Friday, November 27th

CODA SYMPOSIUM

Resilience and Empowerment Among Hearing Children of Deaf Adults

Background

Approximately 90% of children born to Deaf parents are hearing, commonly known as Codas (Children of deaf adults). While rooted in Deaf culture and fluent in sign language, CODAs frequently exist as a "hidden minority." Support systems often overlook them, focusing instead on Deaf parents or Deaf siblings. Because CODAs are perceived to belong to the hearing majority, their unique struggles with stigma, indirect discrimination, and complex gender dynamics are largely ignored by social work, education, and healthcare professionals. This systemic neglect directly impacts children's rights and inclusion, conflicting with UN Sustainable Development Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities). This symposium places CODAs at the centre of inquiry. It provides a vital platform for them to share their lived experiences and narratives. Ultimately, the event explores how CODAs navigate dual identities and familial expectations, highlighting their intrinsic agency, community resilience, and empowerment.

Key words: Children of deaf adults, CODA, resilience, empowerment, indirect stigma, deaf parents, deaf children, hearing children, sign language.

Themes

Children of Deaf adults: Stories and Storytelling: The theme of stories and storytelling is built on research and evidence-based methodologies that demonstrate that the process of telling and sharing stories help us make sense of the Coda world in a way that connects and resonates with others.

Indirect Stigma from the CODA Perspective: This theme explores case studies on how hearing children of Deaf adults (CODAs) navigate indirect stigma throughout childhood, youth, and adulthood. While Deaf parents face direct stigmatisation, CODAs experience indirect stigma—bias stemming from familial ties to a marginalised group. This session examines how CODAs negotiate these unique social challenges across their lifespans.

Community Resilience, Agency and Empowerment in Deaf Parented Families: This theme explores the role of deaf parents in fostering community resilience for Codas through community connection, shared cultural values and a sense of identity and collective belonging in the Coda community and deaf community. Social networks with deaf adults and their children play a crucial role in developing resilience, agency and empowerment.

Friday, November 27th

CODA SYMPOSIUM

Resilience and Empowerment Among Hearing Children of Deaf Adults

9:00 - 09:30 AM	**Registration** Registration at the Aula Maxima, UCC and virtual login
9:30 – 09:45 AM	**Opening Address** Professor Stephen Graham, Head of the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences, UCC
9:45 – 10:00 AM	**Introduction** Introdcution to the event by Dr Noel O'Connell
10:00 – 10:55 AM	**Sign language brokering as a form of Shame Resilience in Children of Deaf Parents** presented by Professor Jemina Napier
11:00 – 11:55 AM	**Panel discussion** Heritage signers: A conversation between researchers, academics, students and CODAs **Chair: Dr Avril Hutch**
11:55 – 12:10 PM	**Coffee break**
12:10 – 1:05 PM	**Resisting Stigma: Resilience and Empowerment Among Hearing Children Deaf Parents – A Qualitative Study** presented by Dr Noel O'Connell
1:05 – 2:00 PM	**Networking Lunch**

Taighde Éireann Research Ireland

Friday, November 27th

CODA SYMPOSIUM

Resilience and Empowerment Among Hearing Children of Deaf Adults

UCC
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh
University College Cork, Ireland

2:00- 2:55 PM	**Irish CODAs Ten Years On: Revisiting Language, Culture and Identity** presented by Dr Caitríona O'Brien
2:55 – 3:25 PM	**CODA experiences of gender in family, school and community contexts** presented by Seda Guektasch, PhD student
3:25 – 3:40 PM	**Coffee break**
3:40 – 4:30 PM	**Community Resilience and What It Means for CODAs and Their Parents** presented by Dr John Bosco Conama
4:30 – 4:45 PM	**Both/And: An Autoethnographic Storytelling Exploration of Coda Identity** presented by Justin A. Read
4:45 – 5:00 PM	**Heritage signers and sign language as a first language: Diverse family settings, education and empowerment** presented by Péter Zalán Herbszt-Romanek
5:00 – 5:15 PM	**Joint Q&A and discussion** with Justin A. Read and Péter Zalán Herbszt-Romanek
5:15 – 5:25 PM	**Closing ceremony** Closing remarks by Professor Maggie O'Neill, Director of the Institute for Social Sciences in the 21st century and UCC Futures: Collective Social Futures.

