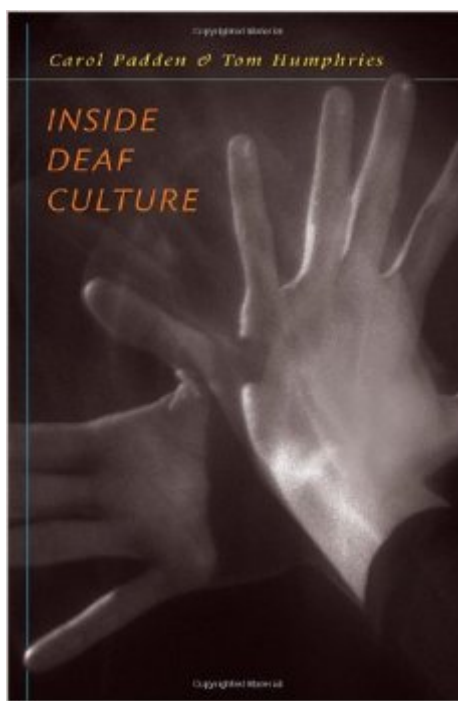


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# Inside Deaf Culture



## Synopsis

In this absorbing story of the changing life of a community, the authors of *Deaf in America* reveal historical events and forces that have shaped the ways that Deaf people define themselves today. *Inside Deaf Culture* relates Deaf people's search for a voice of their own, and their proud self-discovery and self-description as a flourishing culture. Padden and Humphries show how the nineteenth-century schools for the deaf, with their denigration of sign language and their insistence on oralist teaching, shaped the lives of Deaf people for generations to come. They describe how Deaf culture and art thrived in mid-twentieth century Deaf clubs and Deaf theatre, and profile controversial contemporary technologies. Most triumphant is the story of the survival of the rich and complex language American Sign Language, long misunderstood but finally recently recognized by a hearing world that could not conceive of language in a form other than speech. In a moving conclusion, the authors describe their own very different pathways into the Deaf community, and reveal the confidence and anxiety of the people of this tenuous community as it faces the future. *Inside Deaf Culture* celebrates the experience of a minority culture--its common past, present debates, and promise for the future. From these pages emerge clear and bold voices, speaking out from inside this once silenced community.

## Book Information

Age Range: 8 and up

Paperback: 224 pages

Publisher: Harvard University Press (October 31, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0674022521

ISBN-13: 978-0674022522

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.6 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 5.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (42 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #43,998 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #16 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Specific Demographics > Disabled](#) #16 in [Books > Medical Books > Psychology > History](#) #21 in [Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Psychology & Counseling > History](#)

## Customer Reviews

*Inside Deaf Culture*; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 224 pages *Inside Deaf Culture* is

written by two well-known professors of ASL and Deaf Studies. Both authors are Deaf and in the later chapters, discuss their different backgrounds. I would recommend this book to anyone studying Deaf Culture, ASL, linguistics, anthropology, social change in America, Deaf people, parents of Deaf children, educators and any one else interested in the history and struggles of minority groups. The book can also be used as a Deaf history reference book for Deaf and hard of hearing students. In the book, the authors describe Deaf life in America from the beginning of the country to the present age. In so doing, they poignantly write about the blight of Deaf in America over the years. The book includes some less than glowing reports about the motives of people who were instrumental establishing some of the earliest schools for the Deaf in the country. The authors tell us of abuses of power and scandals that occurred in some of these early schools. The authors describe how historically, people in positions of authority who made decisions for and about what Deaf people could and could not do at school, work and in communities were usually hearing. Even so, early in the history of Deaf in America, schools for the Deaf played an enormous role in bringing Deaf people together. The authors also tell us how early United States history, the hearing community practices of segregating African Americans was also reflected in early Deaf education and in the Deaf community. The accounts are told with frankness. We learn how Deaf people were often discriminated against as a group. We also learn how this discrimination was even more oppressive for Deaf African-Americans.

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.

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