they get too much. They have, as Deaf or hard of hearing people, been entitled to a wide range of services. This has made them compare themselves to their hearing age mates who do not have access to the same services. These services perhaps made them appear more different or special than they really felt they were, and eventually also challenged their identity as ‘non-different’. This could also be an indication of their individualistic approach to these services. They may not appreciate that access to many of the services are victories fought for by Deaf, hard of hearing and disabled people one or two generations earlier. Earlier generations may have had a universalistic or collective approach to the disability issue or services, which did not have much room for individualism or individualised services. The youth perceive themselves as unique individuals, and may therefore feel that the services they are entitled to *qua* Deaf or hard of hearing do not match their self-image.

However, almost all interviewees said that their parents or other caretakers had taken care of obtaining special technical aids like flashing lamps and text telephones. Few reported direct contact with municipal counsellors or the regional technical aid centres, they said that their parents had made all the arrangements. It is therefore necessary to interview the parents about these issues. It may seem like the youth have been ‘protected’ from eventual struggles the parents may have had with, for example, the local social security office to release actions or support the family or child had the right to.

Rehabilitation support

The youth are now in a situation where financial rehabilitation support for further education is a hot issue. Marianne was one of the girls who expressed some ambiguity with regard to rehabilitation support. Oline is also doubtful, although she already receives rehabilitation support:

“One is somehow caught by the system if one gets rehabilitation support. I think it is not really right that we should receive rehabilitation support. One becomes a little stupid, somehow. Really, we want to show what we can do, that we can manage for ourselves. Still, we are sneaking in for rehabilitation support. That’s not good. But on the other side, it is great to get support to live by yourself without having to raise a student loan!” (Oline, 20)

Maja, however, is very sceptical:

“I do not want rehabilitation support. Hearing youth do not receive it, so why should I? I want to manage my own finances, and I do not expect that I will get problems with that.” (Maja, 16)

Helene may agree with Maja:

“I have asked those at the vocational courses why they don’t do their homework and why they are not interested in school. They told me they got rehabilitation support anyway, so they did not have to work. I believe the boys at the vocational training don’t bother to work because they receive rehabilitation support. If they didn’t get rehabilitation support, they said they would go to work in a sheltered workshop. As if the options only were rehabilitation support or sheltered work? I think some Deaf people are thinking in the wrong direction. They are demanding too much. What is really important is for example captioning on TV and equal opportunities at the workplace and so forth. One cannot expect that everyone should get rehabilitation support. Should people get rehabilitation support only because they are short-sighted?” (Helene, 16)

However, Helene is not quite consequent, and tells how she sometimes exploits the system:

“I have a accompanying person card, which entitle me to bring an accompanying person for free, for example, at the cinema. That’s not quite right, but I use the card anyway. My friend and I share the cost of one ticket, and get the other for free, so we both get half price. I do not need that, it is not equal opportunities, but I save a lot of money!” (Helene, 16)

The ambiguity in discussions related to welfare entitlements also reveal that collective representations or beliefs do not inevitably become personal beliefs. The youths see both advantages and drawbacks in receiving rehabilitation support. However, it may seem like they are alternating between different realms of interpretations. Sometimes, they define themselves as fully able youth, youth who belong to a cultural or linguistic minority. In other situations or contexts, they may define themselves as disabled or at least disabled enough to access various types of welfare support (which they often take for granted). They do, like other Deaf people, use various systems of knowledge and construct their own positions both as members of a cultural/ linguistic minority and as members of the broader society (Haualand 2002). Helene’s strategy to stretch her budget at the cinema does indeed confirm her position as disabled, and may contradict her support for equal opportunities. However, she is aware of the contradiction, and does not neces-

sarily perceive her actions in different situations as incompatible antagonisms. Helene, and many of the other youth are discussing own positions in the world and relate themselves to other people, whether Deaf or hearing, to the schools and the welfare state with both ambiguity and flux. They are relating themselves to different realms of interpretations (Deaf/ hard of hearing people as a minority vs. deaf/ hard of hearing people as disabled), a life strategy which also "... belies any simplistic notion that identities are internalized in a sort of faxing process that unproblematically reproduces the collective upon the individual, the social upon the body" (Holland et al. 1998:169). The individual does indeed have a strong role in the development of identity. Contrasting messages from different realms of interpretations could even be interpreted as a multivocal reality, which the youths relate to without much trouble. Marianne alternates between a disablist and culturalist realm of interpretation, and makes attempts to unite these understandings:

"Deaf people are a cultural minority, but also a part of something larger. It is a bit provocative when people who claim they are 'normal' say that we are special, when we really are like them." (Marianne, 16)

Ambiguity is a characteristic of the teenage years, but as they are defined as disabled people in a welfare context, this ambiguity is also a critique of the definite categories of the welfare state. Discussing normality as a relative concept, like Marianne does, challenges the basic structures of the welfare bureaucratic system, and thus challenges the power of the welfare system itself. The welfare states can be perceived as products of a solid modernity (Bauman 2001). For the sake of cost control and equal treatment, stable systems for categorisation and systematisation of the inhabitants are a prerequisite. Entitlement to the various welfare services are based on fixed categories. More often than not, the fixed categories are based upon a medical diagnosis, as is the case of the Deaf and hard of hearing young people in our survey. However, taking advantage of their entitlements does not mean that they uncritically accept the categories these entitlements are based upon. Many have never been really excluded from participation in the society, and view themselves as normal as anyone else. Services are expected without any element of gratitude. Our informants are the children of the normalising ideology, and the positive side of this is that they are taking their right to participate for granted. Realising oneself, following own interests and crafting unique identities can be viewed as a feature of a post-modern life approach – a very striking feature the informants have in common. They belong to a generation of young Deaf and hard of hearing people who to a large degree perceive themselves as their own stakeholders in their own life projects. A similar pattern is found in a survey of three generations of disabled people in Norway (Sandvin 2003). Like the youngest interviewees in the generational survey, the Deaf and hard of hearing youth "seem

to develop a more personal life project, with no reference but to their own self-identity and interests” (Sandvin 2003:16). However, as equal access has not been implemented in all fields yet, this life strategy may make them more vulnerable than hearing youth. Since their life projects have own interests and identity as point of departure, there will not be anyone to blame but themselves if the plans fail. Older generations may have planned and followed life trajectories, which in one sense or another also had some reference to their impairment. This may have made it easier to blame external factors (for example, lack of equal opportunities) for lack of success. By using own interests and identity as the sole basis for the life project, a positive heterogeneity among the youth will emerge, but this may be accompanied by more loneliness or insecurity (Sandvin 2003).

Bauman (1996) describes the post-modern identity projects as fragmented individual travels through life. The young people speak of being their own agents and about individual choices based on own preferences and interests. In the same way that they discuss and relate to rehabilitation support as a matter of their own choice, they also discuss identification and belonging as something they can craft for themselves. Jon (18) is a good example of the latter. He is hard of hearing and decided in his early teens to do something about his own image. He did not gain or lose any hearing, but he changed the way he approached his hearing loss:

“I turned the whole thing upside down. I had to get new friends. I found a new style of clothing, a little more grown up than the others. I wanted to be different in my way. It felt good to walk with a straight back. I wanted to change, and I did.” (Jon, 18)

Jon captures very well the life strategy of many of the informants. He carefully selects the style and friends he wants to be associated with, reminiscent of a ‘shopper’. Whatever we do, Bauman (2001) writes, we shop outside the stores as much as we do inside. Personal qualifications, images, social milieu and romantic partners have been commodified, and the code that formulates personal life strategies has been transferred from the pragmatics of shopping. Welfare services seem to be approached in a similar way and are courses of a state, which is there to serve its consumers. Normalisation is no longer a goal, individualisation is. This change in emphasis provides decision makers with certain challenges:

“The principles of integration and normalisation did, in their time, define the problem of segregation in a precise and disclosing manner. As general principles for planning, they also caused many positive changes. The principles, however, do not manage to handle the challenges of today and the future, as they are based on a 20 year old reality” (Söder 1992:53).

Disabled people's organisations have initiated a fight about normality, either wanting to expand the concept of normality (Hansen 2001), or by wanting to dissociate from the concept of normality itself (Breivik 2001; Solvang 2001). Normalisation is no longer a goal in itself. Inspired by the minority discourse, there are demands for acceptance for what one *is*, not what one should have been. Concepts of normality and deviance are moving, and a relative and fluid understanding of disability is emerging. What used to be taken as absolute truth has been challenged, and the needs of disabled people are now elusive, non-defined and imprecise. While disabled citizens have to some extent always accepted the needs which were defined on their behalf by the welfare bureaucracy, their consumption of various services is increasing, and they are simultaneously reserving the right to define their own needs. A culture of consumption has arisen. The youth in this project have much in common with the youth interviewed by Sandvin (2003). Their individualistic life strategies will put heavy demands on the organisation of the welfare services, as they have not had the same experience of segregation and exclusion during childhood as the older Deaf and hard of hearing people. It stands to reason that they will not accept the definition of their needs by hearing people either.

Conclusions

The relation between the medical hearing loss and self-identification is not as strong as the relation between preferred language and identification. In general, those with sign language as their 'best' language seem to identify themselves as Deaf, while those with Norwegian as preferred language say they are hard of hearing.

Of crucial importance for their world view is their experience of inclusion and communication at home. The youth in our survey with parents who have learned sign language, and those who have parents who have been careful to include them in family situations, speak of themselves with much confidence.

