

A review by
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Inside Deaf Culture chronicles and engages the emergence and acceptance of the concept of Deaf culture. Padden and Humphries situate themselves as children of a historical period during which the idea of Deaf culture had not yet emerged, while asserting that Deaf culture did already exist as a culture. As the debate over Deaf culture and language arose during their college years, their account of the history and development of a group identity among deaf people therefore intersects with their own biographies. They argue that the self-definition as a culture allowed Deaf people a sense of wholeness as both Deaf people and hearing people learned to see the Deaf community as culturally rich and empowered. They examine influential moments in the history of that community, showing throughout how the themes of the challenge of voice and of the struggle against power imbalances resonate from the nineteenth century, with its prevalence of oralism, asylums, and eugenics, to the twenty first century, and the emergence of cochlear implants and the Human Genome Project.

The theme of the struggle for voice is fundamental to Padden and Humphries's account. Deaf culture emerges to be recognized as a whole culture like other cultures, but nonetheless it does have its own distinct political goals. Padden and Humphries show the enduring impact of the nineteenth-century schools for the deaf, with their censure of sign language and their insistence on oralist teaching methods. They assert that, because of these early forms of segregation and separation, the struggle for the use and management of voice, and to make sign language intelligible, is the basis for nearly every political act within the Deaf community. They

chronicle the shift in public perception of the Deaf, from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, when deafness and muteness were linked, to the means by which new links were forged, connecting deaf culture with spoken voice; from the conception of speech and language as inseparable to the recent recognition by a hearing world of American Sign Language as a language.

The theme of the struggle against power imbalances is also central. Again, Padden and Humphries stress the historical legacy of the early-nineteenth-century asylums, the practices of which-naming, management, classification, control, separation-constitute the imbalance of power inherent to these institutions. They discuss the conflictual nature of that legacy, as even while the institution made deaf children vulnerable to abuses of power it also forged them into a sign language community. This conflict remains unresolved, as the authors question how deaf children can be educated within a community, which is what Deaf people want, without repeating the patterns of the nineteenth-century asylum where the Deaf are rendered powerless.

The concluding chapter discusses the contemporary situation and the continued relevance of these two themes in the current age of cochlear implants and the Human Genome Project. Padden and Humphries situate Deaf people within what they term as one of the deepest contradictions of the twenty-first century-the conflicting drives to acknowledge diversity on the one hand, and “repair” it on the other. They argue that the struggle for voice is crucial in order to communicate the risks of post-cochlear-implant social programs that are dangerously reminiscent of the nineteenth-century oralism. Padden and Humphries stress that the fact that Deaf people want to preserve their language and culture does not mean that they do not also want to embrace technology, and that the challenge is how to voice their perspectives on scientific technology in a world that finds it easier not to listen.

