

## **Book Review**

**Title:** *Deaf Identities in the Making: Local Lives, Transnational Connections*

**Author:** Jan-Kare Breivik

**Publisher:** Gallaudet Press, 2005

Cloth, ISBN: 1-56368-276-1, 220 pages

**Cost:** \$49.95 USD

**Reviewer:** Steven E. Brown

Breivik, a Norwegian anthropologist, became interested in studying issues of deafness and Deaf culture in the 1990s. He learned Norwegian Sign Language and immersed himself in Deaf cultural events, both in Norway and around the world. The result is a fascinating book that examines deafness and Deaf Culture from local and transnational perspectives through the life stories of ten deaf individuals.

The ten stories that are shared with readers have commonalities and differences, but all relate tales of oppression from a dominant hearing culture. The controversy around Cochlear implants is a large part of the story, as is the ambivalence contained in both being a minority and representing a minority status. Breivik starts a quote from one individual by stating:

“At college, she was the only deaf student. Being once again immersed in a hearing world was a big challenge:

‘In the beginning of the first year at the teacher’s college, I rediscovered that being with hearing people was not an easy thing for me. To talk one on one was OK, but in groups, I was lost and fell out. For the first time in my adult life I realized that I didn’t accept my deafness, and that I wanted to be a hearing person’ (p. 128).

Another participant expressed shock at her reaction to giving birth to a child who is deaf:

‘When he was diagnosed as deaf, I had a shock which lasted for half a year! This was something quite different. We had hoped for hearing children, thinking about what was best for the child in society. To be within the deaf community is safe and good, but we are a small minority with restricted opportunities, compared to the hearing society’ (p. 139).”

Another individual summarizes the heart of the stories related in the book in the following two questions: “The all-important questions were: Where is my world? Where do I really belong?” (p. 169).

Like elsewhere in the world, cultural ambiguities revolving around who is deaf and who is Deaf are revealed in this work in a variety of ways. What is most interesting is how these

conflicts are often assimilated into the personalities of the individuals whose life stories are being related. Breivik's tale of coming to terms with deafness, identity politics and the local and transnational characteristics of the Deaf culture form an absorbing read that could be used in a variety of disability studies and multicultural courses and would be an excellent addition to any library.