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Annotated Bibliography

American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb: Causes of Deafness

MLA Reference:

American Asylum, At Hartford, For the Education and Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, and Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf and Dumb. *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb*. Hartford: Brown & Parsons, 1847. V. 1-2, 25-32

Major Topics:

This article discusses the many different causes of deafness. The author premises his argument by first stating that a wide variety exists among deaf individuals. He then explains the process by which deaf children become conscience of their differences. He states that they “perceive that [others] have sensations and modes of communicating” which they do not and begin to question why they specifically are deaf” (25). The author begins by distinguishing between two types of deafness: congenital deafness and accidental deafness. Then in detail, the author explains the actual malformation that occurs within the ear when an individual becomes deaf as well as the intricate parts of the organs of hearing. The author explains how being born with one of these malformations means that an individual has congenital deafness. Once the author prepares the foundation for understanding deafness, he discusses the various causes of deafness that some people believe to be true without validifying them himself: deafness through mental impressions of the mother prior to birth, intermarriage, and congenital deafness to the second child after the first acquires deafness. Finally, the author shifts to detailing well-known causes of accidental deafness such as fevers, local diseases, and injuries.

Key Concepts:

Deaf-mutes	People lacking the sense of hearing and the ability to speak. Deaf-mutes are seldom entirely destitute of hearing. They can all perceive sounds through feeling, but some can also hear sounds through the ear. Ex: Some can hear loud noises such as cannons while others can hear the louder tones of a human voice.
Cause of dumbness (inability to speak)	It is commonly believed that anyone unable to speak is deaf, however, deafness is not the sole cause. The cause is usually a physical difference that occurs within the child's brain during infancy.
Congenital deafness	Loss of hearing that is present at birth.
Accidental deafness	Also known as "acquired deafness". It is hearing loss that occurs sometime in a person's life but was not present at birth.
The organs of hearing	The ear/organs of hearing consist of three main parts: the outer, middle, and inner ear. The outer ear consists of the pinna and the external auditory canal. The middle ear consists of the three ossicles, and the inner

	consists of the semicircular canals, the vestibule, and the cochlea.
Malformation of the organs of hearing	If any malformation exists within the ear, deafness will be the result. Ex: The membranes are too thick or the inner ear contains mucous, bloody, or indurated matter instead of limpid fluid.
Scrofula	A condition in which the bacteria from tuberculosis causes inflamed and irritated lymph nodes. It is an important agent in causing deafness.
Mental impressions	Although most psychologists deny any affects associated with metal impressions, many believe that they are a probable cause for deafness of children. Ex: Mrs. M from a small town in Massachusetts went to a funeral a few months before the birth of her second child, and she saw a deaf and mute woman for the first time. She witnessed this woman let out a huge cry of grief. She had this image in her head for weeks, and as she feared her child was born deaf and mute.

Accidental deafness of the first child and congenital deafness of the second child	Several families have reported having their first child acquire hearing loss over time and their second child being born deaf. The oldest child became deaf through some form of disease. Ex: W.B. of Massachusetts lost his hearing due to ulcers at eighteen months. The next child born into his family was born unable to hear.
Intermarriage of near relations	Intermarriage appears to be a factor in the deafness of children. Ex: Mr. M of New Hampshire married his cousin and all four of his children were born both deaf and mute.
Most common cause of accidental deafness	The most common reason people become deaf after birth is a fever in its various forms. Fevers cause inflammation upon the auditory nerve and portions of the brain. This causes paralysis or insensibility to impressions from sounds. The specific form of this disease which most frequently results in hearing loss is the scarlet fever.

	Ex: The majority of pupils at the American Asylum attribute their acquired deafness to the scarlet fever.
Local disease and deafness	Local diseases which result in a scrofulous habit cause inflammation in the head and the formation of ulcers. These ulcers discharge from the ear and lead to hearing loss. Ex: Measles and various diseases
Injury and deafness	Injury from falls, blows, and other casualties can disrupt the internal organs of hearing or cause a concussion of the brain. These destroy the individual's ability to receive impressions from sounds. Ex: Experiencing a blow from football or falling in the rain and landing on one's head.
Marriage among the Deaf	Before deaf individuals were educated, they avoided marriage and very few had children. The proportion of their pupils that had deaf children to those having none was one to twenty. Therefore, the probability is so slight that it should not deter the Deaf from having children.

	Ex: L.S. of Connecticut with congenital deafness married a hearing woman and had seven children-five of which were deaf. Ex: N.B. of New Hampshire also married a woman who could hear and had two deaf children.
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Main concepts:

The author believes that all individuals are different and that a huge range exists among the Deaf Community in terms of severity. He separates deaf individuals into two main categories: those that are congenitally deaf and those that acquire deafness later in life. The author accepts that not every person can fit perfectly into one of these two categories. However, he still finds these two to be most useful when examining the cause of deafness. He explains how we are unable to determine the exact cause of congenital deafness while the individual is alive, since “most of the organs of hearing are concealed from observation in the bony cavities of the head” (27). He also details a few other possible causes of congenital deafness while refraining from committing to their validity such as mental impressions of the mother and intermarriage. The author does believe, on the other hand, that with enough evidence and inference one can determine the exact cause of an individual’s accidental deafness. The author discusses some probable causes of accidental deafness such as a blow to the head, a fever, or some local illness. However, he does acknowledge that acquiring deafness through a fever or illness can be difficult to infer if the child has not yet begun communicating.

Overall Conclusions:

After covering these main causes of deafness, the author articulates his opinion on the fear that deaf individuals possess to have children. Although there are numerous ways to either be born deaf or acquire deafness later in life, the author believes that the probability of having deaf children “is so slight that it need not deter them” (32). No matter what, the author believes that deaf individuals raise their children well to become “useful and respectful members of the community,” and that they should not live in fear of slight possibilities (32).

Relation to class:

As discussed in class, it is extremely important for children to receive some form of a newborn hearing test. This allows the parents and doctors to determine immediately if there is any congenital deafness. Then, if necessary, later on another test can be administered to determine if hearing loss has occurred over time. As the author discusses, it can be difficult to depict the exact event or circumstance that led to a child’s deafness. Therefore, it is extremely important to have tests done and be aware of the child’s language development. As we have learned in class, early identification of hearing loss greatly improves the quality of life of the child. Immediate support decreases the barriers to language learning providing more communication experiences which supports academic progress and social-economic functioning.

Comments/how this will help in the future:

Not only did this article teach me more about the many ways that individuals become deaf, but it gave me a whole new perspective on how different each deaf individual’s story is. I now realize just how important it is to remember that each person in the Deaf Community is

there for a different reason. Some people have been deaf since birth while others may have experienced a traumatic accident or a deadly sickness that resulted in their hearing loss. I think this is an extremely important thing to remember as I begin to teach and work with deaf children. I need to be conscious of each individual's unique story and be aware of how it might be affecting them and their ability to perform in certain circumstances. Overall, this article has shown me a new way of looking at the Deaf Community.