These youths are about to find their own trajectories in life. The options available to, and the choices made by, Deaf and hard of hearing young people are related to their personal, material, social and linguistic resources and living conditions. Defined as disabled, these young people are legally entitled to a range of welfare and social services. They do not put themselves in a position in relation to the welfare state that differs much from their hearing age peers, and they take the available services for granted. They have an individualistic approach to their own lives, and perceive themselves as responsible for their own life course. This may eventually make them more vulnerable if and when hindrances occur, since they

put the responsibility for their own life career primarily on own shoulders. Less than half of them define themselves as disabled. Still, most take the services they are entitled to because of their medical condition for granted, but are ambiguous about the categorisations the entitlements are based upon.

Friends, community and organisations

Friends

“We are doing things together, drinking coffee at cafés, going to cinema, art galleries and so forth. I have both Deaf and hearing friends, and many of my hearing friends are interested in learning sign language. Now, some of them want to become interpreters, too.” (Oline, 20)

Most of the youth we have interviewed lead an active social life. Some have Deaf friends only, some have both Deaf, hearing and hard of hearing friends, and some have only hearing or hard of hearing friends. What is also interesting is that several of the sign language users do not see hearing as a hindrance to friendship – they teach potential hearing friends to sign. The youth are active at various arenas. In this chapter we will describe the youths’ relation to their social milieu; their friends, participation in civil society organisations as well as politics. We also look at how they experience discrimination as Deaf or hard of hearing people.

Deaf, hard of hearing and hearing friends

Hanne is one of the respondents who says she alternates between Deaf and hearing friends with ease. She is profoundly Deaf, and for verbal communication, she only uses sign language. She tells with a matter of course how she is teaching her friends sign language:

“I have both Deaf and hearing friends. When my Deaf friends went home for the weekends, it was so boring. So I started to learn to know the hearing children on my street. I must have both Deaf and hearing friends. My boyfriend is hearing. I have taught him sign language. In the beginning, it was a little bit difficult, so we used our mobile telephones when there were words we did not understand. But after a couple of months, he improved his skills in reading me. I am also teaching his hearing friends sign language. Many are curious

and ask what the sign is for this and that. I am a lot with them in the week-ends and the holidays when my Deaf friends go home.” (Hanne, 18)

We asked the youths about who they associate with in their leisure time.

Table 8 In addition to your family, who are you mostly meeting in your leisure time?

Identity	Deaf friends		Hard of hearing friends		Hearing friends		Too many answers/ not answered		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Hard of hearing	7	15	12	26	19	41	8	17	46	100
Deaf	15	50			3	10	12	40*	30	100
All	22	29	12	16	22	29	20	26	76	100

*Far more of the Deaf respondents gave too many answers to this question. Many may not have understood the correct meaning behind the text, and ticked all answers that applied to their social life, meaning perhaps that they spend time with deaf, hard of hearing and hearing friends.

The general picture is that the majority say that they associate mostly with they Deaf or hard of hearing friends. This is reasonable, since most are going to a school with Deaf or hard of hearing peers. Also, those who label themselves as Deaf tend to socialise mostly with Deaf friends, while those who label themselves as hard of hearing seem to have more contact with hearing friends.

In the interviews there were very different descriptions of the primary community of friends. While Hanne seems to move with ease between different groups of friends, Maja (16) says that she only has Deaf friends. Frode and Jon say that they prefer to be with hearing friends. Jon does basically not seem to discriminate between hearing and deaf or hard of hearing people, although also some of his best friends are hard of hearing, and he went abroad with the parents' association. The interviewees can be divided in two groups, those who mostly have Deaf and/or hard of hearing friends, and those who seem to have friends both among hearing and Deaf or hard of hearing.

“My friends are mostly Deaf or hard of hearing. Only one close friend is hearing. It is easier to be with your Deaf or hard of hearing friends because we can use sign language.” (Trine, 17)

Trine thinks it is easier to be with people who use sign language. Mia has a similar kind of comment:

“Most of my friends are Deaf, but I did have a hearing boyfriend once. I met him on the Internet.” (Mia, 20)

For Mia, having a hearing boyfriend was an exception from the norm for her. Through the Internet she was able to reach hearing communities, and eventually

also became a leader for a large data party in the town. Anne is hard of hearing and do not want to use sign language. She gives a different explanation as to why she mostly associates with hard of hearing friends:

“We are all friends at the school for the hard of hearing. It is a small school. There is a youth worker who arranges leisure activities. I often sleep over at friends’ places.” (Anne, 18)

For her this does not seem to be so much a conscious choice as an outcome of the the people she is exposed to at school and through organised leisure activities.

Small milieus – limited choices

Are there problems linked to being mostly with Deaf or hard of hearing friends? Marianne says the following:

“I attend a course together with a Deaf friend. It would have been impossible to do this, had I been the only Deaf person there. There are 40 hearing youth at the course. The problem with being Deaf is that there are so few friends to choose from. Everybody knows each other; all my friends know each other. The hearing can chose from many different circles, where people do not necessarily know each other.” (Marianne, 17)

Marianne is different from the others who mostly have Deaf and hard of hearing friends. She sees it in a way as her destiny and feels that there are limits, due to the fact that there are so few Deaf youths in her environment. She shares this more ambivalent view of the Deaf or hard of hearing communities with several of the youths who have both hearing and Deaf or hard of hearing friends. Helene lives in a boarding school, and reflects on her relation to the Deaf community in the following way:

“When I came here I lost contact with my friends from my hometown. I miss the daily contact with hearing friends. But we keep in touch via the Internet. They are many. The Deaf are so few, and the community is so transparent. There is too much gossip and too many rumours. I trusted some friends and then I heard that they were gossiping. Hearing people keep quiet, that is a big difference. But I am Deaf wherever I go, and I want to continue to be a part of the Deaf community. At the same time I want to keep in touch with some of my hearing friends. Now I mostly socialise with other pupils from the boarding school.” (Helene, 16)

Helene and Marianne have similar views. The Deaf community is too small and transparent, and the choice of friends is limited. But they are both a part of the same community and see this as something they must accept, or even as something positive. Helene, however, seems to have a more active approach to this in the sense that she is quite conscious about keeping contact with her hearing friends as well. As she lives in a boarding school she uses the Internet to keep up that contact.

Frode uses his mobile phone to keep up the contact with his friends from his hometown. He says:

“I keep in touch with my old buddies on the mobile phone. There are four or five Deaf youths in my home town. We talk when we meet, but that is all. My parents used to drive me, so that I could meet Deaf friends. I have many friends, only a few of them are Deaf. I prefer to be with my hearing friends. We have been friends since lower secondary school and we still keep in touch.” (Frode, 20)

One of his basic motives for keeping his hearing friends is the fact that these friendships have a long history. His family were conscious of assisting him to meet hard of hearing friends when he was younger, but those who are still important for him seem to be hearing. In his way he describes the same dilemma as Helene and Marianne – the limited choice of friends in the Deaf community.

While some of the interviewees said that the low number of sign language users limits their choice of friends to a Deaf or hard of hearing circle of friends, others see sign language as an opportunity to break barriers through teaching their friends sign language. Oline says:

“I have both Deaf and hard of hearing friends. Many of my hearing friends want to learn sign language.” (Oline, 20)

Simone talks about hearing friends who know sign language, some of whom know sign language because they have learned it from her. She is, however, somewhat ambivalent about this:

“One of my best childhood friends knew sign language. She learned it because we played together. She moved abroad, and I still miss her, because there is no one on my street who knows sign language any more. I do not have too many close friends there. But I do have some hearing friends. Some people think I try to make a good impression by saying that I have hearing friends, but it is not like that. Some of my hearing friends know sign language, but I do not want to be their sign language teacher, so sometimes I am quite bored.” (Simone, 17)

Simone seems to be proud of having broken the barriers between Deaf and hearing friends, but at the same time she is afraid other people shall think she is bragging when she says so. This might be an expression of distance between the hearing and the Deaf communities. This kind of attitude contrasts with the lack of distinction between friends with and without impairment that Sandvin (2003) found in a study about disabled people over three generations:

“The youngest generation does not want to stand out, to be different, and they do not see themselves as very different from other youngsters. What the older generation saw as opportunities – “despite” being disabled – are now taken for granted by the youngest generation. Perhaps more interestingly, hardly any of the interviewees from the youngest generation used the concept “us”, referring to people with the same impairment as themselves, not even among young Deaf people. Very few expressed any strong relation to the traditional collectives at all. Instead they talked about friends and classmates without making any distinction at all between people with and without impairments. One partial exception is that the Deaf interviewees talked much about the importance of access to a sign language community. “We need both”, they said.” (Sandvin 2003:16)

These observations parallel our observations of a less divided world, but we found that the concept “us” was frequently used among our informants. Sandvin that Deaf youth represent a slightly different case from the other groups he has studied in one important respect – access to sign language. When we look at both the qualitative and quantitative data, we find a whole range of ways of coping with being different from the majority when it comes to hearing. Use of language(s) varies by context and milieu. Some teach non-signers sign language, some speak when they are with hearing friends and sign when they are with Deaf friends, while some only have hard of hearing or Deaf friends, with whom they do not have to worry about language usage or being able to participate in conversations. Some confess ambiguity when discussing where they belong, and reveals that identification, belonging and means of communication are not fixed.

If we sum up the interviews and the survey data, it seems that an important part of the social life of the Deaf and hard of hearing youths takes place with friends who are Deaf and hard of hearing. Some interviewees felt that the community of Deaf is too small and too transparent. Some of our informants seem to miss hearing friends from their childhood or home town – the hearing friends were their first companions and they miss them. At the same time, they feel that it is hard work to keep in touch because of language barriers. If you go to a boarding school, it means that you have to leave your old friends. The informants talked a lot about missing friends.

