

## INTRODUCTION

---

---

The coincidence amazed me.

I was reading Harlan Lane's *When the Mind Hears* and was struck by a passage written over one hundred years ago by a young deaf man raised apart from other deaf people. He heard about the Hartford Asylum, a new school for deaf children, and arranged to visit it accompanied by his normally hearing older brother, Charles. Here is what he wrote after his first meeting with deaf people when he was sixteen years old:

Charles and I went into the boys' and next the girls' sitting room. It was all new to me and to Charles it was amusing, the innumerable motions of arms and hands. After dinner he left and *I was among strangers but I knew I was at home.*<sup>1</sup>

That last phrase sounded familiar. Turning to my bookcase, I found a pamphlet published in 1973 and in it these lines from a speech by a young deaf man describing his first encounter with other deaf people:

My sister told me about the Maryland School for the Deaf. My immediate reaction was one of anger and rejection—of myself. I reluctantly accompanied her to the School one day—and at long last began to come *home*. It was literally a love experience. For the first time, I felt less like a *stranger* in a strange land and more like a member of a community.<sup>2</sup>

Though separated by more than one hundred years, the two teenagers, Edmund Booth and Frank Bowe, neither of whom had ever before been with people who shared their deafness, both described their feelings at that first meeting in similar words express-

ing their sense of comfort, relaxation, and familiarity. They felt *at home among strangers*.

Deaf women and men have come together for at least the last two centuries to form their own communities within the larger communities in which they live. From time to time, the general public becomes aware of deaf individuals and of deafness as a condition, but seldom, if ever, is it aware of the Deaf community. In 1988, students at Gallaudet University—the only institution of higher education for deaf students—demanded that the next president be deaf. The “Deaf President Now” movement emerged in newspaper headlines, radio commentaries, and television features. Not only in the United States but also throughout the world, the general public observed Deaf people struggling for a cause that was seen as a civil rights issue. The stereotype of Deaf people as intellectually limited faced a sharp challenge. The courageous student leaders, backed by the Deaf community, conducted a brilliant public relations campaign and emerged victorious against a prejudice dramatized by the university’s own board of directors. This one event may effect a long-term change in the general public’s attitudes toward Deaf people. It will not, however, educate the public about their nonhearing neighbors, especially about their culture, their organizations, and their everyday social lives.

## WHO IS DEAF?

The little child swinging in the park, that lovely lady walking into the supermarket, that gentleman standing at the bus stop—nothing about their appearance tells you they cannot hear. Deafness does not show. Only if you attempt to engage them in conversation will you realize that they are unusual. If you speak to them when they do not see you, they will “ignore” you. When you do attract their attention, their intent stare at your face may disconcert you. Often their voices, if they answer you, will be unusual, monotonic, nasal, poorly articulated. With all of these clues, will you guess these people are deaf? Or will you have other, unflattering ideas about why they differ from your expectations?

## DEGREE OF IMPAIRMENT

Definitions can mask theoretical presuppositions. To achieve a theoretically neutral definition of deafness, I have focused on the role of

hearing in communication. After all, hearing losses can occur in high and/or low frequencies, at greater and lesser degrees, affecting one or both ears the same or differently. These are all considerations that audiologists and otologists must take into account. In the end, for the individual, the important question is how has the hearing impairment affected the ability to communicate. Hence, my definition is in those terms: Deaf people cannot hear and understand speech through the ear alone, with or without amplification.<sup>3</sup>

The corollary to that definition is that deaf people are visually dependent; they cannot carry on a conversation with their eyes closed. To communicate on a one-to-one basis, they must be able to see the other person.

This definition eschews the medical view of deafness as a disease. It does not treat deaf people as pathological. Their condition makes them different from the majority of people, but that difference does not make them inferior beings. However, while we point out the absence of functional hearing, we should hurry on to state that the deaf person may in all other respects be unimpaired. Being deaf should not imply anything but the inability to hear. Deaf people have fought against the use of “deaf and dumb” for the very reason that it implies that those who are deaf are also mentally incompetent. As the former director of the National Association of the Deaf often said, “It’s not the ears that count but what’s between them.”

