Attachment and acculturation as catalysts for perceiving life as meaningful: A critical analysis

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In 2018, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released a report stating the rise of suicide rates in nearly every state in the United States of America. “Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death” in the country and one of only “three leading causes that are on the rise” (CDC, 2018). Turner, Windfuhr, and Kapur (2007) found that while studies report higher rates of depression and perceived suicide risk among individuals who are deaf, the existing literature on suicide among individuals who are deaf is sparse, piecemeal, and not representative of the general deaf population. This finding is made all the more troubling when the same authors provide the reminder that existing research report higher rates of psychiatric disorders among individuals who are deaf compared to their hearing peers while individuals who are deaf also encounter more barriers to accessing mental health services than their hearing peers (Turner, Windfuhr, & Kapur, 2007).

The culturally Deaf community is often seen as a source of empowerment. Hamill and Stein (2011) report that while 35 million people in the United States are deaf or hard of hearing, only 500,000 of them perceive their hearing status from a cultural perspective. To better address the rise in deaths by suicide throughout the country, this critical analysis reviews existing literature on protective factors within Deaf culture and explores ways in which protective factors within the hearing population may apply to this historically underrepresented and underserved population, with a special interest in those who are underrepresented within the Deaf community.

Existing literature on secure attachment style, Deaf acculturation, and perceiving one’s life as meaningful show that individuals reporting high scores across these constructs report greater longevity, enhanced motivation and work performance, self-regulation, and resilience, as well as better overall psychological and physical health (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964; Hamill & Stein, 2011; Harlow, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1986; Padden &
Identifying as culturally Deaf is generally positively correlated with self-esteem and a “sense of agency” (Hamill & Stein, 2011). Padden and Humphries (1988) noted that for some, in contrast to the hearing world, Deaf community can be experienced as the only place where a Deaf individual feels equal. The above findings mean less depression and anxiety, which are strong predictors of suicidality (Debats et al., 1993; Eisenberg, Gollust, Golberstein, & Hefner, 2007; Henry, Lovegrove, Steger, Chen, Cigularov, & Tomazic, 2014; Kleiman & Beaver, 2013; Mascaro & Rosen, 2005; Thompson, Mazza, Herting, Randell, & Eggert, 2005).
References