Sandvin (2003) points to the importance of access to sign language. This is equally evident among our respondents. But he also points to a lack of identification with other people with the same impairment. This was not as evident in our data. For example, Helene was very outspoken when it comes to the expression of an “us” when talking about the Deaf community. It seems paradoxical that at the same time she expresses a very ambivalent attitude towards this community, but she definitely wants to be a part of it.

Young people find their friends at school. Anne is an example of this. She keeps to her hard of hearing friends, her schoolmates. All of them are pupils at the same school for the hard of hearing. It seems that, for some, the elements of school, language and sense of identity combine to create the level of social life within the different groups of Deaf and hard of hearing youth. For others, a slightly different picture seems to emerge – a tendency towards socialising both with hearing and Deaf/hard of hearing friends. Some of the interviewees are very conscious of the fact that they want to be a part of both worlds. In that sense there is a tendency towards uniting divided worlds. At least, the youth are extending their zones of participation.

Leisure activities

Peer influence

The youths in our survey have a high level of leisure activities, with or without friends. This became particularly evident in the interviews, for example, in the description Jon gave of his everyday life:

“I have very good contact with two buddies. We use our computers a lot, but I am not so fond of that. We talk and watch TV. I shoot, and also playing tuba in a band. I have two part time jobs. I wash in my father’s office and work in the post office. Last summer, I worked in a restaurant, selling ice cream. Most of my friends are of my own age, and they are mostly boys. Four or five of us see each other a lot; we go out in the weekends. I do not have Internet at home. All my friends have Internet, so I can use their computers. I can also use the Internet at my father’s office, but I do not like chatting. Last weekend we went abroad with the “Parents’ association of hard of hearing children”. Two of my best friends and both of my parents were there.” (Jon, 18)

Jon is one of the most active people among the interviewees. Many interviewees spoke about a high level of leisure time activity. The activities range from jobs via formally organised activities to informal activities within the primary group of friends. Other leisure activities mentioned in the interviews are, among others, sports, politics, leadership training, part time jobs (for example, working in fast food restaurants, working as a model, providing leisure support for younger children for pay and cleaning), cinema, computers and Internet, art galleries, pupils' council and pupils' magazine at school, and playing guitar and tuba. Some of the youth said explicitly that their friends' activities guide what they do in their own leisure time. Helene, who moved to a boarding school when she entered upper secondary school, is not too satisfied with this situation:

"In lower secondary school, I behaved more properly. I went to school in the morning and then I went home and did my homework. It is a lot more laid-back here at the dorm. I go out with friends a lot, come home late, and then I am supposed to do homework after that, at the very end of the day. Now, I have changed. I am more like the others; they have influenced me. I am less sensible, doing less homework and so on. I pay less attention and I had greater ambitions earlier, but have got negative attitudes towards school and my marks have dropped. But, I do not want the others to perceive me as a dull person who only does her homework; I want to be with them. I'd prefer to live with a friend in my class. That may help. We can help each other, since we have about the same homework every day. Perhaps we'll become more motivated, when we can sit together and do our homework, instead of just sitting there alone." (Helene, 16)

The young people we studied are of an age where they are in the middle of the process of developing a new independence from their closest family. In this phase, friends and community play a more important role, which Helene refers to above. What makes the situation more intense for Helene is that she also physically has moved a long way from home. Her parents have less influence, but she admits that her father has been worried about her marks lately. The dormitory curfews are different from the ones set up in a family. Helene is struggling to set up her own curfews so she can keep a balance between the need for time for homework and her need to socialise with peers. She says that the dormitory assistants have been stricter in the past few weeks, and she hopes the situation will improve soon. The life away from home may give some of the youth more freedom than what is usual among hearing youth at the same age. In another city with an upper secondary school for the Deaf which is not a boarding school, all pupils were able to make use of the freedom offered by those renting their own apartments:

“We do a lot of different things in the weekends, partying and so on. Often, we visit someone who rents an apartment with someone else, or has moved away from home. We are almost never at those who still live with their parents; it is so awkward to have parents there. Those living away from home are a little bit older, maybe 20 years old. I believe we are about 15–20 persons in our group, and most are between 16 and 19 years old.” (Marianne, 16)

Marianne is still living at home, and seems to appreciate her parents’ supervision:

“There is some drinking, but I do not drink because I have seen how people change when they drink. I do not understand parents who think it is okay that their kids drink, and allow them to bring alcohol from home. I am very glad my parents just say no.” (Marianne, 16)

The upper secondary schools for the Deaf or hard of hearing are located only in a few cities in Norway. Sixty percent (46 persons) still live at home, while about 20% (16) live in a dormitory. Nine live alone, and nine are living with friends or partner. In the latter groups, many have probably moved away from home sooner than they would have done if they had chosen to attend an upper secondary school closer to their parents’ home. In these circumstances, friends may become more prominent in social life after school than they would otherwise have been.

Sports activities

As is the case with youths in the general population, sport clubs seem to be the kind of organisations that reach most Deaf and hard of hearing youths. According to a study of Norwegian youths and their membership in organisations, 35% of all pupils in secondary school say that they are members of sport clubs (Rossow 2003). Among our respondents 34 people (44%) are, in one way or another, members of the sports movement. Deaf youths in our study are more active in sport than their hard of hearing peers. Four people in the survey hold a position of trust in sports clubs. The youth participate in a variety of sport activities, which ranges broadly from traditional sports as skiing, football and ice hockey to more modern sports like taekwondo and aerobics. They also participate in fishing and climbing and other outdoor activities. One of the boarding schools covered in our survey organises informal sport activities in a hall once a week, and several of our interviewees said they participated in these. Hanne said:

“I am often in the hall. It is open for Deaf youth from both the lower and the upper secondary school. There’s a lot of sport and play there.” (Hanne, 18)

The social element is important in sports activities. Deaf people have their own sport games, at both national and international levels. Breivik (2002) and Fosshaug (2002) discuss various aspects of Deaf sports. Fosshaug emphasises the empowerment perspective, and shows how Deaf sports is an arena for empowerment and an opportunity to show bodily strength and competitiveness among other sign language users (Fosshaug 2002). Loss of hearing is rarely a hindrance to participation in leisure level sports activities, and may be an arena in which Deaf or hard of hearing young people can meet hearing youth. Quoting Stewart (1991) Breivik says: “Deaf sports must first and foremost be understood as a social practice – as one of many arenas where signed communication is carried on” (Breivik 2002:42). To Hanne, the hall is obviously such a place.

Religious and cultural organisations

Six respondents (8%) informed us that they are members of religious organisations. One of them holds a position of trust. Among the youths in secondary schools in Norway 6% are members of religious organisations. (Rossow 2003). Again we see that the Deaf and hard of hearing are at least as active in these kinds of organisations as their hearing peers.

The questionnaire asked about respondents’ relationship to religious organisations in general, and went on to specifically enquired about their relationship with the Deaf church. When asking of participation in the church for the Deaf community, we get slightly higher figures. 10 respondents (13%) tell us that they are connected to the activities in the Deaf church. Three of those say they have some kind of position of trust in the Deaf church.

The motivation respondents gave for taking part in the congregation for the Deaf ranged from religious belief to the fact that the congregation offers an attractive range of activities. Two of the interviewees spoke about their activities in these churches:

“I am active in the Church for the Deaf. I am not a religious believer, but they offer a number of good activities. I am on the youth council. We travel abroad together.” (Marianne, 17)

“I went to a leadership course, with 40 hearing and two Deaf participants. But it was a very good course, with loads of practice. I am not a Christian, but right now, the Deaf church has a lot of great activities. The Deaf youth club is not so well organised nowadays.” (Simone, 17)

Because the sample is so small, we need to be wary of stretching our interpretation too far. However, from the two interviewees who said anything about this topic, it seems that churches for the Deaf have been able to establish activities that are valued positively by a group larger than the “inner circle” of the congregation.

Six respondents said they are members of community-based and/ or culturally-oriented organisations, and three hold positions of trust.

Organisations for Deaf or hard of hearing

Altogether 22 of the respondents (30%) say that they are members of the Norwegian Association of the Deaf. Three of them are in a position of trust. The Oslo/ Akershus region has a slightly higher participation than the other regions in Norway. Two thirds of those who are members of the Norwegian Association of the Deaf label themselves as Deaf, and the remainder describe themselves as hard of hearing.

Nineteen of the respondents (26%) are members of the Youth Organisation for the Deaf (NDU). Three of them hold positions of trust. Once again we see that the Oslo/ Akershus region is slightly over represented. This geographical bias might be the result of these organisations being more active in this region.

Twelve of the respondents (17%) said that they are members of the Norwegian Association of the Hard of Hearing. Two of them informed us that they have a position of trust. A majority of those who said that they are members of the Norwegian Association of the Hard of Hearing label themselves as either hard of hearing or hearing impaired. Paradoxically the exceptions are the two who said they hold a position of trust in this organisation – they most often describe themselves as Deaf.

Eleven respondents (15%) told us that they are members of the Norwegian Association of the Hard of Hearing's Youth Association, of which five hold positions of trust.

There is a high degree of double membership among respondents of ‘mother’ organisations and their youth wings. This applies to the Norwegian Association of the Deaf/ NDU as well as for the Norwegian Association of the Hard of Hearing/ the Norwegian Association of the Hard of Hearing's Youth Association. The youth organisations enjoy a slightly lower membership among our respondents than the mother associations. Because our respondents belong to the core target group for the youth organisations, this is surprising – one might expect to find a higher incidence of membership of youth organisations in the youth we surveyed than mother organisations.