## AGE AT ONSET

Having defined deafness in terms of its behavioral consequences—specifying that the hearing impairment affects human communication—the point in individuals’ development at which they become deaf is indicated by a modifier, thus: *prelingual* deafness (occurs before three years of age), *childhood* deafness (occurs before adolescence), *prevocational* deafness (occurs before nineteen years of age), and so forth. A variety of modifiers can be, and have been, used to indicate individuals’ ages when they became deaf. The unmodified term encompasses all ages at onset.

Specifications of age at onset and degree of impairment, critical as they are for maintaining communication between researchers and their readers, do not exhaust the connotations of the word. Roslyn Rosen, a Deaf educational administrator, sagely observes, “Deafness is much broader than just a hearing loss; it is a complex sociopolitical reality that permeates one’s life.”<sup>4</sup>

Until recently, society almost invariably considered deafness to be a pathological condition. Its management fell in the physician's province. As a medical problem, its social implications tended to be lost. Yet, from time to time, scholars have noted that deafness does not hurt, is not fatal, and is disabling only in particular situations. Deafness alone does not prevent one from learning, working, raising a family. The medical model—the view of deafness as a pathological condition—obscures rather than aids deaf people in making a successful adaptation to their circumstances. The definition of deafness selected for this study remains neutral with respect to a particular disciplinary allegiance; it can be as successfully applied by educators, physicians, psychologists, rehabilitationists, social workers, sociologists, and other specialists interested in studying the condition and/or working with Deaf people.

Another way to define Deaf people is in terms of their preferred mode of communication. As one anthropologist has noted,

Indeed, what makes Deaf people a cultural group instead of simply a loose organization of people with a similar sensory loss is the fact that their adaptation includes language. An environment created solely by a sensory deprivation does not make a culture. Blind people find themselves in a visual void. This similarity in circumstance certainly provides for a strong group bonding of individuals of similar experience; it does not, however, form a culture. Blind people are vision-impaired members of the variety of America's linguistic communities. What does form a culture for Deaf people is the fact that the adaptation to a visual world has by human necessity included a visual language. In the United States this is American Sign Language.<sup>5</sup>

## DEAFNESS IN THE DEAF COMMUNITY

Members of the Deaf community vary in the extent to which their hearing is impaired, from mildly to profoundly. Their losses are similar in that they will have occurred early in the deaf person's development, with most arising before eight years of age. To distinguish those who are members of the Deaf community from those deaf people who are not, writers in this field have adopted a simple convention that has been widely adopted. When capitalized, Deaf refers to members of the Deaf community. Written in lower case, deaf refers only to the inability to hear and understand speech, and

it carries no further social connotations, no indication of the age at onset, and no implications of membership in the Deaf community.

## STEREOTYPES

In this century, scientists have struggled to escape the stereotypic thinking that defines people by their physical characteristics. Some folk sayings seem innocuous (“Fat people are jolly”) and some not (“Left-handed people are erratic”). Regardless of pejorative intent, such generalizations encourage mental laziness that, by itself, is debilitating to the thinker. The classic treatise by Donald G. Paterson, *Physique and Intellect*, destroyed with scientific precision myths about the relationship between physical features and personality that ranged from “redheads are fiery tempered” to “Chinese people are inscrutable.” Yet some stereotypes persist.

Would it be better not to define deafness, not to differentiate those with extreme hearing losses from the rest of the population? Would that avoid stereotypes? No, deafness would not go away because we did not use that name. The evil of stereotyping does not reside in the naming but in the associations that the naming implies—the generalizations about the behavior of those who are named. Deaf people would object to banishing the term, because deafness is a part of their identity. They have a history, a culture, a community, and they wish to preserve the bases of their self-concepts. To deny deafness would, in effect, deny a major portion of their existence. Deaf people’s objections come not from being called deaf but from being considered mentally incompetent, clan-nish, socially inept, lacking in refinement, and hosts of other calumnies that do not correctly apply to them as a group. Yes, some Deaf people are boors, stupid, and even criminal, but the majority—the overwhelming majority—are not. Thus, to do away with a term does not eliminate the stereotype. Even worse, abolishing the study of deafness would perpetuate ill-founded legends by preventing the corrective facts from emerging.

## HOW MANY DEAF PEOPLE?

Knowing the size of the Deaf community is fundamental to understanding it as will be discussed at length in chapter 8. Here we will deal with that question descriptively, to orient the reader.

