

## **Experiences of Deafhood**

Jan Kåre Breivik (2005). *Deaf identities in the making: Local lives, transnational connections*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet Press, 220 pages. Hardcover. \$49.95

*Deaf identities in the making: Local lives, transnational connections* is a book written by a hearing author in Norway. Breivik is a social anthropologist and researcher at Stein Rokkan Center for Social Studies, University of Bergen, Norway and has been able to spend a great deal of his time with the Norwegian Deaf Community developing relationships and a broad understanding of the perspectives of the various groups and individuals who could be considered to make up the Deaf community in his country. He has described 10 contemporary stories, or individual cases, that reveal the variability that may be actualised in the lives of deaf people. He presents these stories, as related to him by participants in a study that he has recently undertaken. Concepts of “deafhood”, deaf citizenship and duality of identity are examined in detail. The participants range from deafened persons to individuals with a long tradition of involvement as members of Deaf families and within the Norwegian Deaf Community.

In reporting the stories of his participants he seems to have engaged their trust and cooperation, but at the same time he seems able to maintain an appropriate sense of distance and detachment from the experiences and emotions in their stories. While the focus is on Norwegian contexts, it is I believe relevant in a broader manner. Indeed, part of Breivik’s analysis is that many deaf people are part of a broader transnational community with its own cultural events, social capital and potential. He even draws a comparison with the national and international links among gay communities and the forms of membership that may exist through shared events, travel, and the use of Internet, media and other communication technologies.

The stories that he presents demonstrate changing attitudes, identities and even dissonance within and among individuals and forms of communicative and cultural dualism between deaf and hearing affiliations (for example, the perceived cultural “impurity” that may be associated with deafened people). The struggles with identity and attempted dualism that the stories reveal are well reported and, unlike many other books using case study methods, these are well analysed in concluding chapters.

As such, the book presents a deep and penetrating exploration of forms of deaf identity and how these may be constructed in local, national and transnational contexts. It is presented in a most readable style and found that I was more and more drawn into the stories and looking forward to finding how the author would draw these disparate accounts together. I particularly recommend the book for teachers, counsellors and even for parents of young deaf children. I would also think that a version of the book in Norwegian would be most appropriate for deaf and hearing readers in that country.

Merv B. Hyde  
Centre for Applied Studies of Deafness  
Griffith University  
Queensland, Australia.