There is a clear link between organisational membership and language use. The highest incidence of membership of the National Association of the Hard of Hear-

ing in our survey was found among those who have used spoken language at school. All those we surveyed who were members of the Norwegian Association of the Deaf use sign language partly or fully in school.

Politics

Seven percent of secondary school pupils in Norway are members of political organisations (Rossow 2003). We asked for membership of political parties, women's and youth organisations. Only 4 of the respondents (5%) are members of a political organisation, and one said he or she holds a position of trust in the party.

Of respondents of 18 years and above, 36 answered the question about whether or not they voted at the last national election. Twenty of them answered yes (56%) and the remaining 16 said no. Participation in elections varies between municipal and national elections, but more than two thirds of the electorate in Norway normally participates in elections. The rate of participation in elections in our survey group is lower than in the population as a whole. However, young people tend to participate less in elections than adults, so in this respect the youths in our survey seem to be typical for their age group.

We also asked respondents whether they intend to participate in the next. Excluding the youngest group – those of 16 years of age who mostly answered that they did not know – almost two thirds of respondents said they plan to participate in elections.

Transnational activities

As a consequence of globalisation, transnational arenas and activities are increasing in importance and accessibility. The youth in our survey are no exception. Restricting entitlements to, for example, interpreter services, or access to information and communication technology to what falls within the frame of the nation state will eventually not be accepted by Deaf and hard of hearing youth. The youth expect to be able to participate in the same globalising processes and international education trajectories as their hearing age peers.

Sign language users have long-standing traditions of translocal and transnational activities (Breivik et al. 2002), which we were able to observe in our own research. There are various reasons for the widespread translocal activities in the Deaf community, and this poses challenges for the way welfare services will have to be organised in the future.

The language(s) used by the youth in our survey and their surroundings is important for their sense of identification and belonging. Traditionally, an early experience of many Deaf people is a sense of *difference* from their families (Fjord 1996; Breivik 2001; Haualand 2002). They communicate and perceive the world differently to the people who are supposed to be closest to them – family. From early onset, human lives can be said to be about finding people one can communicate spontaneously with. To Deaf people and other people with a considerable hearing loss, these people are rarely found in the family or neighbourhood. A usual estimate is that about 10% of Deaf or hard of hearing children have Deaf or hard of hearing parents. Many of these experienced a sense of belonging or sameness for the first time when they met other signers, for example, in school. Hence, to many Deaf and hard of hearing people, the sense of belonging has been of trans-local nature (Breivik 2001). Breivik (2001) writes that Deaf people often experienced a departure from home or their closest geographical surroundings in order to meet communication partners. Mostly being surrounded by hearing people, who either do not know sign language, and/ or are ignorant about the communication prerequisites of Deaf people:

“... everyday life in a hard-to-sign (hearing) environment where many Deaf subjects are “settled,” raised and positioned (most of the time) – do hence not contain the key constituting elements of belonging. Identification and belonging are thus more connected to projecting, longing for, planning and performing Deaf communal life beyond this – at temporary occasions ... Conscious efforts in making such occasions appear, through active involvement and planning, is thus becoming central. The sense of belonging is thus connected to the places and occasions where visual communication is practiced.” (Breivik 2002:11)

However, what we have seen among the young people we interviewed in our research is that many have had a chance to develop close, mutual communication with their families. Growing up in a country with one of the world's most through sign language education programmes for parents of deaf and hard of hearing children, quite a large number of the interviewees have parents who know sign language. However, what many of these parents have in common is a willingness to move away from home for short or long periods in life to learn sign language. Some have spent an extended period at a county college, where they have had the opportunity to learn sign language intensively in a sign language environment. Milieus of fluent sign language users will not be found everywhere, and some of the families who wanted to learn sign language have had to bear the difficulties inherent in this.

Due to the low incidence of sign language users, it is reasonable to presume that milieus of sign language users still will be located at a few spots. The permanent clusters of sign language users will often be in or close to large cities, where schools for the Deaf exist or where large numbers of Deaf people attract more sign language users. Also of importance in the Deaf world are events which draw large numbers of participants from large areas (Breivik et al. 2001). These are, among others, the annual national Deaf Culture Days, the quadrennial Nordic Deaf Culture Festivals, Nordic, European and worldwide sports games, the World Federation of the Deaf World congress, as well as countless small and large events and gatherings of sign language users worldwide. The motivation to meet other sign language using people may be one of the driving forces in the long-standing traditions of transnational activities in the Deaf community. Some of the youth tell about early participation in translocal Deaf activities.

Mia (20) and Simone (17), both Deaf children of Deaf adults, tell about transnational family activities since they were young children. Simone's parents escaped from the former Soviet Union when her older brother (also Deaf) was young. With Deaf family and friends all over Europe, even the family activities are quite transnational. As a result of this, she has grown into a multilingual person. She communicates fluently in NTS and Russian Sign Language, knows some Austrian Sign Language and is a fluent international signer. She is also proud of her excellent grades in Norwegian. She uses English with ease (and some German) when communicating through Instant Messenger⁴ with her boyfriend in Austria or other friends abroad. Mia's family members are all Norwegian (her older Deaf sister has moved abroad).

"I have been to several Nordic camps for Deaf children or youths. I have been travelling a lot with my parents, for example at Nordic Deaf Culture Festivals and handball championships since my father played handball at the Deaf national team. Just a few weeks ago, I went to Sweden for a gathering for pupils in upper secondary schools for the Deaf. I have a lot of friends abroad. Only this winter, I have visited my sister in the USA and I have been in Rome. When I am travelling, I always live at someone I know, or at a friend of a friend's house." (Mia, 20)

Mia and Simone are perhaps more experienced travellers than many of their age mates. Like Simone, Mia knows several sign languages (NTS, Swedish Sign Language, American Sign Language), and has a high literacy in Norwegian and

⁴ Instant Messenger programmes are Internet Communication programmes that usually can be downloaded for free. Through instant messages, written conversations can be done with other people who are also logged on with an Instant Messenger programme. Examples of such programmes are MSN, AIM and ICQ.

Table 9 Frequency of travelling abroad to meet Deaf or hard of hearing people from other countries compared to preferred personal language

Best personal language	Never		1-2 times		3 times or more		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Norwegian	28	62	15	33	2	4	45	99
Sign Language	7	29	12	50	5	21	24	100
All	35	51	27	39	7	10	69	100

English. However, they are not so unusual if their experiences of transnational activity are compared with replies from our survey. The more people prefer sign language, the higher the chance is that they have had a high level of international interaction.

Comparing transnational Deaf/hard of hearing activities to other variables like identity or language of instruction in school shows the same pattern. Use of sign language and identification with being Deaf increases the chance for transnational contact with other Deaf or hard of hearing people. Those who preferred sign language, for example, have more Deaf or hard of hearing friends abroad than those who had Norwegian as their best language.

Table 10 reveals that about 71% of the sign language users have Deaf or hard of hearing friends abroad, while only 11% of Norwegian-speaking youth have Deaf or hard of hearing friends abroad. This corresponds well with the general impression that Deaf people averagely travel more than hearing people. The life stories collected by Breivik (2001) show that translocal and transnational connections are of great significance in many Deaf people's lives. Also Lane, Hoffmeister and Bahan (1996), Wrigley (1996) and Wallvik (1997) write about the significance of physically distant acquaintances in the Deaf world.

Several of both the Deaf and hard of hearing young people interviewed planned to study or travel abroad. Some of the Deaf interviewees mentioned Gallaudet University⁵ as a place they would consider going to after finishing upper second-

Table 10 Frequency of Deaf or hard of hearing friends outside Norway compared to preferred personal language

Most used language	None		1-5		More than 5		Not answered		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Norwegian	27	60	12	27	5	11	1	2	45	100
Sign Language	7	29	10	42	7	29			24	100
All	34	49	22	32	12	17	1	1	69	100

⁵ Gallaudet University in Washington DC, USA is the only liberal arts university in the world designed exclusively for deaf and hard of hearing students.

ary education, but only as a part of their education. The survey did not ask about international activities in general, for example, about contact with hearing people abroad or former participation in culture, music or sports events or festivals.

The interviewees who spoke about their international activities were not all Deaf. Tone, who has a slight hearing loss, plans to go to a university in Scotland after graduating from upper secondary school for a bachelor and eventually honours degree in marketing or education. She is then on par with many of her hearing age mates who plan to undertake some education abroad. She is well ahead in her planning, and has been visiting the university in Scotland. The university has a disability counsellor who will assist her with practical support and arrangements. On the subject of her plans, she says that no one has ever tried to stop her, and her parents as well as her teachers have encouraged her to reach for the highest point she would like to reach, without regard to her loss.

English is one of Tone's mother tongues, and she is confident that she will manage to study and communicate abroad, despite her hearing loss. However, lip-reading foreign language(s) is significantly more difficult than lip-reading a first language. People with a profound hearing loss will, in general, have more problems communicating verbally with other people in foreign spoken languages, even they are familiar with the foreign language in its written form. It may therefore be expected that having knowledge of sign language increase the possibilities for transnational activities for people with a hearing loss. Sign languages are also more easily adapted to a mode of communication comprehensible by other signers. Knowledge in one or more sign languages increases Deaf and hard of hearing peoples' degree of mobility and freedom to choose where they want to be. Multilingualism is an important resource in the accelerating globalising process. Participating actively in the process of globalisation where "modes of connection between different social contexts and regions become networked across the earth's surface as a whole" (Giddens 1990:64), multilingualism is a resource to anyone, regardless of hearing status. Decisions regarding languages of instruction seem to have significant consequences for the transnational activities of young people. Further investigation is needed to find out how national education and welfare policies influence opportunities to participate in the increasingly important global arena. It seems that Deaf and hard of hearing people (and disabled people) are especially vulnerable to educational decisions made on their behalf early in life. Decisions regarding language(s) of instruction may influence the ability of pupils to participate actively in translocal and international network.

Discrimination

Discrimination is a very effective way to raise barriers between the majority and minorities. The word ‘discrimination’ usually has negative connotations, but it is not necessarily so. Positive discrimination might imply that there are different ways for different groups to reach the same goals. Discrimination might be institutional, as well as personal. The consequences of institutionalised discrimination are one of the very basic issues we sought to address in this study. The question of how the welfare system influences the identity and opportunities of people with disabilities is basically about how these institutions differentiate between different groups in society, and what the result of this differentiation may be. We asked respondents about their experience with negative discrimination on the personal level. Nearly half of them said that they had had a negative experience because they are Deaf or hard of hearing.

Table 11 Deaf or hard of hearing and experience of discrimination

Identity	Yes		No		Uncertain/too many answers/not replied		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Hard of hearing	19	41	17	37	10	22	46	100
Deaf	13	43	10	33	7	23	30	100
All	32	42	27	35	17	22	76	100

The majority of respondents reported that they had experienced discrimination. Table 11 makes it clear that there is hardly any difference between the Deaf and the hard of hearing on this issue.

A few if the interviewees spoke about their experiences of being ostracised. One spoke about systematic mobbing from fellow pupils, while some told us about how they had been exposed to more subtle mechanisms of exclusion.

“When I was in lower secondary school, some of the pupils tormented me, but mostly it was okay. Here, at upper secondary school, I feel ostracised, and there are a lot of rumours about me. People keep torment me about everything, that’s quite annoying. Sometimes I have considered quitting school because of the ostracising, but at least, I’d like to rent a room elsewhere. Now, I live in the middle of the school.” (Frode, 20)

Being tormented and ostracised was reported among Deaf and hard of hearing youth as well as between hearing and Deaf/ hard of hearing youth. We asked what kind of discrimination respondents had experienced.

Table 12 If you experience discrimination, what happened⁶?

I did not get the work I applied for	2	6 %
Problems with getting an apartment	2	6 %
I was attacked physically	8	24 %
I was ostracised, "mobbed"	19	56 %
I felt that they thought I was stupid	17	50 %
Other answers	4	12 %
No answer	1	3 %
		N=34

Table 12 shows that there are very few examples of youths who believe they did not get a job or an apartment because they are Deaf or hard of hearing. The reason might quite simply be that few of them had applied for an apartment – most are too young to have done so. Only 16 (20%) of the respondents had part time jobs after school, which is much lower than the portion of hearing youth working after school. Among hearing youth, more than 50% have part-time jobs.⁷ Few report they did not get a job they wanted because they were Deaf or hard of hearing. However, we do not know how many of the respondents who have *considered* taking a job after school, but not have done so. The lack of working experience among teenagers and students disadvantages the study group when they apply for a job after ending their studies. Most employers prefer to hire people with more work experience than disabled applicants (Skei & Zahl 1999).

The two categories of discrimination reported most in our survey are ostracising ("mobbing"), and when people thought respondents were stupid. There are, however, differences between the Deaf and the hard of hearing when it comes to the kinds of discrimination they have experienced. We again stress that the numbers of people participating in the survey were very small, so it is difficult to draw very definite conclusions. However, there seem to be a relatively higher number of people among hard of hearing youths that have experience physical attacks (33% of those who have experienced discrimination) than among the Deaf youths (8% of those who have experienced discrimination). A total of 77% of the Deaf who have experienced discrimination say that they feel people thought they were stupid. One reason for the difference between Deaf and hard of hearing respondents it could be that hard of hearing youth socialise more with hearing people than Deaf people do. Being in closer touch with other youth, they may be more exposed to physical attacks. Deaf youth may not socialise as much with other youth, so they may be judged at a distance, or may be facing prejudices (for example, being labelled as stupid) without any contact having been made at all.

⁶ Each respondent could give more than one answer to this question

⁷ <http://www.ssb.no/emner/06/01/aku/tab-2003-01-30-03.html>

The small size of our sample makes it impossible to draw clear conclusions, but it may be that these differences are due to use of language, since sign language is so visible. The profile of the discrimination also indicates that many people see sign language users as stupid. Another way to say this is that 'old' ideas and prejudices which link deafness and learning disabilities still seem to be alive in the population. However, the ideas connected to sign languages may be turning in a positive direction. Sign language has increasingly been exposed in the media and in everyday life, but as our research shows, negative attitudes to sign language still exist. In the next chapter about education, the interviewees report an alarming amount of discrimination from teachers and other employees in school, which seem to stem from the same belief that Deaf people are slow learners.

Conclusion

We have analysed the participation of Deaf and hard of hearing youths in different arenas, starting with the community of friends and ending up with transnational activity. With respect to some aspects, we have been able to compare them with the general population of the same age. The youths we met do not seem to be very different from their hearing school mates and other youths of the same age.

Hearing impairment does not seem to be a hindrance for participation and social life and, in that sense we have once again seen that the barriers between previously divided worlds seem to be lower. Several of the respondents referred to restrictions on choice that are a result of the small numbers of people in the Deaf/hard of hearing milieu, and that this meant it is necessary to meet people outside this milieu.

The experiences of personal discrimination reported by respondents show that discrimination is still one of the barriers that the majority population forces upon Deaf and hard of hearing. The form of discrimination is different according to whether the young person views him or herself as Deaf or hard of hearing. Especially in the arena of friends and community, there seems to be a need, not only to meet other sign language users, but also to meet other youths who have had the experience of being 'different'. Although our research confirmed that Deaf and hard of hearing youths are generally moving away from seeing themselves as different, we also saw identification with Deaf and hard of hearing communities. Many of these youths seem to have an ambivalent relation to these communities and try to be a part of both worlds. They do not see why they should not participate in both arenas.

School and education

An arena for learning and socialisation

“In lower secondary school, the instructions were easy, even if most of the teachers knew sign language. But there were large differences. Some teachers put really high demands on us, while others did not demand anything from us. One example of the latter is when we had a quick test, and the answers were enclosed. At the upper secondary school where I am at now, Deaf and hearing pupils are treated equally.” (Trine, 16).

Several of the youth were concerned about the level of instructions in school. Especially those who had gone to a school for the Deaf or who were currently attending one had critical comments about the level of instruction they received in school. However, many experienced an improvement in the instructions when they entered upper secondary school. At this level, the lack of course opportunities is of more concern. The schools are nevertheless important arenas for social interaction and peer support. Even the hard of hearing youth who attend a public school emphasised the importance of meeting other hard of hearing youth to get support and ideas for coping in a hearing environment.

The choice – which kind of upper secondary school should I attend?

Most of the respondents in the survey were undergoing upper secondary education in a school with other Deaf or hard of hearing peers. As has been pointed out above, the population was defined as pupils in upper secondary schools. The numbers in this report therefore only apply to the portion of Deaf and hard of hearing young people who actually receive some kind of upper secondary education. The numbers do not measure how many who are not in the special needs education support system for hearing impaired, or who did not obtain a secondary education at the time the survey was conducted. In the next phase of the project,

we will consult the regional consultants for Education of Hearing Impaired⁸ to discuss the situation of deaf and hard of hearing youths who are not obtaining any special education support.

Table 13 shows that most of the respondents are in a school for the Deaf or hard of hearing or through a mainstream program, while a little more than one fourth receive education in a public school with hearing peers, but are still in touch with the support system at a school for Deaf or hard of hearing.

Table 13 Which type of school are you going to?

	N	%
School for Deaf or hard of hearing	42	55
Mainstream program (knutepunktskoler)	12	16
Public school	21	27
Unanswered/too many replies	2	3
Total	77	100

Some of the interviewees felt that they have been restricted by structural factors in their choice of upper secondary school, like Hanne (17). She said that she chose to continue her education at a secondary school for the Deaf, despite the lack of optional courses there:

“There has never been any doubt or discussion whether I should go to a local school or a school for the Deaf, until I entered upper secondary education. I like art, but the upper secondary school for the Deaf does not offer that subject. There would be more choices at a public upper secondary school and a larger social milieu. But I’d rather not be the only Deaf pupil at a large hearing school. I feel that the Deaf school gives me more.” (Hanne, 17)

Here we clearly see an example of a structural feature that limits her options. Hanne wanted to receive her education in a signing milieu with Deaf peers. The consequence was that she had to settle for taking a course which was not her first choice.

Anne also reports a sense of being restricted in her educational choices. She would have headed for the general studies, anyway, she said, but regretted the lack of possible choices in primary school. At the time of the interview she was at a school for the hard of hearing that does not use sign language for instruction. Anne wished there had been a similar option in lower secondary and primary school. She had been integrated in a public school, but said she would have preferred to go to a school with other hard of hearing peers, one which did not use sign language for instruction.

⁸ Fylkesaudiopedagogtjenesten

A survey of hearing impaired people and education indicates that hearing impaired youth who live in cities with large populations of sign language users are more likely to enter a public upper secondary school and use interpreters than hearing impaired people from smaller places without a milieu of sign language users. The first group are more likely to have a social network in which they can participate after school, and the need to meet sign language using peers at school is not found as consistently as it is among the youth who are not surrounded by sign language users on a daily basis (Olsen 1999). In this project we focused on youth who are either in a school for the Deaf or hard of hearing, or receive support from the special education support system. For this reason, the aspect of choice of school is not discussed. Olsen's conclusion supports the relevance of taking social factors into consideration when analysing a youth's choices of school.

