

Reviewed by  
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*Inside Deaf Culture* presents a beautifully well-written, grounded, and historical exploration of Deaf culture. The book is in part about ASL as a medium for cultural expression. It is also about the history of Deaf culture, its struggle for recognition and struggle with questions of what it means to be a culture. Culture cannot be defined by a dictionary nor reduced to theatrical performance. Rather, it is practices in everyday life. How then, the authors ask, does one define culture or declare who is a member of that culture? Where are the boundaries?

Padden and Humphries find that cultures give us spaces of separation and inclusion. They describe the segregation the Deaf community has experienced from without and within by institution, race, teaching methods, how a person became deaf, extent of hearing-loss, and adoption of technology to help hear. As deaf people are constrained through the management of their bodies, these boundaries can also be liberating as ideas and goals are shared, new practices developed, new spaces of belonging created.

The authors also demonstrate through the history of the Deaf community how shifts in physical geographies lead to shifts in social relations from which emerge shifts in language and culture. As physical boundaries disappear (such as a decrease in the number of deaf educational institutions and community gathering spaces), language is used to stake out new edges. Boundaries become mediated through voice and sign, not fences.

The book emphasizes that culture exists within a history made up of individuals, social forces and conflicts. Padden and Humphries show very well how the border between the body and the world is always mediated (for example, through ASL), changing, and reiterated in every moment through the circumstances of the present.

This book can be helpful to anyone working with the idea of culture. Not only does it provide a solid example of a good analysis, but it opened my eyes to the nuances of what culture means and the importance of individuals in the larger cultural scheme.