Taighde Éireann
Research Ireland

CODA RESEARCH

Friday, November 27th

CODA SYMPOSIUM

Resilience and Empowerment Among Hearing Children of Deaf Adults

UCC
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh
University College Cork, Ireland

Presenters

Professor Jemina Napier, is a hearing heritage signer from a multigenerational deaf family, and has practiced as a professional sign language interpreter for over 30 years, working between English and BSL, Auslan or International Sign. Working full-time as Professor of Intercultural Communication at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh, she conducts research on mediated sign language communication, primarily focusing on professional sign language interpreting and access to public services; as well as family language policy and language brokering. She teaches sign language interpreting theory and practice and research methods. Jemina is a Fellow of the UK Academy of Social Sciences and a Corresponding Fellow of the Australian Academy of Humanities; Honorary Professor at Macquarie University and former Visiting Professor at Trinity College Dublin. She has over 150 publications and is the sole author of the books: Sign language brokering in deaf-hearing families (2021), and Linguistic Coping Strategies in Sign Language Interpreting (2016 2nd Ed.)



Presentation title: Sign language brokering as a form of Shame Resilience in Children of Deaf Parents

Abstract
Children of Deaf Adults (Codas) – also known as heritage signers - frequently act as informal mediators between Deaf and hearing worlds through sign language brokering (SLB). This presentation examines SLB as a communicative practice and explores its relationship to stigma, shame, and resilience in Codas. Drawing on a multi-country mixed-methods study involving interviews with heritage signers and Deaf parents, the study investigated experiences of language shaming, deafness stigma, and brokering across the lifespan. Using Brown's theory of shame resilience as a conceptual framework, the findings reveal that Deaf parents and their children often encounter courtesy stigma associated with deafness and sign language use. Nevertheless, sign language brokering emerged as a significant source of resilience. Participants highlighted how brokering fostered strong intercultural communication skills, confidence, advocacy, and a sense of connection to both Deaf and hearing communities. The presentation argues that understanding SLB through the lens of shame resilience and linguistic care work offers new insights into the experiences of Deaf-hearing families and heritage signers. It also highlights the need to better recognise and support the communicative expertise developed through sign language brokering.

Taighde Éireann
Research Ireland

CODA RESEARCH

Friday, November 27th

CODA SYMPOSIUM

Resilience and Empowerment Among Hearing Children of Deaf Adults

Presenters

Dr Caitríona O' Brien, Ph.D., M.Sc., B.A. (French and Spanish), is an Assistant Professor in Applied Sign Linguistics at the Centre for Deaf Studies, Trinity College Dublin. Her research focuses on sign language acquisition, bilingualism, language and identity, and the experiences of deaf people and their families, with a particular emphasis on Irish Sign Language (ISL) and classic grounded theory methodology. Caitríona holds a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics from Trinity College Dublin and an M.Sc. in Applied Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition from the University of Oxford. Her doctoral research developed the Becoming Theory of Parental Transformation, a classic grounded theory examining the experiences of parents raising deaf children in Ireland and acquiring ISL. Her earlier research at Oxford explored bilingualism, biculturalism and identity among Children of Deaf Adults (CODAs) in Ireland, a project she is currently revisiting ten years later to investigate contemporary experiences of language, culture and community belonging. Her recent work includes a book chapter in Grounded Theory in Practice: Real-Life Applications Across Disciplines (Routledge), her doctoral thesis, The Becoming Theory of Parental Transformation: A Grounded Theory Study of Parents Raising Deaf Children in Ireland and Acquiring Irish Sign Language, and a co-authored chapter in the Guide for the Linguistic Inclusion of Migrants (Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca).