Courses

The youth's decisions regarding type of school has probably also influenced which courses they are presently taking. Hanne (above) chose upper secondary school on the basis of the type of school rather than what her major interest is or the range of subjects offered in a particular upper secondary school. Table 14 only reflects courses offered by the schools that are a part of the special education support system to give a rough picture of the preferences of the youth themselves. The respondents were following a variety of courses, with a majority doing in general studies or vocational education. A total of 44% were undertaking general studies (allmennfag), which only offers theoretical subjects. About 43% obtain vocational education.

Table 14 Which type of school are you going to?

	N	%
General studies	36	47
Art or sport	5	7
Vocational course	33	43
Too many replies/not answered	3	4
Total	77	100

Table 15 Choice of courses

	General studies		Arts or sports		Vocational		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Boys	9	32	2	7	17	61	28	100
Girls	27	59	3	7	16	35	46	100
Total	36	49	5	7	33	45	74	100

There are more girls than boys doing general studies, which is in accordance with the pattern among the general population. Among the respondents who undertake general studies, 59% are girls, while 61% of those in vocational training are boys. Among hearing pupils at the same age, 55% of the pupils in general studies are girls, while 54% of the pupils in vocational courses are boys.⁹

To 50%, advice from parents was considered 'very important' or 'quite important' when making decisions about upper secondary education. Forty one percent perceived advice from friends to be 'very' or 'quite' important; 32% considered advice from school counsellors 'very' or 'quite' important, while only 10% said that advice from employment agencies had been 'very' or 'quite' important for their education decision processes. There seemed to be mixed feelings about the value of the advice received. Maja was not very satisfied with the counsellor from the lower secondary school. She got excellent marks and did well in school. But her counsellor questioned Maja's theoretical abilities:

"Entering general studies was my own decision. But the counsellor was not very positive. She asked me persistently if I was sure, if I would follow normal progression and not take four or five years instead of the regular three years. She was so sceptical and had a lot of prejudices. But the counsellor at the school I am at now is far more positive and she gives me constructive advice." (Maja, 16)

The prejudices Maja was subjected to did not influence her initial plans. Many of her classmates took a course on health and childcare. Maja believed this was partly because several of them were tired of school, and that this may have made them more susceptible to influence.

The number of Deaf and hard of hearing pupils in the special education support system is quite small (152 in our population) compared to the total number of pupils undertaking upper secondary education in Norway (about 160 000).¹⁰ The interviews revealed that many have experienced a limitation on subject choice, partly due to the small number of pupils. Not all had been able to take the classes that would have been their first choice.

Jon, who is hard of hearing, headed for general studies. When he found out that his first choice of school did not make the best adaptation for him, he changed his mind about which school he would attend. He mentioned some other hard of hearing pupils at the school he was at at the time of the interview, but did not seem to in much contact with them. To him, the lack of options probably did not have consequences as drastic as those for Hanne, who had to settle for taking a

⁹ http://www.ssb.no/emner/04/utdanning_as/200003/T-11.html

¹⁰ <http://www.ssb.no/emner/04/02/30/utvgs/tab-2002-01-29-07.html>

course that was not her first choice because she decided to stay at the school for the Deaf.

The decision of Maja (16) to take general studies was based on own interests, and went against the advice of her counsellor. She only experienced structural limits on her choice when it was time for her and her classmates to choose subjects for the second year in upper secondary school. Maja, who would have chosen general studies anyway, says that she would prefer to read politics as a major subject for the second year rather than geography. However, there were neither enough pupils in class nor enough teachers to offer both subjects. Since most of the other pupils in her class preferred geography, she had to take this subject instead of politics. Another girl, Mia (20) told us that she joined physics classes in a nearby public school, while reading the rest of the subjects in a school for the Deaf.

The degree of freedom in choosing schools and courses seemed to be reduced for some of the interviewees. There is a broad range of possibilities for upper secondary education, but not all these options are available to Deaf and hard of hearing young people. Not all schools have adapted what they do to suit the needs of all students. The schools that are organised to fit the needs of Deaf or hard of hearing pupils are not able to offer all the subjects the students are interested in. The option of moving to another city (to live in a boarding school or in a rented apartment) may be open to some of the young people, but this is not always desirable, especially for the youngest of those in our survey. Mainstream programmes (where classes of Deaf or hard of hearing students are set up in a public school) may solve some of the dilemma related to choice of school, if teachers and other co-pupils accommodate the needs of Deaf and hard of hearing pupils by alternating spoken classes where an interpreter is used, with classes in which sign language is the language of instruction. In these kinds of schools the youth may be able to get a social milieu of sign language users and simultaneously benefit from the increase in possible choices that comes as a consequence of larger numbers of pupils.

The school as an arena for socialisation and increased awareness

Like Hanne, Helene also gave the social milieu a high priority when choosing an upper secondary school. She visited a school for the Deaf when she was still in lower secondary school, and received a positive impression of the pupils there. This influenced her choice of upper secondary school considerably. Anne values the milieu of hard of hearing peers at the school for hard of hearing she is going to. Peer support and socialisation is important during the teenage years. Some respondents let the possibility of being able to interact on equal terms decide which upper secondary school they should attend.

The schools within the state special education support systems are important, and not only to the young people who are full time students there. Tone (18), who is hard of hearing and attends a public school, has positive experiences from visits to a special education support centre. When she started to use a hearing aid when she was ten years old, she attended a course at a school for the Deaf to learn to use her new hearing aid.

“It was very good to be at the course and meet other people in the same situation as me. No one at my school had used hearing aids and no one there knew how to handle it. At the course, I met another world. When I learned what the other people there had, I wondered why I did not have the same. I should have gotten this support immediately. My mom had to get everything rolling.” (Tone, 18)

She did well in school, but made repeated visits to the support centre. When she was 14, she met the same group again:

“We discussed common problems. I realised that I did better than many of the other people there, because I was not afraid to talk about it. I understood that there were a lot of things that I could do myself. For example, I could stand up in front of class and tell how things were. That really demanded courage in that age.” (Tone, 18)

When she entered upper secondary school, she attended a course at an upper secondary school for hard of hearing pupils. This was another positive, learning experience to her. She and her co-pupils made a presentation about themselves for their teachers at their own schools.

“After that presentation, I changed my mind regarding wearing an hearing aid. Earlier, I had been concerned about what I should show other people. Now I am thinking that if other people are engrossed by my hearing aid, it is their problem, since they do not learn to know me.” (Tone, 18)

Tone has grown into a confident girl, and said that her hearing impairment has not influenced her educational plans or choice of course in upper secondary school:

“I have been determined to make it. My mom has had the same focus as I. My performances in school have shown the teachers that there are no hindrances. In school, they have sometimes tried to make me less hard of hearing than I really am. Sometimes, for example when I came home from the courses at the other school, they thought that I tried to make myself more hard of hearing than I really am.” (Tone, 18)

Tone overtly states that the courses in the schools for the Deaf or hard of hearing have been important to her and her awareness as a hard of hearing person. She has got ideas, confidence, awareness and support from the special education support system. At the same time, she has been given confidence and responsibility from her own school. The combination of support from an external service and equal treatment from school seem to be a satisfying solution to Tone. However, Tone is also critical about what steps her mother had to take before she got the support she needed. The support from the special education support system was important, both to Tone, and to the adaptations her school had to make in order to make provision for her and her hearing impairment. Tone is treated like any other clever pupil, and has been given tasks that fit her abilities. However, when some of the teachers in her school claimed that she tries to make herself “more hard of hearing than she really is”, this may indicate an attempt to render her hearing impairment invisible. She has been encouraged to “overcome” the hearing impairment, and aim for whatever she desires to do. She has eventually found herself able to do this, but will have to continuously work at balancing two things. On one hand, she must be aware of her needs as a hard of hearing person, and learn what she must expect from her surroundings for optimal personal functioning. On the other, she is continuously being encouraged to perform like a person who is not hard of hearing. She does not seem to see herself in a state of limbo, but the message from the school may add ambiguity to the situation she is in.

Frode is another hard of hearing pupil who attended a public lower secondary school. He is now a pupil at a school for the Deaf where the teachers and classmates use sign language. He was much more ambivalent than Tone about his visits to a school for the Deaf when he was in lower secondary school:

“I visited a school two or three times, but I did not like it. The other pupils behaved so strange. They were not like me. They were different. They had other interests and did not want to have contact with me. I do not know if it was because they were in a school for Deaf and I was mainstreamed.” (Frode, 20)

In elementary school, Frode went to a school with a few other deaf and hard of hearing children. The teacher used signed Norwegian, or an interpreter was provided. When he entered lower secondary school, he entered a large public school, being one of two hard of hearing students in the entire school. At the new school, the teacher used no sign language. A cordless sound amplifier was used in addition to Frode’s hearing aid. When comparing the learning situation in lower secondary school and upper secondary school, he said:

“My parents had to help me every day to get through school. I had no time off after school and I also got less challenging homework than my classmates. My

teacher believed the final exams would be too hard for me to accomplish, so I only received a leaving certificate. At the school where I am now, I get more help and the instructions seem to be better.” (Frode, 20)

Frode’s situation was quite different to that of Tone. Almost all of Tone’s experiences of the adaptations that have been made to assist her to get through school are positive. She received positive advice on how to deal with her hearing impairment. At the same time, the school did not allow her hearing loss to influence her education or to reduce the level of performance they expected from her. Frode did not experience the same support from the special education support system, nor did he receive the same education as his hearing classmates. As a result, his possibilities seem to be restricted, and he reported a sense of not fitting in anywhere.

