Marriage & Hearing Loss
Oh My!

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Fundamental to human existence
Human beings are social creatures and desire close and intimate connection with others
Relationships bring us life’s greatest satisfaction
Marital Relationships

- Marital relationships are difficult!
- Rate of divorce for people with hearing loss
  - Mild – similar to current population norm
  - Severe – 4 times higher current population norm
Humans

- Capacity for life-long growth
- Continually learning about, adding to and changing personal and marital identities
  - In part through communication
    - Communicate and interact with each other we learn about self and identity as couple
Communication plays dual function in development of marital identity

1\textsuperscript{st} function – create marital identity, (who you are as a couple), through face-to-face communication

2\textsuperscript{nd} function – sustain the marital identity by “working out, clarifying or repairing conflicting or ambiguous meanings” perceived by each partner
Effective communication is an integral component of a marriage relationship because marital identity is established through it. Without appropriate, meaningful communication, this identity is compromised, and the relationship will not thrive and may not survive.
Hearing Loss and Communication

- Hearing loss compromises communication in marriage
  - Results in reduced emotional and physical intimacy
How is Intimacy Reduced?

- Impact of hearing loss
- Complexity of communication
  - Use of poor coping strategies
- Negative attributions
- Unrealistic expectations
- Dependency issues
- Gender differences
What is the psychosocial impact of hearing loss on person with loss and their partner?
People with hearing loss are more likely to experience:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>increased anger</th>
<th>discontentment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>frustration</td>
<td>depression</td>
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<tr>
<td>paranoia</td>
<td>being temperamental</td>
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<tr>
<td>insecurity</td>
<td>being more fearful</td>
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<tr>
<td>instability</td>
<td>being more self-critical</td>
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<tr>
<td>nervousness</td>
<td>suffering from a sense of inferiority</td>
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<tr>
<td>tension</td>
<td>social phobias</td>
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<tr>
<td>anxiety</td>
<td>being perceived as confused</td>
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<td>irritability</td>
<td>disorientation or the inability to concentrate</td>
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Research Supports

- Spouses and family members are also significantly impacted by their loved one’s hearing loss.
- They often experience feelings of loneliness, depression, anger, frustration, anxiety, impatience, and irritability.
- They may experience increased levels of stress and feel unimportant or unloved.
Communication is Complex

- 3 Channels of communication
  - Listener
  - Speaker
  - Environment

- Use positive communication strategies and repair strategies when necessary
  - Avoid poor coping strategies – bluffing, dominating and withdrawal
Positive Communication Strategies

- Use rules for communication
- What positive communication strategies can be used?
Attributions

- Understanding how individuals perceive and explain the causes of behavior and events and subsequent effects of such perceptions and explanations.
- People typically explain others’ behavior in terms of internal (personal) rather than external (situational) factors.
Negative Attributions

- Accurate perceptions and interpretations of spouses’ behavior is imperative for intimate relationship to function effectively.
- Attribute problems experienced secondary to hearing loss to character of person rather than hearing loss, results in reduced marital satisfaction.
Unrealistic Expectations

- Walking a mile in my shoes
- Loved ones will forget
- Hearing aids don’t give you 20/20 hearing
Dependency Issues

- Often become overly dependent on others
  - Places considerable strain on marital relationship
- Work to become assertive, rather than use aggressive, passive-aggressive, or passive communication styles
  - Key word for assertive behavior is respect
Spouse should not assume responsibility where it isn’t warranted

› To avoid embarrassment, may monitor conversations, to ensure appropriate response

› May respond without permission from person with loss
Gender Differences

- **Men**
  - Task focused
  - Process emotion through action
  - Approach communication to express facts for purpose of exchanging information

- **Women**
  - Relationship focused
  - Process emotion through verbal communication
  - Approach communication with desire to connect, increase emotional intimacy by disclosing feelings
The major differences in communication patterns between genders suggests changes in marital communication secondary to hearing loss may affect men and woman quite differently.
Intimacy in Marriage

- All intimacy in a relationship comes from communicating our feelings to one another
  - Accomplished through effective verbal and non-verbal communication
  - Verbal communication is a critical component in the development and maintenance of emotional intimacy
Emotional Intimacy

- Expressing and listening to each other’s feelings, thoughts, desires, doubts, joys, and fears; attending to, understanding and accepting one another’s “true self”
  - verbal communication
- Vital to women
- Plays a strong role in marital satisfaction
Physical Intimacy

- For woman to engage in physical intimacy, their emotional intimacy needs must be met
  - Affection is important to women – hugs, holding hands, snuggling

- Typically more important to men
  - Men, more than women, base their feelings of closeness on and express their love through sex, shared activities, practical help, economic support, or just being in the other’s presence
Physical Intimacy

- Hearing aids in or out?
- Constant wear and tear on relationship
- Fatigue
- Depression/negative affect
- Negative attributions
- Low self-esteem
Conclusion

- Communication is vital to marriage
- Hearing loss has profound impact on individual with loss, their spouse and the marriage
- Heightened awareness, education and counseling are needed
Reference