She is an active member of the Irish Deaf Research Network and served on its organising committee from 2017 to 2024. Her work is grounded in principles of equity and inclusion, with an emphasis on inclusive education, community-engaged research, and research-informed advocacy and policy. Caitríona believes in the importance of connecting academic research with practical action, particularly in promoting the visibility, use and maintenance of Irish Sign Language. This commitment is reflected in her recent establishment of a weekly ISL conversation circle at Trinity College Dublin.

Presentation title: Irish CODAs Ten Years On: Revisiting Language, Culture and Identity

Abstract
Children of Deaf Adults (CODAs) occupy a distinctive position within Deaf and hearing communities, often growing up navigating different linguistic and cultural environments (Preston, 1994; Pizer et al., 2012; Allard & Roos, 2025). Their experiences raise important questions about bilingualism, biculturalism, identity and community belonging, particularly in relation to the maintenance of sign language and connections with Deaf communities across the lifespan (Grosjean, 2010; Preston, 1995).

Friday, November 27th

CODA SYMPOSIUM

Resilience and Empowerment Among Hearing Children of Deaf Adults

Presenters

In 2016, research exploring the language, culture and identity of Irish CODAs examined how bilingualism, biculturalism and community membership contributed to CODA identity (O' Brien, 2016). Drawing on questionnaires and interviews with 18 adult CODAs, alongside a focus group with three leaders of the Irish Deaf community, the study found that participants identified with a distinct CODA identity, with Irish Sign Language (ISL), English and connections to both Deaf and hearing cultures playing important roles. However, the findings also highlighted tensions surrounding language maintenance, cultural belonging and CODAs' position within Deaf and hearing communities.

Ten years later, the sociolinguistic landscape in Ireland has undergone significant developments. The recognition of ISL through the Irish Sign Language Act 2017, alongside further research examining the experiences of Irish CODAs (Heffernan & Nixon, 2023), provides an opportunity to revisit these findings and consider their continuing relevance. Growing international scholarship examining CODA identity, heritage sign language maintenance and experiences of stigma (Millar & Vione, 2024; Papin & González-Montesino, 2025; O'Connell & Napier, 2026) offers additional perspectives through which to reconsider the original research.

This keynote returns to the original research, reflecting on its findings in light of subsequent developments and introducing a new qualitative follow-up study exploring contemporary experiences of language, culture, identity and community belonging among adult CODAs in Ireland. It considers questions of continuity and change, including how CODAs understand their linguistic and cultural identities, negotiate their relationships with Deaf and hearing communities, and perceive their place within an evolving social landscape.

Dr John Bosco Conama, PhD, M.Litt., BA (Social Policy), is Director of the Centre for Deaf Studies and Associate Professor at Trinity College Dublin, where he has also been elected a Fellow of the University. A leading scholar and advocate in Deaf Studies, he researches language rights, social justice, and educational equity for Deaf communities. Dr Conama completed his PhD in Equality Studies at University College Dublin and has published extensively on Irish Sign Language (ISL), language policy, Deaf identity, and the socio-economic experiences of Deaf people. His scholarship has contributed significantly to national and international debates on linguistic rights and inclusion. Beyond academia, Dr Conama has played a prominent role in Deaf advocacy. He served as Vice-Chair of the Irish Deaf Society and chaired the Irish Sign Language Recognition Campaign, helping lead the successful movement to recognise Irish Sign Language and enact the Irish Sign Language Act.