The interviews revealed that satisfaction with advice provided to respondents varied. Maja was one of the youths who said that her advisor primarily took her hearing loss into account, thereby devaluing her other interests and abilities. Frode, however, had to fight with his parents about his educational path:

“My parents told me to take arts and crafting. I did not want to do that, but they were stubborn, so I thought I could give it a try. But I left after three months. I did not like it. Then I went home and worked in my father’s factory for two years.” (Frode, 20)

At the time of the survey he was taking a vocational course at an upper secondary school for the Deaf in another city, and seemed satisfied with this choice, although he was not sure whether he would be able to get a job once he left school. It was his former teacher who encouraged him to re-enter school. At the time of the interview, he lived close to the school, and planned to go back to his home town to look for a job when he finished school.

Educational expectations

The further education plans of the respondents do not seem to differ much from their hearing age mates. Thirty four percent of all respondents were aiming for higher education after finishing secondary school. In 1997, the proportion of people aged 19–24 undertaking higher education was 26,9%.¹¹ Due to the low number of respondents, we will be careful about making conclusions, but it may seem like Deaf and hard of hearing youth have about the same plans for education their as hearing age mates, an assumption supported by Olsen (1999). More pupils in

¹¹ http://www.ssb.no/emner/04/utdanning_as/9901/9901v01.shtml

Table 16 Course compared to ambition level

	Upper secondary school or vocational training		University or college		Not decided yet		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
General studies	2	6	19	54	14	40	35	100
Arts or sports	1	20			4	80	5	100
Vocational training	11	37	7	23	12	40	12	40
All	14	20	26	37	30	43	70	100

general studies are planning to continue their education in a university or college than pupils in vocational training.

More girls (46%) than boys (14%) planned to enter college or university. This is also in accordance with the otherwise observed pattern, as about 60% of the population undertaking higher education are now women.¹² Many of the boys who replied to the questionnaire went to a school which greatly emphasised vocational training. This may reinforce the difference among the sexes in this survey.

A most striking difference in ambition level can be seen when considering major language(s) of instruction in elementary school. At the time the respondents received their elementary education, only the regional or central schools for the Deaf had sign language as the main instructional language, although the sign language qualifications of teachers varied.

Eleven percent of the respondents who received their education in sign language only (and thus have only attended a school for the Deaf), planned to undertake more education after leaving upper secondary school, while 64% of those who had received their education in only Norwegian (and had been following a mainstream education progress) were aiming for further education. The schools for the Deaf have been and are crucial language and cultural shelters, but the flip side of this system might be what we can see here. The use of signs have been banned for long

Table 17 Language of instruction at primary school and desired level of education

	Upper secondary school		University or college		Not decided yet		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Norwegian	1	7	9	64	4	29	14	100
Both languages ^a	8	21	15	39	16	41	39	100
NTS	6	33	2	11	10	56	18	100
All	15	21	26	37	30	42	71	100

^a The 'both languages' option does not differ between a bilingual approach (where NTS has been used as a language of instruction and Norwegian has been taught through NTS or written mediums) and sign supported Norwegian. This should therefore not be confused with bilingual education.

¹² <http://www.ssb.no/aarbok/fig/f-040240-191.html>

times, partly due to a devaluation of the potential of sign language.¹³ Low levels of expectation about the possible academic achievements of Deaf and hard of hearing pupils have been widespread (Lane 1992). The schools have gone through major changes in the past 10–20 years, but reports from the interviewees reveal that low academic expectations and prejudices still prevail. However, it is also important to notice that more than half of those who had used sign language as a language of instruction in primary school had not yet decided which educational level they would aim for. It is thus very possible that more pupils will consider higher education later.

The prejudices Maja experienced from her counsellor at the school for the Deaf are not unique. General studies are generally more theoretically advanced than vocational courses but, despite Maja's excellent marks and Norwegian literacy, her counsellor's attitude reflected a tradition of low expectations of the potential of Deaf children. Comments from almost all Deaf interviewees and the data in Table 17 make it reasonable to conclude that low expectations still prevail in several schools for the Deaf. Oline (20) went to a school for the hearing impaired from 1st to 7th grade, and moved to a school for the Deaf when she entered lower secondary school, partly due to social reasons. She said she had made closer friends at the school for the Deaf than she had ever had at the school for the hard of hearing, but quickly noticed the difference in level of education:

“I was far ahead of the other pupils in my new class at the new school. They had an English book for 6th grade when they really were in the 9th grade. All of a sudden, I also got As in English. When I was at the other school, I had only Cs and Ds.” (Oline, 20)

Oline said she was in no mood to accept the treatment she got. She admitted that she was rude at times, but was still shocked by the response from the teachers when she tried to comment on the low educational level:

“The teachers were too protective and “understanding” at the new school. If we had not done homework, they said “oh poor you, this must be too difficult for you”. When they treated us that way, they did not get much respect from us. But when I protested and told them to quit threatening us as if we were stupid, I was thrown right out of the classroom. I asked why we were treated like we did not know anything, but the only reply I got was that they did not want to see “manners like that”, and sent me out.” (Oline, 20)

¹³ Only in the 1970s were signs commonly recognised as an “appropriate tool” in the education of deaf children. The right of deaf and hard of hearing sign language users to receive their education in sign language was legally implemented in Norway only in 1997.

None of the interviewees spoke about having been sent out of class, but Oline's familiarity with low-level education is not unique to her. Trine, who went to another school for the Deaf, has also had experiences of low levels of instruction:

"In lower secondary school, the instructions were easy, even if most of the teachers knew sign language. But there were large differences. Some teachers put really high demands on us, while others did not demand anything from us. One example of the latter is when we had a quick test, and the answers were enclosed." (Trine, 16)

Helene (16) was the only hard of hearing pupil in her local lower secondary school, and had an interpreter during the lessons. When she entered upper secondary school, she noticed a difference between herself and her classmates who had been at a school for the Deaf.

"It is as if there was an attitude saying "they are deaf, so...." at the school for the Deaf. I think it has helped me a lot to attend a hearing school for four years. Now, the level is a little bit low. I am at another level than those from the school for the Deaf, and feel that I can relax a bit in class." (Helene, 16)

Helene said she was tired at the end of the day in lower secondary school. After finishing homework, she did not have much energy left for a social life with her peers. Her sense of being able to relax in class may also be connected with the strenuous effort she was used to having to mobilise to follow the instructions in lower secondary school. At the upper secondary school she did not have to make any effort to grasp what her classmates and teachers were communicating. Her sense of ease may have been influenced by the level of the education and her previous experience of straining to understand what was being communicated.

Tone's experiences of receiving equal education in a public school may also throw light on the large differences in ambitions. She had managed to balance support from courses in the special education support system and an encouragement in school to overlook her impairment, and had been expected to perform like any other young person at her age. She has been pushed towards "normality" rather than let her hearing impairment stop her. This contrasts with the experiences of Frode and many of the interviewees who had attended schools for the Deaf. But some of the pupils in schools for the Deaf spoke about exceptions. Simone had a teacher in Norwegian, who was also Deaf:

"It's thanks to my teacher in Norwegian, who is Deaf, that I am so competent in Norwegian. She was an excellent teacher in Norwegian. The teachers at Valley were continuously comparing us to the hearing pupils at the school at the other side of the school yard, and the education level was adequate." (Simone, 16)

The stories of low expectations seem familiar and expected. Some of the young people who feel they have received an adequate education underline a sense of being lucky, like Simone and Maja does. Maja's experience with the counsellor was not very good, but about her teacher, she had this to say:

"At the upper secondary school I am attending now, we are evaluated on par with the hearing pupils at the same school. But I was frustrated several times at my old school because of the low level. However, my form teacher was a really good one, and compared our performances with the performances of the pupils at a neighbouring school. So I was lucky. Many of the other teachers were not fluent in sign language, and their instructions were so slow. Everything depends on the sign language competence of the teachers." (Maja, 16)

The sign language competence of the teachers seems to be another source of frustration and despair. Marianne said:

"Some of the teachers sign okay. Some are – uhm – funny to watch." (Marianne, 17)

Ida had a more serious critique of the sign language competence of the teachers:

"Some of our teachers are good signers, but others are not that good, for example, our form teacher. I do not understand much of what she is talking about. She has so many strange signs. She loses authority in class, for sure, when she cannot sign properly. I miss much of the instructions and I am getting tired of school because of her low signing competence." (Ida, 16)

The numerous reports from the interviews and data in Table 17 point to a structuralised pattern of low expectations of the theoretical and academic potential of the pupils in some schools for the Deaf. However, the young people we interviewed seemed to have found ways to overcome this, and had not allowed the attitudes of their teachers or counsellors to influence their ambitions for the future.

There are small differences between those who identify themselves as Deaf respectively hard of hearing in educational plans, and the overall ambition level seems to be on level with the education level of hearing age mates. The pattern of high ambitions was confirmed during the interviews. When we asked about future plans during the interviews, the goals and plans were no less ambitious than those of their hearing age mates. Among those having made any decisions about their future career, occupations like oceanologist, sign language researcher, lawyer/advocate, TV journalist, estate agent/ manager, teacher, designer and business manager were mentioned. When we asked interviewees if they could foresee possible hindrances for their goal of obtaining the necessary education or position, the lack of welfare services or adaptations were rarely mentioned. Failing exams or not

working hard enough were mentioned as possible obstacles as frequently as, for example, a lack of interpreters or communication problems:

“I am a little bit afraid to work only with hearing people, but I know I have to do that to get the job I want. So I hope I am going to make it. My parents do not like attitudes like “I can’t because I am Deaf”. So I hope the obstacles don’t come because I am Deaf. Being Deaf is no hindrance. If I do not get an interpreter, I’ll hire my own.” (Marianne, 17)

Many respondents took access to sign language interpreters for granted, or perhaps the young people we surveyed are in a phase of their lives where they have not yet experienced using interpreters on an everyday or broad basis. At the same time, this individualistic position can make them more vulnerable. Having grown up in a post modern era, the:

“... freedom of choice and the personal responsibility to form their own destiny and self-identity is not only something these youngsters have captured or chosen, but also something they are fated to. And young people, independently of personal advantages, seem to have accepted that as a fact” (Sandvin 2003:17).

The youth are indeed aware of the obstacles and discrimination Deaf and hard of hearing people face, but the very same obstacles and discrimination may make them less likely to succeed than hearing age peers. Being their own stakeholders in their own life project, where interest and personal preferences are guiding them, they will eventually not have anyone to blame if their plans fail (Sandvin 2003).

Conclusion

The low number of pupils in upper secondary schools for the Deaf or hard of hearing, limits the subjects available to students. Some of the interviewees have had to choose between a school where they can communicate with their peers or a school which offers the courses they want. Even though the opportunities are fewer in a school for the Deaf or hard of hearing, several prefer a school with other Deaf or hard of hearing pupils to risking being the only Deaf or hard of hearing pupil in a large public school. The special education support system, which the schools are a part of, is also important for those pupils surveyed who attend public schools. They get both advice and support on how to deal with the classroom instructions and necessary adaptations at school.

The schools for the Deaf are crucial language and culture shelters, but the flip side is low expectations, preserving discriminatory attitudes and, as a consequence of this, a reproduction of unequal opportunities.

The general ambition level is high. The interviewees foresaw few or small hindrances to achieving their goals. Some mentioned hearing loss, lack of interpreters and other factors as possible obstacles, but highlighted their own role and willingness to work hard as critical success factors.

Concluding remarks

A new generation

There has been a change of policy from unilaterally trying to teach deaf and hard of hearing children to speak their parents' language, to teaching the parents their children's language. The increased acceptance and visibility of sign language in public life have also reduced the traditional stigma attached to Deaf people. This has given this generation of youth quite another experience of growing up deaf or hard of hearing than the previous generation. In the first chapter, we asked two questions, which are interrelated. The first was whether inherent in the welfare state is an inherent normalising ideology, which considers welfare services to have been successful whenever users adopt a "normal" lifestyle. The next question was how the youth cope with being labelled "special" or disabled, while simultaneously being potential members of a cultural minority of sign language users, and how this influence their world views and identification. The way these questions were posed could intimate a possible conflict between an implicit normalising ideology in the welfare state and the celebration of difference within the Deaf community.

While there may be a conflict at a discursive or theoretical level, we have found little evidence of a conflict in the lives of the youth we interviewed. Many easily shift between different spheres of understanding deafness and/ or disability. Few consider themselves disabled, but still overtly state that they take advantage of the benefits they are entitled to because of their "official" status as disabled. Also, several of the official measures for Deaf people taken over the past decades have recognised what the Deaf community has claimed for years. The Norwegian Association of the Deaf has insisted on the use of sign language as a means of including Deaf people. The youth surveyed in this project is the first generation that have grown up at a time when sign language is relatively widely accepted. Their experiences of growing up Deaf or hard of hearing are therefore probably different compared to those of the older generation. Many said that they have been included in their early years and expect to be included in their adult lives, too. However, in this manner, differences can be seen between those who have experienced rel-

actively trouble-free communication at home, and those who have had to struggle to be included because their parents had not learned sign language. If a child is defined as a sign language user, this has consequences both for the language of instruction in school, the curricula, and the parents' opportunities to learn sign language. Many hard of hearing children may have been able to learn spoken Norwegian quite well, but they still do not hear well enough to participate on equal terms in social interaction with non-signers. As the interviews have revealed, many report a sense of exclusion in their own families, and experiences of falling between two stools. The association of hard of hearing people in Norway has recently emphasised that hard of hearing children also need sign language, and should be offered the opportunity to achieve bilingual competence, like Deaf children already are.¹⁴ This proposal coincides very well with the conclusions in this report. Sign language competence makes both the child and his or her family more flexible, and gives them more arenas for communication than what knowledge of spoken Norwegian alone can offer.

It stands to reason to expect that those who have experienced full access to family life will not accept limited access to society in their adult life. Many have experienced being insiders in their families, and expect to be treated as insiders in a hearing society too. Several of the Deaf and hard of hearing young people in this survey perceived themselves as obvious participants in a variety of scenes and contexts, both in hearing and Deaf worlds. In practice, many of them are uniting worlds that traditionally have been divided by language barriers.

Issues for further investigation

This report is the result of the first of two phases of the "Children of the normalising ideology" project. The initial plan was to conduct an identical survey and identical interviews with the same informants two years after the first survey. As a result of what we have experienced during the first phase, this strategy will be changed slightly. Preparing and conducting the quantitative survey took a disproportionate amount of time and effort, given the low number of respondents. It has therefore been decided to conduct only the qualitative interviews in the next phase, re-interviewing as many people as possible.

What has emerged through the interviews we conducted, several issues, which we see that the youth have no or little insight into, have been disclosed. These are

¹⁴ http://www.hlf.no/oslo/hlf.nsf/672b76bef9874edac1256b3d003b4033/6b263e4f29ed3b4441256c3e003c51c5?OpenDocument&Highlight=2,_uehimerjje1p8cqo_

still of importance for their lives and identifications, and we will therefore focus more extensively on those in the next phase.

The role of the parents

Many of our respondents told us about parents who have taken care of everything from getting flashing lamps at home, making decisions about school and learning sign language. The youth seem to have little experience with negotiating with social security offices or other welfare service providers in order to access services or technical aids. In the next phase we intend to interview a few parents to ask them about the actions they have taken and the experiences they have from meetings with welfare providers on behalf of their child(ren).

Youth outside the special education support system

All of the youth interviewed in this survey are either pupils at a school for the Deaf or hard of hearing or have a close connection to one. We plan to consult some of the consultants for hearing-impaired pupils (fylkesaudiopedagogene) to get more information about Deaf or hard of hearing youth who are not pupils in these schools, to gauge the extent to which they receive support from others, and to establish whether they are undertaking upper secondary education at all.

Low expectations

Low expectations about the academic results that Deaf and hard of hearing children are able to achieve are still evident in some of the schools, in contrast to the movement towards inclusion and teaching parents sign language. To the extent that the pupils in our survey have experienced systematic discrimination, this discrimination seems to have occurred in schools. The schools are an arena where “the relationship between discrimination on the basis of both perceived impairment and discrimination on the basis of perceived generational location” (Priestley 2001:246) is highlighted in the case of Deaf and hard of hearing youth and children. Several informants were very critical about the instruction they received in school, but schools with both Deaf/hard of hearing and hearing pupils tend to be viewed in a more positive light than schools which only cater for Deaf pupils. Teachers in mixed schools may have more opportunities to discuss the performance of pupils with a larger group of colleagues. The Deaf and hard of hearing pupils may eventually become less ‘special’ when compared to hearing children and youth of the same age, and the teachers may be prevented from making overprotective measures towards their Deaf and hard of hearing pupils.

A life course approach

The youth we surveyed showed a clear tendency to speak of their lives as an individualistic project. In this, they are typical representatives of youth in the year 2003. Their lives as Deaf or hard of hearing persons are different to the lives of Deaf and hard of hearing people just a few years older. They take access and inclusion for granted, and are only to concerned with the traditional borders between Deaf and hearing worlds to a small degree. In the next phase of the project, we may lay greater emphasis on a life course approach, since it “offers a unique way to make links between the individual lived experience of disability and the macro-social context in which disabled lives are played out.” (Priestley 2001:245) The youth discussed their lives as if it they were full of potential opportunities and trajectories which they were free to choose. However, as they are yet on the threshold of adult life outside the sheltered environments that family and school offer, they may be faced with more obstacles than they really are aware of at the time they were interviewed. When we start the next phase of the research project, all the respondents will have reached legal age, and many will have moved on with their lives, either for further education or work. Using a life course approach in the next round of interviews may trigger more reflections from the youth about their own life and future opportunities as Deaf and hard of hearing people of tomorrow.

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Uniting divided worlds

This report is based on a study of living conditions among Deaf and hard of hearing people between 16 and 20 years old. A major question posed in the project is whether there is an implicit and inherent normalisation ideology in the welfare state, which considers welfare services to be successful whenever the users adopt a "normal" lifestyle. This study indicates that this young generation does not identify with the concept normal, but demands the right to be accepted as they are.

One of the major findings in this study is that sign language seems to be a language of inclusion, not exclusion. Unlike earlier generations of sign language users, many have experienced linguistic inclusion at home through parents who have been given the opportunity to learn sign language. Among those who have not experienced the same degree of inclusion and acceptance at home, questions of belonging to Deaf or hearing worlds seem to add pressure to the anxiety often connected to the teenage years.

The study was concentrated around the young people's views on education, family relations and identification. Many see themselves as obvious participants in family life and in various local and global scenes and contexts both in hearing and Deaf worlds. They are uniting worlds that traditionally have been divided by language barriers.



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