

## **Book Review**

**Title:** *Many Ways to Be Deaf: International Variation in Deaf Communities*

**Editor:** Leila Monaghan, Constanze Schmaling, Karen Nakamura, & Graham H. Turner

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**Reviewer:** Sally Y. Nhomi

*Many Ways to Be Deaf* provides glimpses into deaf communities around the world, and throughout history, from 17<sup>th</sup> Century Britain (Rachel Sutton-Spence) to contemporary circles of deaf peers and diverse families in the United States (Ceil Lucas and Susan Schatz). It illustrates that internationally, there is still controversy about how to equip deaf children with appropriate and adequate forms of language and literacy skills, and tensions between desires to standardize sign language forms and calls for allowing authentic and diverse forms of expression. Leila Monaghan provides an excellent overview of international forms of deaf culture in the introductory chapter to the book.

Every language has a political history, and issues of nationalism and community identity are reflected in the place of sign language in each country. Deaf culture is widely seen to be inferior to Hearing culture in Austria (Franz Dotter and Ingeborg Okorn), and sign languages are divided by linkages to particular spoken languages within multilingual societies in Switzerland (as reported by Penny Boyes Braem, Benno Caramore, Roland Hermann, and Patricia Shores Hermann) and in South Africa (as described by Debra Aarons and Louise Reynolds). Schools for the deaf have also shaped signed languages and deaf culture, sometimes in idiosyncratic ways. For example, Barbara LeMaster describes how segregated boys' and girls' schools led to the development of separate forms of "boys" and "girls" sign languages in Ireland.

Particularly in rural parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America, rich and poor deaf individuals see highly unequal educational opportunities, medical supports and technologies, and basic quality of life expectations. Constanze Schmaling laments how, in one Nigerian community, deaf and hearing residents who long shared manual gestures for communication are seeing the gradual loss of their common language as American Sign Language (ASL) is learned and favored by a privileged minority. Calls for limiting the intrusion of ASL and for preserving the heritage of locally derived signed languages run through articles describing deaf communities in Brazil (by Norine Berenz), South Africa (Aarons and Reynolds), Nicaragua (Richard Senghas), Thailand and Vietnam (James Woodward). Contrastively, Karen Nakamura (who writes on Japan) and Michael Pursglove and Anna Komarova (who report on Russia) critique societies which deny civil rights for deaf individuals along standards upheld by American Deaf activists.

While most of the book's chapters are by hearing researchers who explore cultures different from their own, Donald Grushkin shares, in very personal terms, feeling caught between the hearing and Deaf communities in the U.S. as an individual who is hard of hearing. A

highlight in the volume is Jean Ann's evocative account of her experiences at a Taiwanese school for deaf children. Ann probes her own (American-influenced) beliefs and research agendas as she allows readers to listen alongside her to the diversity of individual voices she draws out during her school visits. She provides not only a rich and sensitive portrait of a school and its community, but thoughtful reflections on her roles as observer, researcher and individual.

*Many Ways to Be Deaf* is highly recommended for those with interests in anthropology, sociology, signed languages, deaf culture, language politics and/or comparative education.