Friday, November 27th

CODA SYMPOSIUM

Resilience and Empowerment Among Hearing Children of Deaf Adults

Presenters

His commitment to equality and human rights is further reflected in his service on the Disability Advisory Committee of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. In recognition of his contribution to public life and the advancement of the Deaf community and Irish Sign Language, Dr Conama was awarded a civic honour by Roscommon County Council in 2025. He was also named Language Ambassador of the Year in 2015 for his contributions to language promotion and linguistic diversity. He currently serves as Co-Chair of the Government's Irish Sign Language Working Group under the National Disability Inclusion and Human Rights framework, where he continues to support the advancement of Deaf rights, linguistic equality, and inclusive public policy

Presentation title: Community Resilience and What It Means for CODAs and Their Parents

Abstract
Resilience is often described as an individual's ability to overcome challenges, but it is also shaped by the communities in which people live, learn, and belong. Within Deaf communities, resilience has long been fostered through shared language, collective identity, mutual support, and community networks. While much attention has been given to the experiences of Deaf individuals, less consideration has been paid to the experiences of Children of Deaf Adults (CODAs) and how community connections influence both their lives and those of their Deaf parents.

This presentation explores community resilience as a way of understanding the strengths, challenges, and everyday experiences of Deaf-parented families. Drawing on Deaf Studies, family studies, and community resilience research, it examines how Deaf communities provide sources of support, belonging, role models, knowledge, and social connections. Particular attention is given to the unique experiences of CODAs, who often navigate both Deaf and hearing worlds and develop valuable linguistic, cultural, and advocacy skills.

The presentation also draws on findings from the RESIDE (Resilience Inspires Deaf Communities) project and the Sense of Community project, which highlight the importance of Irish Sign Language, social networks, volunteering, community participation, and intergenerational relationships in building resilience and well-being among Deaf-parented families.

As a Deaf researcher, I am neither a CODA nor a parent of a CODA. Therefore, this presentation does not seek to speak on behalf of CODAs or their families. Rather, it aims to bring together research and community perspectives to explore how community resilience can help us better understand their experiences.

The presentation argues that resilience is not simply an individual achievement but a collective process rooted in relationships, belonging, and shared resources. By considering the experiences of CODAs alongside those of their Deaf parents, it highlights the important role that communities play in supporting identity, well-being, and participation across generations.

Friday, November 27th

CODA SYMPOSIUM

Resilience and Empowerment Among Hearing Children of Deaf Adults

Presenters

Seda Guektasch is a PhD student based at the ISS21 and School of Applied Social Studies, UCC. Seda is working on a PhD project entitled, "CODA: An ethnographic study of children of deaf adults and the role of gender in the negotiation of stigmatized identities." Her research focuses on understanding how CODAs experience stigma through gender as a social system in the family and society and how gendered power relations manifest themselves and impact on self-identity and social identity. This involves addressing the question of how, when, where and why it makes a difference to be female or male in CODA childhood. Her PhD supervisors are Dr Noel O'Connell and Professor Deirdre Horgan. She pursued studies of sociology and anthropology at Université Libre de Bruxelles, then completed a master's degree in sociology at Université catholique de Louvain in 2021. Subsequently, she worked in a national association for the deaf people in Belgium, where she held a position as project manager until March 2024. In parallel, she co-founded la Collective F.R.i.D.A. for raising awareness among women with disabilities and advocating for the recognition of their realities, among other initiatives.



Provisional presentation title: CODA experiences of gender in family, school and community contexts

Abstract
This presentation is based on my PhD project using semi-structured interviews with adult CODAs (children of deaf adults) and DODAs (deaf offspring of deaf adults) in Ireland and Belgium. It is guided by two research questions: (1) How do CODAs negotiate the courtesy stigma associated with their parents' deaf identity? and (2) What role does gender play in CODAs' social interactions within family, school, and community contexts?
The study draws on an intersectional framework, with particular attention to gender, alongside concepts including gender trouble and parentification. Participants are being recruited through snowball sampling and through contacts made at conferences and sign-language-accessible events. I will reflect on my own positionality, as a Deaf person with hearing parents, and how this has shaped the research process. The preliminary findings suggest that CODA men may be more involved in the Deaf community when both of their parents are Deaf, whereas CODA women may remain involved when one or both parents are Deaf. These early observations will be examined further as the analysis progresses. Funded by the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme 2022 and supervised by Dr Noel O'Connell and Professor Deirdre Horgan, this project aims to contribute new knowledge about how gender shapes the experiences of CODAs in Ireland and Belgium.