## STEREOTYPES

Perhaps no single example demonstrates more dramatically the arbitrary character of the able-bodied world's perception of handicaps as biological conditions than the impact of success upon the way in which almost any disability is perceived and remembered. We do not think of Franklin D. Roosevelt as a great crippled president: we think of him as a great president who, among many other things, happened to be crippled. Nor do we customarily think of John F. Kennedy as a handicapped president cut down before he could redeem his promise. Yet he suffered from Addison's disease, a chronic illness that qualifies its bearer to carry the handicapped label. And while both Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar were epileptics, it takes Jorge Luis Borges (himself blind but not considered handicapped) to remind us that in Caesar's case, a handicap changed the course of history. While swimming in the Rhine, Caesar had an epileptic fit and nearly drowned. Only the presence of a soldier on shore saved his life. As a result of the incident, Caesar decided not to mount a major invasion of what is now Germany.

Nor do we remember that Lord Byron had a clubfoot and Alexander Pope had curvature of the spine. Elizabeth Barrett Browning was a paraplegic. Milton was blind when he wrote *Paradise Lost*, Beethoven was deaf when he wrote the Ninth Symphony, Nietzsche was a syphilitic, and Dostoevsky was an epileptic. Edison was deaf, and Freud spent the last sixteen years of his life wearing a prosthesis on his jaw. To speak of these men and women as handicapped seems a contradiction in terms. It seems so, we believe, because success defines a chronologically adult individual as carrying out certain adult functions so well that his inability to carry out other adult social functions is judged irrelevant. We remember FDR's cigarette holder better than his wheelchair.<sup>6</sup>

The number of Deaf people is very small relative to the general population. It is smallest when one adds to the definition of deafness the age at onset. Table 1 shows deafness occurs at a rate of 873 per 100,000. This yields a sizable number of people (over two million, if the rate is applied to the present population of the United States) but as a proportion of the general population it is small. Pre-

**Table 1** Prevalence and Prevalence Rates of Hearing Impairments in the Civilian, Noninstitutionalized Population, by Degree and Age at Onset: United States, 1971

Degree of Impairment	Age at Onset	Number <sup>a</sup>	Rate per 100,000
All degrees	All ages	13,362,842	6,603
Significant bilateral	All ages	6,548,842	3,236
Deafness	All ages	1,767,046	873
Deafness	Prevocational <sup>b</sup>	410,522	203
Deafness	Prelingual <sup>c</sup>	201,626	100

SOURCE: Adapted from Jerome D. Schein and Marcus T. Delk, Jr., *The Deaf Population of the United States* (Silver Spring, MD: National Association of the Deaf, 1974), 16.

<sup>a</sup>Do not add numbers in this column. Each category includes those in the succeeding category. "All degrees" includes all of the people in the remaining four categories. Of the 1,767,046 who are deaf, 410,522 had an onset before nineteen years of age and 1,357,324 had an onset at or after nineteen years of age.

<sup>b</sup>Onset prior to nineteen years of age.

<sup>c</sup>Onset prior to three years of age.

vocational deafness—on which this text focuses—occurs at a rate of 202 per 100,000 persons. Rarest of all is prelingual deafness, which occurs at a rate of 100 per 100,000. Thus, in a town of one thousand people, only one would be prelingually deaf, another one prevocationally deaf, and two or three more deafened later in life, for a total of eight or nine. Clearly, deaf people are a minority of the population, and the earlier they are deafened, the smaller is their proportion of the total population.

Incidentally, the figures in Table 1 make a point unrelated to population size. Note that the data are for 1971. The study that yielded those numbers was the first in over forty years, and it is the most current study that provides estimates of the size of the Deaf community.<sup>7</sup> This gap in information about the Deaf community indicates how little attention deafness is given by the government and provides a bit of evidence for the alienation felt by Deaf people. Not counting a group diminishes its social and political influence. The establishment by Congress in 1988 of the National Institutes of Deafness and Other Communicative Disorders recognizes the oversight and mandates that steps be taken to correct it.

## THE DEAF COMMUNITY

A community is made up of persons who have a common characteristic.<sup>8</sup> The Deaf community consists of Deaf people who

communicate visually and who share a wide variety of interests based on their loss of hearing ability. Along with these shared traits have grown organizations, mores, and literature that are special to Deaf people. Higgins, in his book on the Deaf community, specifies that "communities consist of people in social interaction within a geographic area and having one or more additional common ties."<sup>9</sup> My own definition eliminates any reference to geographical limits because I do not believe that a Deaf community is physically constrained. Deaf people seek (or indicate a preference for) each other's company, remain in contact with each other, share common interests, and act in concert on some significant issues, even though separated by hundreds of miles.<sup>10</sup> Thus, their social groups meet the criteria for a community.

Recognition of the Deaf community grew slowly among scholars studying deafness. Until recently, they have not perceived the social structure that Deaf people have built and nourished over the last century and a half. The experts' emerging awareness of American Sign Language (ASL) as a true language, independent from English, enabled the concept of the Deaf community as a linguistic entity to emerge. Members of the Deaf community use sign language—usually ASL, in the United States—to communicate with each other, making social interactions much easier than they are when the Deaf person must depend on lipreading and speaking in English. But Deaf people share more than a language; they have common interests, similar ways of behaving, and similar backgrounds.<sup>11</sup>

The Deaf community is not geographically bounded, a characteristic usually included in definitions of community. They are not deterred by great geographic distance in their efforts to interact with those whom they regard as their peers and colleagues. Surprisingly, they do not share the same degree of hearing disability. Deaf community members differ in the extent to which their hearing is impaired, from mildly to profoundly, while their hearing disabilities are usually similar in that they will have occurred early in their development.

Some authorities have looked upon the Deaf community as an ethnic group, even though its constituents do not have a common heritage; quite to the contrary, many Deaf adults are alienated from their parents, with whom they have great difficulty in communicating (see chapter 2). As more and more parents learn manual communication, that situation is changing, so that many Deaf children are now better integrated into their nuclear families. Whether seen



as a linguistic, ethnic, social, cultural, or disability group—and granting that its members do not live in physical proximity to each other—the Deaf community exists. As the next chapters seek to demonstrate, Deaf people in the United States have built a comprehensive organizational network that fills the gaps that would otherwise be left in meeting their psychological and social needs and that preserves their culture. Lest this discussion of the Deaf community sound too utopian, recognition must be given to racial, sexual, educational, and economic distinctions in the Deaf community. They exist and they are no less troubling in the Deaf community than they are in other communities. They will be discussed in the following chapters.

## DEAF VIEWS

What do Deaf people think about the Deaf community? Several Deaf writers have commented on the Deaf community without explicitly defining it. Its reality must seem palpable to them, rendering unnecessary any effort to define it.<sup>12</sup> Even two sociologists concerned about deafness do not define it, although they write about it.<sup>13</sup> However, Roslyn Rosen, an educator and Deaf leader, views a Deaf community as principally identified by its use of sign language.

The Deaf community is a microcosm of any community of people, a cross-section of society at large, in its heterogeneity of physical builds, races, religions, intelligence, interests, and values. The common denominator is the inability to hear and its ramifications.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike an ethnic community, Deaf people are remarkably diverse in their origins. They vary by race and parents' country of origin. Unlike members of the Polish community, for example, they do not share a nationality. Unlike members of a religious community, they do not require the same church affiliation as a condition of membership. Deaf people are not even entirely alike in their inability to hear, which ranges from some to virtually none. Furthermore, all persons who cannot hear do not belong to the Deaf community. Membership is a matter of choice. Why some join and others do not is a fascinating topic for research—research that has not been done.

## CRITERIA FOR CONFIRMING THE DEAF COMMUNITY'S EXISTENCE

As the foregoing makes clear, the Deaf community is a concept, not a place. It is a name given to the tendencies of Deaf people to seek each other out, tendencies that are manifested in the organizations and guides to behavior that facilitate such interactions. Hence, the Deaf community is real—as real as any other community.

Its existence is attested to by the various authorities cited. They point to folkways, shared attitudes, organizations, and specific behaviors as the means of identifying the Deaf community. Most do not define Deaf communities geographically. The magnetism that draws one Deaf person to another is not greatly attenuated by distance. As the subsequent pages unfold, the criteria for establishing the existence of a Deaf community are its distinct culture and its formal organizations.

### COMMUNITY OR COMMUNITIES?

Some theorists question the use of “community” as opposed to “communities” of Deaf people. They regard the sense of homogeneity that the singular form suggests as misleading. Carol Padden, for example, notes, “Thus, there are many different deaf communities across the United States, but there is a single American Deaf culture with members who live in different communities.”<sup>15</sup> Certainly, the white and nonwhite Deaf communities have substantial differences. Whether these differences are sufficient to warrant conceptualizing separate cultures remains open to research. Ernest Hairston and Linwood Smith ask, “Are we [blacks] that different?” Their explorations bring them to conclude “that deafness has the same effect on a person despite racial, ethnic, or cultural background, but where Black deaf persons are concerned, the differentiating factor lies in being Black rather than in being deaf.”<sup>16</sup>

My own view is that the within-group similarities among deaf people outweigh the differences in the adaptations they choose to resolve common problems. While not disagreeing about the heterogeneous nature of the Deaf community—see especially the variety of organizations that Deaf people have created to accommodate the differences they find among themselves—an argument can be made for holding to the singular concept.

First of all, the Deaf community is singular in the same sense that the United States is singular. Within the United States, one finds a bewildering array of political, social, and ethnic subdivisions. It is as valid to speak in the singular about the Deaf community as about the United States. That obvious argument aside, one must ask if the singular concept is useful. For the answer to that, I beg the reader's indulgence until the next six chapters have been read. If from accumulated observations common threads are found, then the Deaf community as a singular entity deserves to stand. But if no valid generalizations about it can be deduced, it should be cast aside. Let utility, then, determine this issue. At the same time, however, let us not overlook the correctness of Padden's and Higgins's contention: within the Deaf community reside numerous distinguishable communities of Deaf people.<sup>17</sup>

## THE SELF-HELP MOVEMENT

One might also think of Deaf communities as self-help groups, as people with similar problems banded together for mutual support. Viewed in that way, the Deaf community is more than one hundred years old. That it has been highly effective in serving its members will be discussed in later chapters. That it should serve as a model for other disabled groups has apparently escaped the attention of most rehabilitators.<sup>18</sup>

Deaf people have evolved their own society to attend to their own needs, to serve their own ends, to manage their own problems, and to provide points of interchange with the general society of which they are a part and yet from which they are apart.

The fierce independence of the majority of Deaf adults confronts popular conceptions of disabled people as weak and demanding of sympathy and aid. Those characteristics fit some chronically impaired persons, but they do not represent the majority of people deafened in childhood. These individuals tend to join the Deaf community, that is, to associate mostly with other persons who have been deafened in childhood. Conversely, those who become Deaf in adulthood seldom become members of the Deaf community; they strive to retain their lifelong relations with friends and relatives whose hearing remains intact. These tendencies—of early deafened persons to seek each other's company and of late deafened persons to remain aloof from those who are early deafened—provide a sig-

nificant clue for those seeking to understand the behavior of Deaf people.

## TERMINOLOGY

Misuse of language may reflect abuse of people. Certain terms and common usages do unintentional violence to attitudes toward Deaf people.

### GHETTO

Such a term is "ghetto." Its application to the Deaf community creates a non sequitur. It is a nasty term for the section of a city in which Jewish people were confined by decree. Jews did not volunteer to live in these often-walled quarters; they were forced to do so. In current parlance, "ghetto" has also been used to characterize urban areas inhabited by minorities, usually black or Puerto Rican. The implied coercion is economic, not legal. To speak of the Deaf community as a ghetto suggests that it is a place and that its members are forced to live with each other. Such implications defy the truth: Deaf communities arise from the decisions of Deaf people to interact with each other. A distinguished Deaf leader expressed with suitable irony his resentment at that inapt term by recounting an incident at the 1972 convention of the National Association of the Deaf, in Miami Beach, Florida, held at the then-luxurious Deauville Hotel.

Watching the multitude of the Deaf guests who were dressed in the latest fashion—women in low-cut, clinging gowns with glittering jewelry and men in formal attire of varying colors, animatedly chatting in the expensively decorated and furnished hotel lobby, an officer of the Association remarked, "And they call this a Deaf ghetto!"<sup>19</sup>

### SUBCULTURE

Often in the professional literature, references are made to "the Deaf subculture." The "sub" in subculture or subgroup is condescending. It connotes inadequacy, something that is beneath (i.e., inferior to) the majority culture or group. Those who use the term

may protest that they meant only to indicate that, as a minority group, Deaf people's culture differs from that of the majority, that it is, at least in some ways, unique. But for such purposes other terms are available, terms that do not carry the dictionary meaning of "beneath" or "lesser."

## NORMAL

From time to time, writers use "normal" as a term contrasted with "hearing impaired" and/or "deaf." "Normal" can have all sorts of connotations; it is a term that drags a great deal of excess baggage with it. To avoid implications other than that "normal" refers solely to hearing ability that characterizes the majority, this book uses "normally hearing," "general," or other designation for the majority. If the majority were deaf, deafness would be normal or general. Thus, in place of "normal," one should not read "good," "preferred," "moral," or any other laudatory adjective; it refers only to the most numerous group. If one acts like the majority, dresses like the majority, hears like the majority, then one behaves normally, dresses normally, and hears normally. Nothing more; nothing less.

## THE DEAF

One last word on nomenclature. Characterizing people by using a descriptive adjective in place of a noun is a destructive verbal habit. In this context, I urge conscious avoidance of "the Deaf." Its brevity alone is offensive. It denies Deaf people a measure of humanity, their personhood. For a scientific text, it inexcusably lacks essential precision. When it is used, does "the Deaf" refer to deaf children, deaf adults, deaf students, or what? In this book, use of "the Deaf" will occur only in quotations from others and in established names; for example, National Association of the Deaf (not National Association of Deaf People) and Texas School for the Deaf (not Texas School for Deaf Students).

## PLAN OF THE BOOK

What is the Deaf community? Where is it? Who are its members? How did they come together? Why have they created the society in

the way they have? How do they conduct their affairs? In what direction is the Deaf community moving?

To answer these and many other questions about the Deaf community, this book divides roughly into two parts. The first seven chapters describe the Deaf community, beginning with this introduction. Chapter 2 takes up Deaf culture, a phenomenon not even considered as recently as two decades ago. Chapter 3 looks at the structural underpinnings of the Deaf community, its organizational base. Chapter 4 probes family life—both the families from which Deaf people come and those they create. Chapter 5 discusses education and rehabilitation, while chapter 6 examines the economic consequences of deafness. Chapter 7 looks at the Deaf experience with law, medicine, and other societal agents. These chapters intend to establish the existence and importance of a phenomenon that has had scant attention in the literature on deafness, to extract generalizations that can be useful to scholars without losing the specificity that piques general readers' interest.

The second, and much shorter, part of the book attempts to explain why the Deaf community exists, and why it has developed as it has. The explanation centers on five factors. Chapter 8 discusses these five factors in detail, along with an explanation of how they interact with each other. Using the five factors in tandem with information about trends in and around the Deaf community, chapter 9 then makes predictions about the future of the Deaf community.

A brief presentation of the five factors appears here to provide the reader with a framework on which to arrange the ensuing description of the Deaf community. If these descriptive chapters have been rendered with appropriate objectivity, then a number of theoretical explanations may be suggested by them. Being even sketchily acquainted with the five factors—demography, alienation, affiliation, education, and milieu—the reader can test their explanatory power as the description of the Deaf community unfolds.

## DEMOGRAPHY

The most fundamental point about Deaf communities is that they can only come into being if there are enough Deaf people. How large that number must be has not been studied, but it is already clear that numerosity has two faces: one absolute and the other rel-

ative. The absolute number of Deaf people needed to form a community is certainly greater than two and less than a million or even a thousand. Precisely what the Deaf population size must be has not been ascertained. But the absolute number alone will not determine the presence of a Deaf community. The number *in relation to the size of the general community* constitutes another important determiner. Ten Deaf adults among fifty normally hearing persons might not generate a separate Deaf community, whereas ten among a thousand might. The enigma, if there is one, will be resolved in chapter 8. At this juncture, it is sufficient to note that both actual and relative numerosities are fundamental to determining whether or not a Deaf community will develop at any given time in any given place.

## ALIENATION

Rejection by general society drives Deaf people to join with other Deaf people. Instance after instance alienates Deaf people from society. The general community's lack of acceptance of Deaf people—whether actual or only perceived to be so by Deaf people—accounts, in part, for the formation of Deaf communities. In the chapters to follow, how alienation manifests itself in this country will be detailed.

### A BREED APART

The following is a portion of a story that appeared in the *Portland Oregonian* and was reprinted in *The New Yorker*, 22 August 1988.

Meanwhile, some 60 pro-North marchers held their own rally nearby, featuring signs such as "Pardon North—Indict the Linders," a reference to the family of Ben Linder, a former Portlander killed in Nicaragua last year. The supporters played flutes and guitars while stressing the broad base of their point of view.

"All Republicans aren't white people," said Sharon Caldwell of Newberg. "We have all kinds of people here—blacks, Hispanics, Jews, and the hearing impaired."

## AFFILIATION

Deaf people have a mutual attraction for each other. The single word "communication" cannot adequately convey the depth of feelings aroused in Deaf people by the relaxed, sympathetic interchanges they have with others who share their deafness. Thus, both centrifugal (alienation) and centripetal (affiliation) tendencies play major roles in development of the Deaf community.

## EDUCATION

The initiation and continuation of a Deaf community also depend on both formal and informal teaching that Deaf children receive. Their education comes not only from schools, but also from peers, family, and others whom Deaf children encounter while growing up. Cultural knowledge derives as much, if not more, from experiences outside the classroom as from instruction within it. How Deaf culture is transmitted is a major consideration in the study of Deaf communities.

## MILIEU

The politics of the general community affect all of the groups within it, but the relationships are not necessarily reciprocal. The social climate created by the larger society in which a Deaf community arises determines to some degree its structure.

## INTERACTIONS AMONG FACTORS

To be complete, a theory must account for the interactions among the five factors. They are not independent of each other. Numerosity affects the public attitudes to Deaf people. As their numbers grow, Deaf people are more able to defend themselves against majority impositions and their attractiveness as a market for goods and services increases. Numerosity also interacts with the way Deaf people regard their own Deaf community, and the number of Deaf people influences educational policies. Since these factors are not



played out in a political vacuum, the milieu must enter into understanding the various combinations of the other four factors.

## PREDICTIONS

The theory seeks to ascertain the likely course of the Deaf community *given* various sets of economic, political, and social conditions. To the extent that it is valid, the theory will correctly anticipate how the Deaf community will respond to conditions that may soon arise. That is one of the theory's functions. It should also be useful to Deaf leaders and those who wish to influence the Deaf community by making accurate predictions in response to "What if?" questions.

## A BIT OF LEAVENING

Describing so complex an entity as the Deaf community risks two dangers. One is that concentrating solely on the Deaf community's positive attributes justifies the criticism that such an account patronizes Deaf people by making them into "Barbie and Ken" dolls. After all, why should Deaf people have to be any better than people in general? The other is that painting too dour a picture of life in the Deaf community makes deafness into a living horror, a constant burden of near-intolerable weight. Both approaches lie. The Deaf community is not heaven on earth; it is the adaptive response of a minority group, hence it reflects unfavorable conditions surrounding it. It is populated with people, not stereotypes. Difficult as it is to sail between these two descriptive rocks, we shall endeavor to steer a careful course. Imagine describing the United States by focusing on a farm community in Iowa or, conversely, on a family living on Manhattan Island. Neither selection could convey to the proverbial Martian visitor the essence of this nation. Yet there is a society that is defined by the political boundaries of this country, and it can be described in terms that do the diversity of the nation justice.

Deaf people belong to more than one community, even though our interest in this book is on their membership in the Deaf community. They are like other Deaf people in some respects, but not in all respects. Deaf culture has distinctive features, though not all aspects of Deaf culture differ from the majority culture. The impor-

tance of the generalizations we seek lies in the assistance they can give to predicting how the Deaf community will react to future conditions. Prediction is the essence of science. Prediction also provides the key to explanation, another goal of scientists. When we are able to predict a group's behaviors, we are a long way—some philosophers would say we are all the way—toward an understanding of that group. The broad survey of the Deaf community in the following pages concentrates on its central tendencies, what the *average* Deaf person is like. It seeks generalizations about the Deaf community. But, in doing so, it recognizes that the Deaf community, like any large group of people, is not homogeneous. So this book strives to achieve balance by presenting more than one view of the phenomena that collectively make up the society of Deaf people in hopes that the composite will do justice to it.

## NOTES

---



---

1. Cited in Lane, 1984, 233. Italics added.
2. Bowe, 1973, 9. Warfield (1957, 60, 76, 78) also expresses the "at home among strangers" feeling, though she considers herself hard of hearing, not deaf.
3. This discussion is based on Schein, 1968, and Schein and Delk, 1974. Deafness has been so variously construed that its very use in technical writing has been questioned (Barker, Wright, Meyerson, and Gonick, 1953). Yet the term is embedded not only in common parlance but also in the technical literature of a wide variety of professions. The meaning cannot be understood by reference to a dictionary. Here are two definitions among many: "partially or wholly lacking or deprived of the sense of hearing; unable to hear" (*The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, unabridged, 1983); "totally or partially unable to hear" (*Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*, 2nd college edition, 1970). Since the degree remains unfixed in these two definitions, mildly hard-of-hearing people would also fit the "partially," hence would be "deaf"! Nor can we turn to laws for a definition of deafness for two reasons. Until very recently, there was no legal benefit or penalty for being deaf, so there was no legal need to define the term. In the last few years, however, "deaf" has appeared in laws establishing services (e.g., Captioned Films for the Deaf), creating commissions (e.g., Texas Commission for the Deaf), and requiring specific treatment

(e.g., Public Law 94-142, "Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975"). The latter does have a definition that is basically the same as that used in this book: "Deaf means a hearing impairment which is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification, which adversely affects educational performance." The first two laws do not define deafness, apparently relying on common usage for its meaning.

4. Rosen, 1986, 241.
5. Rutherford, 1988, 132.
6. Gliedman and Roth, 1980, 28-29.
7. Schein and Delk, 1974.
8. Schein, 1968. While the phrase "Deaf community" has only recently appeared in the literature, the concept dates at least from early in the nineteenth century, when it was used by Jean-Marc Itard not as a description of an existing entity but as a suggested solution for the social problems of Deaf people (cited in Lane, 1984).
9. Higgins, 1980, 38.
10. Cohen (1985, 7) writes, "The concept of community has been one of the most compelling and attractive themes in modern social science, and at the same time one of the most elusive to define." He continues, "'Community' is one of those words—like 'culture,' 'myth,' 'ritual,' 'symbol'—bandied around in ordinary, everyday speech, apparently, readily intelligible to speaker and listener, but, when imported into the discourse of social science, however, causes immense difficulty. Over the years it has proved to be highly resistant to satisfactory definition in anthropology and sociology, perhaps for the simple reason that all definitions contain or imply theories, and the theory of community has been very contentious" (11). Cohen does not attempt to formulate a definition of community; rather, he proposes to follow Wittgenstein's advice and avoid lexical restrictions initially and seek meaning through use of the term. A reasonable interpretation of the word's use implies two related suggestions: that the membership of a group of people (a) have something in common with each other which (b) distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other putative groups. Thus, community implies simultaneously *similarity* (with members of the community) and *difference* (from other communities).
11. Higgins sets forth the membership criteria: "Deafness is not a sufficient condition for membership in the deaf community, though some degree of hearing impairment is a necessary condition. . . . [Membership] is not an ascribed condition. [It] is achieved through (1) *identification* with the deaf world, (2) *shared experiences* that come of being hearing impaired, and (3) *participation* in the community's activities. Without all three characteristics, one cannot be nor would one choose to be a member of a deaf community" (Higgins, 1980, 38).
12. Jacobs, 1974, 1980; Schowe, 1979.
13. Nash and Nash, 1981.

14. Rosen, 1986, 241.
15. Padden, 1980, 93.
16. Hairston and Smith, 1983, 81.
17. Higgins, 1980; Padden, 1980.
18. Rhoades, Browning, and Thorin (1986) and Cohen and Livenah (1986) regard self-help groups as relatively new phenomena. The latter authors note, "The Self-Help Movement began in the 1930s as a response to several factors that were making general counseling services unavailable or unresponsive to those who needed them" (8). They appear totally unaware of organizations like the National Association of the Deaf and the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf.
19. The quotation is from Jacobs (1974, 70). Kenner (1986) holds a contrary view about using the word "ghetto" to describe the Deaf community. In his essay in the *New York Times Book Review* on the book by Walker (1986) he writes, "No, 'ghetto' is not too strong a word. 'I didn't think mutes were allowed to have driver's licenses,' a man in a gas station grumbles as early as the ninth page [of Walker, 1986]. That is but one slight among thousands; later, a psychiatrist, a specialist in the Deaf, refers offhand to his patients as 'defectives.' And in New York major agencies serving the blind are found 'on the genteel upper East Side or on tree-lined streets in Chelsea,' but the Society for the Deaf 'in a place the police had forsaken.' "