Friday, November 27th

CODA SYMPOSIUM

Resilience and Empowerment Among Hearing Children of Deaf Adults

UCC
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh
University College Cork, Ireland

Presenters

Dr Noel O'Connell is a Senior Postdoctoral Researcher at the Institute for Social Science in the 21st Century (ISS21) and the School of Applied Social Studies, UCC. Dr O'Connell is working on a project entitled "CODA: A hidden minority amongst the majority: An ethnographic study of children of deaf adults and the negotiation of threatened social identities". The project is funded by Research Ireland under the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme 2022.
Dr O'Connell graduated with a BA in English Literature from University of Ulster (2002), MSc in Literature: Writing and Cultural Politics from University of Edinburgh (2005), MPhil in Deaf Studies from University of Bristol (2008) and PhD in Deaf Education from Mary Immaculate College (2013). Prior to joining UCC this year, he worked as Postdoctoral Research Associate at Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh, (Jan 2015-Sept 2015) as part of the UK AHRC grant awarded to Professor Jemina Napier (Heriot Watt University) and Professor Alys Young (University of Manchester). Noel also occupied a Postdoctoral Researcher position (2022) at the School of Applied Social Studies, UCC where he worked under the direction of Dr Gill Harold (Principal Investigator) who was awarded funding the Irish Research Council under the New Foundations scheme for her project entitled, "ISL-health: Ensuring access provision to public health services for the Irish deaf community."



Author of over 29 publications, Dr O'Connell was awarded the DOROTHY COFUND Marie Skłodowska-Curie award from the Irish Research Council for a project focusing on deaf people's experience of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ireland and the UK (2023). He was also awarded the GOI Irish Research Council Postdoctoral Fellowship (2015) to publish doctoral research findings and a grant from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (2022) to conduct research on deaf people's experience of ableism and employment discrimination in collaboration with Irish Deaf Society. Dr O'Connell has published on the sociology of deaf education, deaf life stories, social justice and human rights, identity politics deaf studies and disability studies.

Taighde Éireann
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CODA RESEARCH

Friday, November 27th

CODA SYMPOSIUM

Resilience and Empowerment Among Hearing Children of Deaf Adults

Presenters

Presentation title: Resisting Stigma: Resilience and Empowerment Among Hearing Children Deaf Parents – A Qualitative Study

Abstract
Hearing children of Deaf parents, commonly known as Codas or heritage signers, negotiate their linguistic and cultural identities at the intersection of the Deaf and hearing worlds. While historical research has focused heavily on the burdens of growing up within a marginalized linguistic environment, this qualitative study explores how Codas actively resist societal stigma, discrimination, and exclusion. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 20 adult hearing Codas, the findings reveal that navigating "stigma-by-association" does not inherently lead to a deficit or disempowerment. Instead, participants transform these social challenges into sources of collective strength, bicultural pride, and heightened empathy. Although some Codas initially internalise indirect stigma, this study highlights their agency in reconstructing their identities and actively reshaping their self-perceptions. These coping mechanisms function not only as personal acts of resistance, but also as broader "cultural acts" that challenge systemic stigma and negative societal attitudes toward Deaf parents. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate how active engagement with Deaf and Coda community networks fosters resilience and empowerment through education, pride, and profound self-awareness. Ultimately, a crucial contribution of this study is its illumination of how children of parents with stigmatised identities strategically counteract parental stigma to claim their own empowerment.

This study is supported by funding received from Research Ireland under the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme.