

# Deaf Culture

## Exploring Deaf Communities in the United States

*Second Edition*

Irene W. Leigh, PhD  
Jean F. Andrews, PhD  
Raychelle L. Harris, PhD  
Topher González Ávila, MA





5521 Ruffin Road  
San Diego, CA 92123

e-mail: [information@pluralpublishing.com](mailto:information@pluralpublishing.com)  
Website: <https://www.pluralpublishing.com>

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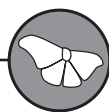
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# Contents

|                          |            |
|--------------------------|------------|
| <i>Preface</i>           | <i>xi</i>  |
| <i>Acknowledgments</i>   | <i>xix</i> |
| <i>About the Authors</i> | <i>xxi</i> |

## Part I. Deaf Culture: Yesterday and Today

|                                                      |           |
|------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>1 Deaf Community: Past and Present</b>            | <b>3</b>  |
| Introduction                                         | 3         |
| The Deaf Community and Its Members                   | 9         |
| Deaf Children of Culturally Deaf Parents             | 10        |
| Deaf Children of Hearing Parents                     | 10        |
| Hearing Members in Deaf Families                     | 12        |
| Hard-of-Hearing Individuals                          | 12        |
| Late-Deafened Individuals                            | 12        |
| DeafBlind Individuals                                | 13        |
| Multiple Communities                                 | 14        |
| Demographics                                         | 14        |
| Historical Highlights                                | 15        |
| Contemporary Descriptions                            | 22        |
| Deafhood                                             | 23        |
| Deaf Gain                                            | 23        |
| Deaf Ethnicity                                       | 24        |
| People of the Eye                                    | 25        |
| Deaf Epistemologies                                  | 25        |
| Conclusions                                          | 26        |
| References                                           | 26        |
| <b>2 Causes of Being Deaf and the Auditory Field</b> | <b>31</b> |
| Determining One's Hearing Level                      | 32        |
| Audiologists and Audiograms                          | 32        |
| Hearing Labels                                       | 40        |
| What Causes Changes in Hearing Levels?               | 42        |
| Genetic Causes                                       | 42        |
| Acquired                                             | 42        |
| Conductive                                           | 43        |
| Sensorineural                                        | 43        |
| History of Auditory Technology                       | 44        |
| Current Auditory Innovations and Rehabilitation      | 47        |
| Hearing Level Screening                              | 47        |
| Hearing Aids                                         | 50        |
| Cochlear Implants                                    | 51        |
| The Cochlear Implant Controversy                     | 54        |
| Inspiration Porn                                     | 56        |

|                     |    |
|---------------------|----|
| Genetic Engineering | 57 |
| Genetic Controversy | 58 |
| Conclusions         | 60 |
| References          | 61 |

## Part II. Signed Languages and Learning

|                                                            |           |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>3 American Sign Language</b>                            | <b>67</b> |
| Background of ASL and Other Sign Languages                 | 67        |
| Indigenous Communities and “Hand-Talk”                     | 68        |
| African American Communities and BASL                      | 69        |
| European Communities                                       | 71        |
| Euro-American Communities                                  | 72        |
| Home Signs and Gestures                                    | 73        |
| Village Sign Languages                                     | 73        |
| How Sign Languages Are Spread                              | 74        |
| International Sign (IS) and Signed Languages Used Globally | 75        |
| ASL and English: Features, Content, and Structure          | 76        |
| ASL Content                                                | 78        |
| Structure                                                  | 80        |
| The Manual Alphabet                                        | 83        |
| ASL Learners and Strategies                                | 84        |
| Dialects and Other Forms of Signed Communication           | 86        |
| Attitudes: Linguistic Imperialism                          | 87        |
| Conclusions                                                | 89        |
| References                                                 | 89        |
| <b>4 How Deaf Children Think, Learn, and Read</b>          | <b>93</b> |
| Culture, Learning, and Intelligence                        | 94        |
| Culture and Language                                       | 94        |
| IQ Tests                                                   | 94        |
| Thought and Language                                       | 96        |
| Cognitive Abilities                                        | 96        |
| Cognition Shaped by Culture                                | 96        |
| Incidental Learning                                        | 98        |
| Joint Attention                                            | 99        |
| Visual Attention and Peripheral Vision                     | 100       |
| Visual Imagery and Spatial Memory                          | 100       |
| Reasoning                                                  | 102       |
| Metacognitive Abilities                                    | 102       |
| Theory of Mind                                             | 103       |
| Executive Function                                         | 103       |
| Language Pathways                                          | 104       |
| Early Gestures, Family Communication, and Play             | 105       |
| Language Milestones                                        | 106       |
| The Brain, Multilingualism, and Sign Languages             | 109       |
| Theories and Strategies                                    | 111       |
| Literacy Learning                                          | 113       |
| Importance                                                 | 113       |

|                                                              |            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Developmental Pathways                                       | 113        |
| Deficit Models                                               | 114        |
| Asset Model                                                  | 114        |
| Conclusions                                                  | 115        |
| References                                                   | 116        |
| <b>5 Deaf Education, Deaf Culture, and Multiculturalism</b>  | <b>121</b> |
| Deaf Culture and Multiculturalism                            | 121        |
| Factors Impacting Schooling                                  | 122        |
| Age of Onset and Parental Hearing Status                     | 122        |
| Multilingualism, Multiculturalism, and Schooling             | 123        |
| Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Deaf Students | 124        |
| DeafDisabled Students                                        | 124        |
| Communication and Language Approaches                        | 125        |
| History of Deaf Education                                    | 125        |
| Bilingual and Multilingual Approaches                        | 130        |
| Blended Approaches                                           | 131        |
| Monolingual Listening and Spoken Language (LSL) Approaches   | 132        |
| Communication Approaches and DeafDisabled Students           | 132        |
| School Settings                                              | 134        |
| Center Schools                                               | 134        |
| Private Oral Schools                                         | 134        |
| Day Schools                                                  | 135        |
| Inclusion                                                    | 135        |
| Mainstream, Self-Contained Resource Room                     | 135        |
| Coenrollment                                                 | 135        |
| Charter Schools and Home Schools                             | 136        |
| Technology, DeafSpace, and Classroom Acoustics               | 136        |
| Educational Programming                                      | 138        |
| Early Childhood (EC) Levels (Birth to 5 Years)               | 138        |
| Curriculum and Outcomes                                      | 138        |
| Challenges in School                                         | 138        |
| K to 12th-Grade Levels (5 to 22 Years)                       | 140        |
| Curriculum and Outcomes                                      | 140        |
| Transition and Postsecondary Educational Opportunities       | 142        |
| Curriculum and Outcomes                                      | 142        |
| Postsecondary Challenges                                     | 143        |
| Preparation of Teachers and Educational Interpreters         | 143        |
| Teacher-Training                                             | 143        |
| Educational Interpreter Training                             | 144        |
| Challenges for Teachers and Interpreters                     | 145        |
| Conclusions                                                  | 146        |
| References                                                   | 146        |

### Part III. Deaf Lives, Technology, Arts, and Career Opportunities

|                               |            |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| <b>6 Deaf Identities</b>      | <b>153</b> |
| Deaf Identities               | 155        |
| Categories of Deaf Identities | 157        |

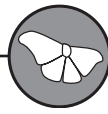
|                                                                                         |            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Disability Framework                                                                    | 157        |
| Social Identity Theory                                                                  | 158        |
| Racial Identity Development Framework                                                   | 159        |
| Deaf Identity Development Framework                                                     | 161        |
| Acculturation Model                                                                     | 165        |
| The Narrative Approach                                                                  | 167        |
| Intersectionality                                                                       | 169        |
| Race/Ethnicity                                                                          | 169        |
| Sexual Orientation                                                                      | 171        |
| Disability                                                                              | 172        |
| Conclusions                                                                             | 174        |
| References                                                                              | 174        |
| <b>7 Deaf Communities Within the Deaf Community</b>                                     | <b>177</b> |
| References                                                                              | 188        |
| <b>8 Navigating Lives</b>                                                               | <b>191</b> |
| Introduction                                                                            | 191        |
| Forms of Discrimination                                                                 | 192        |
| Resilience                                                                              | 195        |
| The Role of Relationships in Strengthening Resilience                                   | 196        |
| The World of Work                                                                       | 198        |
| Health Issues                                                                           | 201        |
| Mental Health Issues                                                                    | 203        |
| Domestic Violence                                                                       | 205        |
| Criminal Justice Issues                                                                 | 206        |
| Aging Issues                                                                            | 208        |
| Conclusions                                                                             | 209        |
| References                                                                              | 209        |
| <b>9 Technology and Accessibility</b>                                                   | <b>215</b> |
| History: Foundations for Access                                                         | 216        |
| Deaf Community and Access                                                               | 217        |
| Captions                                                                                | 219        |
| Telephones                                                                              | 226        |
| Alerting Devices or Systems                                                             | 234        |
| Wake-Up Devices                                                                         | 236        |
| Baby Alerting Devices                                                                   | 236        |
| Residential Security and Alarm Systems                                                  | 237        |
| Emergency Announcements                                                                 | 239        |
| Assistive Systems and Devices                                                           | 240        |
| Innovative Technology                                                                   | 242        |
| Conclusions                                                                             | 247        |
| References                                                                              | 248        |
| <b>10 Deaf People and the Legal System: Education, Employment, and Criminal Justice</b> | <b>253</b> |
| Education Laws                                                                          | 254        |
| Laws in Early Childhood                                                                 | 254        |

|                                                             |     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EDHI) Act         | 254 |
| Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Part C) | 254 |
| Laws With School-Age Deaf Children                          | 256 |
| IDEA (Part B)                                               | 256 |
| IDEA (Part A)                                               | 256 |
| American With Disabilities Act (ADA)                        | 257 |
| Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973               | 257 |
| Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)                           | 259 |
| Laws in Foster Care Placements                              | 259 |
| IDEA, ADA, and Section 504                                  | 259 |
| Laws in Juvenile Justice Facility Placements                | 260 |
| IDEA, ADA, and Section 504                                  | 260 |
| Employment                                                  | 262 |
| Social Security Act                                         | 262 |
| Rehabilitation Act of 1973                                  | 262 |
| Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)                       | 262 |
| Higher Education                                            | 264 |
| ADA and 504 Protections                                     | 264 |
| Justice System                                              | 265 |
| Family, Education, and Language Factors                     | 265 |
| Section 504 and ADA Protections                             | 266 |
| The Bill of Rights and the 14th Amendment                   | 266 |
| Victims of Crimes                                           | 267 |
| Prevalence and Types of Crimes                              | 268 |
| Homicide                                                    | 268 |
| Sexual Offending Crimes                                     | 269 |
| The Criminal Justice Process                                | 271 |
| Barriers at the Arrest                                      | 271 |
| Booking, Medical /Psychological Intake, and Orientation     | 271 |
| Barriers at Trial                                           | 273 |
| Barriers in Jail or Prison                                  | 275 |
| Barriers in Probation and Parole                            | 276 |
| Conclusions                                                 | 277 |
| References                                                  | 278 |

|                                       |            |
|---------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>11 Arts, Literature, and Media</b> | <b>281</b> |
| Arts                                  | 281        |
| Visual and Tactile Arts               | 282        |
| De'VIA                                | 284        |
| Performing Arts                       | 288        |
| Deaf Theater                          | 288        |
| Deaf in Television and Movies         | 291        |
| Deaf in Game and Reality Shows        | 294        |
| Deaf Music and Dancing                | 294        |
| Literature                            | 299        |
| Literature in the Deaf Community      | 299        |
| ASL Literature                        | 300        |
| Deaf Literature: English              | 304        |
| Online ASL and Deaf Literature        | 308        |

|                                                         |            |
|---------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Media                                                   | 310        |
| Deaf Images: Digital Arts and Photography               | 310        |
| Deaf Motion: Cinema and Film                            | 312        |
| Conclusion                                              | 315        |
| References                                              | 315        |
| <b>12 Advocating and Career Opportunities</b>           | <b>321</b> |
| Introduction                                            | 321        |
| Deaf-Hearing Collaboration                              | 322        |
| Career Possibilities                                    | 325        |
| ASL Interpreters                                        | 325        |
| Teachers                                                | 327        |
| Early Childhood Educators                               | 329        |
| Audiologists                                            | 330        |
| Speech and Language Therapists                          | 332        |
| Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and Job Coaches    | 333        |
| Mental Health Service Providers                         | 334        |
| Hotline Volunteer                                       | 335        |
| Clinical Mental Health Counselor                        | 336        |
| School Counselor                                        | 336        |
| Social Work                                             | 336        |
| Clinical Psychology                                     | 337        |
| Emergency Medical Technicians                           | 338        |
| Other Career Possibilities                              | 338        |
| Conclusions                                             | 339        |
| References                                              | 339        |
| <b>13 Final Thoughts on Deaf Culture and Its Future</b> | <b>343</b> |
| References                                              | 350        |
| <i>Index</i>                                            | 353        |





# Preface

Deaf culture has been around for centuries, definitely since the 1700s and perhaps even earlier. Deaf people have always been on this earth. When schools for the deaf were started, deaf people began coming together. The ways they communicated and interacted with each other planted the seeds of Deaf culture that have grown to what it is today: a vibrant culture with a diverse membership.

Many books have been written about Deaf culture. Our book takes a different approach. Yes, we explain what Deaf culture is all about. We describe the Deaf community, its history and contemporary perspectives, and what Deaf culture has to offer. Looking at the Table of Contents, you may wonder: What are some of those chapters doing in a book on Deaf culture? Auditory Innovations? Deaf Education? How Deaf Children Think, Learn, and Read? Technology and Accessibility? Careers? As you continue to read this Preface, you will see why we address these issues.

These chapters are a testimony to how Deaf culture has been influenced by experiences related to each area and how culturally Deaf individuals have influenced new approaches in each area that have taken Deaf people's perspectives into account. We four authors, three Deaf and one hearing, teamed up to work on revisions for this second edition and agreed that we needed to present the Deaf experience in areas that have profoundly influenced the lives of Deaf people. We have had close connections with each of these areas and want to share what we have learned with you, the reader. As three white cisgender, abled women, two

Deaf and one hearing, working with a Latino Queer Deaf man, we have collaborated to give you a perspective of how complex the Deaf experience is and how it is transitioning from the framework of a purely white straight Deaf experience to one that reflects the reality of diversity with the multiple communities within the greater Deaf community, including DeafDisabled individuals. Following, we describe our backgrounds.

Irene W. Leigh's parents, stateless refugees who ended up in Great Britain during World War II and survived the bombing, found out their daughter was deaf on her second birthday. Her hearing mother repeatedly told her how she responded to the news, grieved, and then after one week pulled herself together and started to get information on how to give her daughter access to language. After the family emigrated from Great Britain to the United States, they were detained at Ellis Island for questioning because it was thought Irene as a 4-year-old deaf person would be a burden to the government of the United States. Her parents were able to demonstrate her mastery of language, which exceeded that of the immigration officer's 4-year-old grandson. Upon release, they moved to Chicago, Illinois, where she eventually attended the Bell School, a Chicago public school that had a day school for the deaf as part of an elementary school with hearing pupils. She was able to play with and learn with both Deaf and hearing peers. Nonetheless, she was consistently aware of her immigrant status and her subtle sense of difference compared to her American peers. She witnessed firsthand how Deaf students

struggled to master the educational curriculum without teachers who could use American Sign Language (ASL) and without ASL interpreters in the classroom. She herself had to prove to educators in high school and college and supervisors at work that as a Deaf person, she was able to keep up with hearing peers and surpass them or perform jobs at work as well as hearing peers. She saw Deaf people going to Deaf friends' houses, hoping they were at home because there was no way they could have phoned ahead of time. From talking to parents and from her own parents' experiences, she understood what hearing parents go through with their Deaf children. She herself has gone through the parenting experience, having raised two children, one hearing and one Deaf, possibly due to a recessive gene. She saw Deaf people explaining how they became deaf. She saw how difficult it was for Deaf people with mental health issues to get help from signing mental health clinicians who could provide culturally affirmative services. These formative experiences led her to become a teacher of the deaf and a counselor before entering the clinical psychology doctoral program at New York University to become a psychologist. Again and again, both socially and at work, she encountered Deaf people who told of how they had to work extra hard to overcome the disbelief of well-intentioned, unenlightened hearing people that they could be competent workers. And she saw how Deaf people went about solving life problems and living productive and happy lives. All of these experiences reinforced her desire to explain to you, the reader, Deaf lives and how Deaf people navigate the early years, the educational system, and the world of home and work. At Gallaudet University, the world's only liberal arts university for

Deaf and hard-of-hearing people, she has trained or supervised numerous doctoral-level psychologists to work with Deaf people in culturally affirmative ways. She has also written extensively on the subject of Deaf people, with particular focus on deaf identities and multiculturalism, and has produced research in the areas of depression, attachment, mental health, cochlear implants, and deaf identities. She has also presented at numerous national and international conferences on these topics. She sees herself as a bicultural individual, comfortable in the Deaf community and comfortable with hearing individuals, thanks to the positive upbringing she received from her hearing parents who supported her as a Deaf person.

Jean F. Andrews is a hearing educator who early on immersed herself in the Deaf community as a young adult. During her graduate studies, she learned about Deaf culture and ASL by socializing with Deaf classmates and working on class projects with Deaf/hearing collaborative teams. She continued her learning of ASL with Deaf faculty at the Maryland School for the Deaf in the teachers' workroom and during after school social activities. While in the classroom, she explored the best ways to teach her Deaf students English reading skills by observing how they used ASL and English to understand print. Throughout her professional life, she continually connected with the Deaf community. She has spent extensive time in more than 20 Deaf schools and mainstreamed schools, researching how to best teach Deaf children using ASL/English bilingual methodology and developing alternative frameworks to teach reading using ASL English, and fingerspelling. Throughout her 45-year career, she has prepared teachers, administrators, and doctoral-level educators to understand

Deaf culture; welcomed Deaf teachers, administrators, and graduate students; and worked to give Deaf students the best academic experience possible in culturally Deaf ways. Along the way, she attended educational conferences and saw how hearing researchers dominated the podium, lecturing about how they think Deaf people should be taught to read, write, and be educated. She often wondered why more culturally Deaf professionals, with their culturally affirming insights, were not invited to participate in federally funded research teams on language, literacy, and educationally related issues. She also has experienced firsthand many Deaf people who have had significant difficulty learning in school due to language deprivation, but they somehow made it through graduate school and got into professions when accommodations were provided. But she has also seen many other Deaf adults at the lower end of the achievement spectrum who have ended up in jails and prisons without being able to communicate with their attorneys or signing interpreters. Her philosophy has been to make sure that the education and forensic fields are culturally affirmative for Deaf people. On the international front, she has collaborated on teaching classes in the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Mexico, Brazil, Morocco, and Taiwan. With international colleagues, she has published research to develop language and reading strategies for Deaf children learning alphabetic and nonalphabetic scripts.

Raychelle Harris grew up with Deaf parents and one Deaf and one hearing sister. Her parents, her mother's parents and aunt, and some relatives are Deaf, making her third-generation Deaf. The sisters learned ASL as their first language from their Deaf father, who graduated from the Florida School for the Deaf and

Blind (FSDB), and their Deaf mother, who graduated from North Carolina School for the Deaf (NCSD). They met at Gallaudet College (before Gallaudet became a university in 1986) and married in 1972. Her Deaf sister met her Deaf husband at a Deaf Awareness Day event at Six Flags in New Jersey. Her husband comes from a Deaf Lithuanian family that immigrated to the United States in adulthood, and all of them learned ASL and English as their third and fourth languages in addition to Lithuanian Sign Language and both written and spoken Lithuanian. All of them are connexin 26 recipients (see Chapter 2) and/or carriers. A geneticist at Gallaudet informed her sister and her husband, both carriers of the connexin 26 mutation, that all of the children they have would be Deaf. They now have two beautiful Deaf children, who are fourth-generation Deaf. Raychelle's hearing sister, an OHCODA (only-hearing Child of Deaf Adults), fluent in ASL, married a hearing man who learned to sign. They have a beautiful hearing and signing daughter.

Growing up, Raychelle never had an opportunity to study her language or culture until a historic Deaf Studies course was offered at her Deaf high school, taught by two Deaf teachers in 1989. The experience was mind-blowing for Raychelle. When she enrolled at Gallaudet University, she met many Deaf people who did not think ASL was a language. They did not think there was a Deaf culture either. This bothered Raychelle. Her mother was the principal of a Deaf school that was the first public Deaf school to adopt the bilingual-bicultural philosophy, teaching using ASL and written English from kindergarten through high school. This inspired Raychelle to establish the first bilingual-bicultural week with all Deaf presenters explaining about ASL and

Deaf culture at Gallaudet in 1992, which then led to the establishment of a Student Body Government position focused on ASL and Deaf culture.

For a long time, Raychelle has been passionately involved in teaching ASL as well as Deaf culture to her students both at the precollege and college levels. She has researched how ASL is used in the classroom in different school settings. She has worked to include ASL and Deaf Studies in school systems. Her research found that kindergarteners who arrive at school already fluent in ASL are better able to participate in academic discussions. She has found that teachers can promote higher-order thinking skills to very young preschool children through the use of complex Academic ASL techniques and principles. Her research provides innovative approaches for ASL/English bilingual preschools and kindergartens to lay the foundation for lifelong literacy in ASL and English.

In 2011, Raychelle established the Masters in Sign Language Education (MASLED) program for teachers of signed languages and cultures. Notable alumni include numerous graduates who teach their own native sign languages such as Saudi Sign Language (SSL), Hong Kong Sign Language (HKSL), and Lengua de Señas Mexicana (LSM). Over hundreds of alumni are now teaching at the University of California, Los Angeles; Harvard University; Gallaudet University; Cornell University; Boston University; Austin Community College; Georgia State University, and many more, transforming their students' perceptions of Deaf people, Deaf cultures and Deaf communities, and hopefully yours, as you read this book.

Topher González Ávila was born in Mexico City, Mexico, to Patty Avila, a Deaf Latina woman. Patty and her eight

siblings grew up in poverty in Mexico. Patty's dad worked as a taxi driver. Patty's mom stayed at home and took care of everyone. Patty wasn't able to attend what is the equivalent of high school in the United States because at the time, schools in Mexico were not required to provide access to communication. This means schools in Mexico were not obligated to provide interpreters and accommodations for Deaf and Disabled students to have equal access as other students. Instead, Patty went to trade school and completed a certification program in sewing.

Patty experienced language deprivation and severe economic hardships as a Deaf Latina woman and did not want the same for Topher, so Patty and some of her siblings moved to the United States. Most moved to Texas, California, New York, and even Canada. Patty stayed in Dallas, Texas, and had two more children, who both are Deaf. Patty learned two languages: American Sign Language (ASL) and English while navigating through a new country. Thanks to her dedication to her children, Topher and his siblings all were able to have education. They all graduated from high school and went to college. Thanks to Patty, Topher became the first one in his family to get a bachelor's degree as well as a master's degree.

Topher grew up in public schools in Dallas while his siblings attended Texas School for the Deaf (TSD). They all had choices when it came to the school they attended. Topher was new to the United States and stayed with his mom. Topher graduated and went to the University of North Texas (UNT). He completed his dual degrees in Radio, Television, and Film (RTVF) and Criminal Justice in 2015. Following graduation, Topher joined Deaf Action Center (DAC), a local Deaf-run nonprofit with services and programs

available to support the Deaf communities in Dallas–Fort Worth (DFW).

DAC has been instrumental in Patty and her family's transition to the United States, and this was Topher's way of giving back to the Deaf communities. For 2 years, Topher worked in the interpreting department as their Scheduling Coordinator Assistant and then as their Training & Outreach Liaison. Topher became familiar with the interpreting field. He took the BEI exams and became one of the first known Latinx Deaf interpreters in Texas. The more Topher worked for the Deaf communities, the more Topher realized that it starts with schools. Changes need to start in school. So he went to Gallaudet University for their Masters in Sign Language Education (MASLED) program and graduated in 2018.

In the program, Topher studied teaching methods and approaches, assessment tools and strategies, and curriculum development and implementation. Topher completed his MASLED internship with Nozomi Tomita, a Japanese Deaf woman who taught Japanese Sign Language. Through her skills and expertise, Topher was able to co-develop and co-teach Gallaudet University's first hybrid *Lengua de Señas Mexicana* (LSM) course with Armando Castro-Osnaya. During his studies at Gallaudet, he also did two other internships.

He did an Accelerator internship with Mitú in Los Angeles, California. Mitú is an online entertainment channel by Latinx people and for Latinx people. There, he worked with some of the industry's writers, filmmakers, and editors. He completed his internship with a short film, *Connected Manos* (2018), on his mom. Lastly but certainly not least, he worked with HEARD (Helping Educate to Advance the Rights of Deaf Communities),

an all-volunteer nonprofit organization that works for Deaf and Disabled people who are impacted by mass incarceration. Topher believes that one can never stop learning, and he hopes to continue working with and for our Deaf communities to bring long-term positive changes.

For Ayisha Knight-Shaw, being asked to create the cover art for this book has truly been an honor. The beautiful collaboration between Ayisha Knight-Shaw, Topher González Ávila, and fellow Deaf artist Jessica Arevalo has made this a reality. Ayisha is a Deaf California-based multimedia artist, poet, educator, and Reiki Master Teacher. The daughter of a white Jewish mother and Black Cherokee father, she was raised by her mother in an ethnically diverse community of poets, painters, sculptors, photographers, and storytellers who taught her that creating and sharing art is as much a political act as a thing of beauty. These intersectional identities have been at the forefront of her art since she began exploring photography at age 13 and have evolved over the years. Her life as a Deaf woman in California, Washington, DC, and Massachusetts, as well as visits to Cuba, Mexico City, and Oaxaca have given Ayisha the opportunity to create a tapestry of many cultures in her work. Her solo and shared photo exhibits have been showcased at Very Special Arts Boston, the Boston Public Library, the Cambridge Center for Adult Education, Salem Access TV, Espresso Royale Café, Two Dogs Working, Galant Gallery, North Shore Career Center, Deaf Expo, Disability Expo, Maine Deaf Expo, and Dorian's in Provincetown, Massachusetts.

As a poet, Ayisha has been seen at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Teatro Pregones, La Mama theater in New York City, Rhode Island School



of Design, Amherst 20th Anniversary of the ADA, Northampton Pride, and Wake Up The Earth. Television and other video appearances include HBO Def Poetry Jam Season 4 as the first Deaf poet, Basic Black, and Urban Update, The Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Gore House Museum, and Culture Coach International. Her 2004 show at Wheelock Family Theater, "Hey Sistah, Welcome Home," led to a grant by the Cambridge Arts Council. She holds a BA degree in Theater Arts from UC Santa Cruz, and a master's degree in Sign Language Education from Gallaudet University. Over the years, her passion for art, storytelling, theater, Reiki, and education has been forming a tapestry that continues today. If you would like to see more of her work, you can visit her website (<http://www.deafayisha.com>).

While we focus strongly on Deaf culture in this book, we also write about persons who do not identify with Deaf culture. Why do we write about these individuals? We contrast their experiences with the experiences of people who grow up either exposed to Deaf culture or who become part of the culturally Deaf community after their school years. We feel this will help you understand more fully how persons who are deaf experience their lives, whether culturally Deaf or not.

Exactly what have we done for this second edition? Each chapter has been significantly updated. In Part I, "Deaf Culture: Yesterday and Today," we have two chapters. Chapter 1 covers the past and present of the Deaf community. It consists of an introduction that reports on the Deaf community, who its members are, how large the community is, its history, and the different ways to explain the Deaf experience.

What is a chapter on "Causes of Being Deaf and the Auditory Field" doing in

Part I? Deaf people themselves *are* interested in genetics. And, contrary to popular belief, many do not necessarily want to become hearing. They are proud of themselves as Deaf people. But they are interested in how genes that cause differences in hearing are transmitted from generation to generation. We assume you readers will be interested, too. Deaf people also talk about how they became deaf from nongenetic causes such as diseases, and we explain this. Everyone with hearing differences has been through hearing testing and different ways to get access to hearing through auditory aids. They all have experiences with audiologists. Culturally Deaf people, including those who want to use hearing aids and cochlear implants (devices to help people hear), have their own perspective on experiences in hearing and speech centers. It is part of their lives, and they have been working to make such experiences more culturally sensitive.

Moving on to Part II, we learn about "Signed Languages and Learning." This gets to the heart of Deaf culture. In this section, we include information that shows how signed languages and learning continue to evolve. In Chapter 3, "American Sign Language," you will learn that despite centuries of linguistic imperialism oppression, ASL and other signed languages remain a vibrant marker of Deaf communities worldwide who cherish and celebrate its use. Here we explore the following: What is a signed language? How do culturally Deaf people, for whom ASL is their unique language and bond, use ASL to communicate? What is the difference between sign language and sign communication? Yes, there is a difference! Do Deaf people all over the world use the same sign language? Read this chapter to find out.

In Chapter 4, “How Deaf Children Think, Learn, and Read,” we explore how Deaf and DeafDisabled students develop their cognitive abilities, world knowledge, and literacy through their different life experiences at home and school with the resources of a sign language, Deaf culture, multiculturalism, and auditory, tactile, and visual technologies.

And in Chapter 5, “Deaf Education, Deaf Culture, and Multiculturalism,” we learn how Deaf, DeafBlind, and DeafDisabled people from different cultural backgrounds have been educated and what they have learned. There are laws about educating children with disabilities, including deaf children. Do you know how much input culturally Deaf people had into their own education? What was the education system like for them? We also examine learner factors in Deaf education related to Deaf culture and multiculturalism and note disruptive dynamics such as institutional and individual racism, linguicism, and audism. What do we know from research about what works and does not work? Get the answers in this chapter!

Moving on to Part III, “Deaf Lives, Technology, Arts, and Career Opportunities,” we get more into how Deaf people live their lives. Chapter 6, “Deaf Identities,” covers different theories and ways that identity develops in Deaf people and how culturally Deaf people may see themselves. When scholars began to explore Deaf culture, they based their conclusions on white Deaf people. What about Deaf people of color? What about Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer culturally Deaf people? What about DeafDisabled people? The field of intersectionality, or how different identities interact with each other and how these interactions are compounded by oppression, is

growing fast. Scholars are finally paying attention to these different Deaf groups and how their identities intersect. In this edition, we pay more attention to issues of intersectionality.

The Deaf community is not just one big white Deaf community, just as hearing society is not one huge hearing community. Both consist of multiple communities. In Chapter 7, written for this edition, we take an in-depth look at exactly what these communities are as represented by various Deaf individuals and what they have done in view of their unique identities. We also present how the disenfranchised communities experience discrimination and oppression.

What life issues do culturally Deaf people confront? How do they deal with these life issues? Do they feel equal to hearing people? When they face discrimination by hearing people, whether in school, on the playground, at work, or in the community, how do they stand up for themselves? That is the focus of Chapter 8, “Navigating Lives .” Many Deaf people do just fine. But others struggle in the world of work. They may also face health and mental health issues and can get caught in the criminal justice system. When they search for help, are the available services Deaf culturally affirmative?

Deaf people have made their mark in technology and access. In Chapter 9, “Technology and Accessibility,” we provide a historical background to explain the access issues Deaf people had to struggle with. When technology finally caught up enough to enable Deaf people to have functional equivalence (this means they can access technical devices just like hearing people can), their lives were transformed in positive ways. In this chapter, new information has been added so that you can learn how Deaf people currently

use and benefit from captions, telephones, alarm systems, and other types of innovative technology. Deaf people have worked to invent much of the technology that they now benefit from.

Laws, legislation, and Deaf communities are the focus of Chapter 10, a new addition to this edition. You may ask what it is about laws and legislation that is so important for the Deaf community. This chapter explains the significant and protective impact these laws have had on the lives of Deaf people. They have used the legal powers of these laws to counteract discrimination and achieve functional equivalence with their hearing counterparts in areas such as education, health care, employment, and the criminal justice system that includes both victims of crime and offenders.

Chapter 11, "Arts, Literature, and Media," provides a window to the arts and literature that is a vital part of Deaf culture. This chapter reflects new work that has emerged since the first edition. We show you how Deaf culture has contributed to the arts through visual means. There are plays, sculptures, paintings, and literary renderings, among others, that have been produced by culturally Deaf people. You will get a taste of sign language literature and written literature that shows how Deaf people express themselves. We also provide information on how Deaf people have been and are being portrayed in the arts, literature, and media. There are Deaf people in Hollywood, on Broadway, and in multiple television shows, including reality shows.

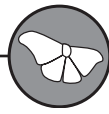
Chapter 12, "Advocating and Career Opportunities," was written with you, the reader, in mind. We present ways in which

hearing people can work together with Deaf people as advocates and allies while minimizing potential pitfalls in working together. There is new emphasis on the importance of mutual respect and awareness of hearing privilege. We also provide information on different career opportunities that allow you to be involved with Deaf people. Hopefully, it will help you decide where you want to go with what you have learned from this book. There are many other possibilities beyond the careers we write about where you can be involved in working with and for Deaf people, if that interests you.

And finally, in Chapter 13, we present "Final Thoughts on Deaf Culture and Its Future." What impact will all the technology and genetic advances have on Deaf culture and ASL? Does the Deaf community have a future? What is the legacy of the Deaf community and Deaf culture? Has sufficient attention been paid to the diversity of the Deaf community considering that earlier Deaf culture scholarship has been described through a white lens? How can hearing parents benefit from knowledge about Deaf culture? Having a deaf child does not have to be anxiety ridden and problem filled; it can be a joyful experience to support a Deaf child, understand the world of this child, and provide ways to be bicultural as this child connects with both hearing and Deaf societies.

We hope you, the reader, enjoy the book as much as we have enjoyed writing it for you. We hope you will get a sense of Deaf culture and the different ways Deaf people have worked to improve their quality of life and to show they are an important part of the diversity of the human race.





# Acknowledgments

We acknowledge the assistance of those individuals who eased the process of our work, starting with Gallaudet University graduate research assistants Alexander Wilkins, Amanda Strasser, and, particularly for this second edition, Erin Timberlake. They ably contributed reference sources that ensured we had updated information. Alexander Wilkins went beyond the call of duty in creating images and ensuring that photographs selected for this book were prepared for publication. We also gratefully acknowledge Ayisha Knight-Shaw's new design work for the book cover. To them we express appreciation.

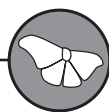
Ashley L. Dockens, AuD, PhD, and James G. Phelan, AuD, made sure that the information on audiology was accurately and impeccably presented. From Lamar University, we thank Brian Sattler for his photographs and Chatman Sieben for his editorial support. Diane Clark, PhD., chairperson of the Department of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education at Lamar provided resources via access to doctoral research in her Cognition in Context (C'nC) Research Laboratory. Brian Greenwald, PhD, of Gallaudet University provided valuable information regarding the eugenics controversy we cover in Chapter 9. We could not have obtained some of our photographs and permis-

sions to use these without the assistance of Susan Flanigan, Coordinator of Public Relations and Communications in the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center at Gallaudet University, and Michael Olson, former Interim Director, Gallaudet University Archives. And we thank the anonymous reviewers for their comments, which enabled us to polish this second edition. Also, we give profound thanks to Kalie Koscielak, our first editor, and to Christina Gunning, who replaced her, for responding promptly to our requests for information and providing encouragement as we worked to bring this book to fruition. As our copy-editor, Gillian Dickens cast a sharp eye on the manuscript. And finally, researching sources went that much faster thanks to the Internet, which in fact was created by a deaf man!

We cannot leave the Acknowledgment section without thanking our families, who patiently endured our long hours on the computer as we worked to meet deadlines. They understood the importance of getting this book out to you, the readers, so that you can learn what Deaf culture is all about. And finally, we express our appreciation to everyone who has shared or written about perspectives on Deaf culture, without which we could never have written this book.

Irene W. Leigh  
Jean F. Andrews  
Raychelle L. Harris  
Topher González Ávila





## About the Authors



**Irene W. Leigh, PhD**, is a Deaf psychologist with an undergraduate degree in Deaf Education from Northwestern University, a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling, and a doctorate in Clinical Psychology, both from New York University. Her experience includes high school teaching at a school for the deaf, psychological assessment, psychotherapy, and private practice. From 1985 to 1991, she was a psychologist and assistant director at the Lexington Center for Mental Health Services in Queens, New York. She taught in the Gallaudet University Clinical Psychology Doctoral Program from 1992 to 2012, was Psychology Department Chair from 2008 to 2012, and attained professor emerita status in 2012. Dr. Leigh serves on review boards of professional journals and was

associate editor of the *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* from 2005 to 2011. She has presented nationally and internationally on identity, multiculturalism, depression, mental health, parenting, attachment, cochlear implants, and psychosocial adjustment and has published more than 50 articles and book chapters in addition to authoring, coauthoring, and editing or coediting several books. As a Fellow of the American Psychological Association, she served on two task forces, chaired the Committee on Disability Issues in Psychology, and was on the Board for the Advancement of Psychology in the Public Interest. She also maintains a private practice and has received multiple awards for her work.

**Jean F. Andrews, PhD**, received a bachelor's degree in English language and literature from Catholic University, in Washington, DC; a master's in education in Deaf Education from McDaniel College (formerly Western Maryland College) in Westminster, Maryland; and a doctorate in Speech and Hearing Sciences from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. Dr. Andrews was a classroom teacher of reading at the Maryland School for the Deaf in Frederick, Maryland. From 1983 to 1988, she prepared educational interpreters and teachers of Deaf students at Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, Kentucky. From 1988 to 2015 at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas, she taught classes, prepared



teachers and doctoral-level leaders, and conducted applied research. Dr. Andrews has been recognized by the Kentucky Association for the Deaf and the Texas Association for the Deaf for her contributions to deaf education. She has also served on the governing board of the Texas School for the Deaf. Her research interests include language and literacy, Deaf Studies, ASL/English bilingualism, and forensic issues with Deaf individuals. For 20 years, she has been involved as an expert witness and has educated judges, lawyers, and criminal justice officials about Deaf culture and the language and communication needs of Deaf, DeafDisabled, and DeafBlind individuals caught up in the criminal justice system. Dr. Andrews has coauthored several academic texts related to psychology, education, and Deaf people. She has also written fiction and nonfiction for young Deaf readers.



**Raychelle L. Harris, PhD**, a third-generation Deaf and a native ASL signer, received her bachelor's degree in American Sign Language (ASL) from Gallaudet University in 1995 and master's degree in Deaf Education from Western Maryland College in 2000. Dr. Harris has been teaching ASL as a first and second language since 1993. She returned to Gallaudet University for her doctoral studies in the areas of education and linguistics, with her dissertation topic focused on ASL discourse in academic settings. In 2008, she joined Gallaudet University's Department of Interpretation as a faculty member. Since 2009, she has been teaching in the Department of ASL. Dr. Harris holds professional certification with the American Sign Language Teachers Association and is a Certified Deaf Interpreter with the Board for Evaluation of

Interpreters (BEI) and is court certified in the state of Texas. She is also one of five coauthors of TRUE+WAY ASL, an innovative and digitally based ASL curriculum, along with Dr. Nathie L. Marbury, Lisa Gelineau, Ritchie Bryant, and Tracy Shannon.

**Topher González Ávila, MA**, was born in Mexico City, Mexico. He moved to Dallas, Texas, when he was a baby. His Deaf mom raised Topher and his two Deaf siblings in a multilingual family of Lengua de Señas Mexicana (LSM), American Sign Language (ASL), English, and Spanish. Topher graduated from University of North Texas with bachelor's degrees in Criminal Justice and Radio, Television, and Film (RTVF) in 2015. He continued his education at Gallaudet University and graduated in 2018 with a master's in Sign Language Education. Topher has been a Certified Deaf Interpreter with the Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) since 2016. He is the first Deaf Latinx interpreter in the state of Texas to hold a BEI Court Interpretation certification. Topher teaches for Gallaudet University's Masters in Sign

Language Education program. Topher works as a community interpreter and a freelance video editor. Topher is proud to be Brown, Queer, and Deaf. It was and still is a journey for him to finally embrace the person he is. He works with and for his communities especially, BIPOC Deaf youth and Queer Deaf youth, through local, state, and national organizational advocacy efforts.







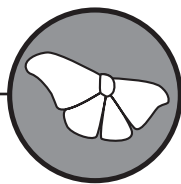
# PART I

## Deaf Culture: Yesterday and Today









# CHAPTER 1

## Deaf Community: Past and Present

### INTRODUCTION

If you are a hearing person or, in other words, a person who is not deaf and who just happens to bump into a stranger and start talking, how do you react when that person says, “I am deaf” and points to his or her ears while shaking his or her head? Many of you likely will blurt out loud, “Oh, I’m so sorry.” This has happened time and time again.

What does this mean? Were you sorry because you were not aware and are apologizing for your mistake? Or were you sorry because that person cannot hear, cannot easily understand spoken language, and has to struggle to communicate?

Many people have created a vision of “deaf” as meaning limited and unable to communicate with hearing people around them. They think deaf people are limited in what they can learn in school and in the kind of jobs they can do. They see deaf people as isolated and unable to connect with the world. This may be why many people look to medicine to “cure” hearing loss. They believe that surgery to insert

a cochlear implant as a means for deaf people to gain access to the sensations of sound (see Chapter 2 for details), or the use of hearing aids to amplify sounds, will “help” deaf people “hear” and understand people who speak. People in general often want deaf people to learn how to speak and hear so that they are a part of their hearing families and their environment.

We’ve also seen people using sign language on the street or in a restaurant. All over the United States, American Sign Language (ASL) courses are very popular. On TV and in the movies, there are deaf actors and actresses using sign language. One example is that of Shoshannah Stern, pictured in Figure 1–1, who is well known especially for TV roles in programs such as *Threat Matrix*, *Providence*, *ER*, and *This Close*. Her colleague, Josh Feldman (Figure 1–2), who cowrote the script for *This Close* and acted with her in this series, is yet another example. Their parents and siblings are Deaf. They attended schools for the deaf and grew up always connected to culturally Deaf people. Read on, and in a few paragraphs, you will see



**Figure 1–1.** Shoshannah Stern, Deaf actress. Photo credit: Tate Tullier. Used with permission of Shoshannah Stern.



**Figure 1–2.** Josh Feldman, Deaf actor. Photo credit: Tiffany Saccente. Used with permission of Josh Feldman.

an explanation of the difference between deaf and Deaf.

In the music field, we have Sean Forbes, a popular deaf rapper who was selected as outstanding hip-hop artist of the year at the Detroit Music Awards (Stone, 2015). And there is Aarron Loggins, who signed the National Anthem with singer Gladys Knight, while sisters Chloe and Halle Bailey signed “America the Beautiful” along with her at the LIII Super Bowl (Slane, 2019). There are talented Deaf artists working in every possible media, as noted in Chapter 11. Every now and then, newspapers will include information about Gallaudet University, the world’s only liberal arts university for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Deaf people’s opinions are often included in media articles about the cochlear implant. Their opinions cover two contrasting

perspectives. One perspective is that cochlear implants support access to the hearing world and help with hearing and speaking. The other perspective is that cochlear implants hurt the Deaf community because the focus is on hearing and speaking and not on sign language, which is visual and accessible. These perspectives are elaborated further in Chapter 2.

You may even have a deaf medical doctor or a deaf lawyer! Deaf people have made inroads in many careers and organizations. For example, we have Suzy Rosen Singleton, pictured in Figure 1–3. She is a Deaf lawyer who serves as Chief of the Disability Rights Office of the Consumer and Governmental Affairs of the Federal Communications Commission. Her parents are Deaf, as are her two siblings, one of whom is also a lawyer while the other is a mechanical engineer. She uses sign



**Figure 1–3.** Suzy Rosen Singleton, Chief, Disability Rights Office. Photo credit: Steven Balderson. Used with permission of Suzy Rosen Singleton.

language interpreters during scheduled meetings. Among her responsibilities is that of helping to implement the Commission's goal of ensuring accessibility of modern communications services and technologies for persons with disabilities.

Google "Deaf" and you will find hundreds, even thousands, of references. Because of this explosion of information, many more people than ever before are aware of deaf people, deaf communities, and Deaf culture. But often the lay public is not aware of the many nuances or details of this unique population. They may not know that being deaf may have more meanings than just "cannot hear." They may use different phrases to describe deaf people, such as auditory handicap, hearing impaired, hearing handicapped, deaf mute, prelingually deaf, or deaf and dumb.

### NEGATIVE LABELS

Auditory Handicap  
Hearing Impaired  
Hearing Handicapped  
Deaf Mute  
Prelingually Deaf  
Deaf and Dumb

Deaf people will often interpret these terms as negative because they focus on the disability and what the deaf person cannot do. *Deaf* and *hard of hearing* tend to be the preferred terms, although *hearing impaired* is also frequently used throughout the United States but not by culturally Deaf people themselves (Holcomb, 2013). Commonly and culturally, Deaf people feel that *hearing impaired* means that something is wrong, broken, impaired, or not working, and they don't see themselves as wrong, broken, impaired, or not working.

It helps to understand that being deaf can reflect a meaningful and productive way of life. Deaf people who identify with Deaf culture want to be labeled as people who are normal in their own way, primarily use vision, sometimes supported by audition (through hearing aids or cochlear implants), to communicate and interact with others. They describe Deaf as a positive way of life, not as something "impaired." Interestingly and in contrast, the term *deaf impaired* is sometimes used to denote hearing people who do not understand Deaf culture or ASL. You can decide whether the use of the word *impaired*, whether deaf or hearing, makes sense after looking at this list of possible types of impairments and considering how subjectively negative these are.

Thin impaired

Tall impaired

Hair impaired

So our purpose in this book is to provide information to help you understand deaf people and their vibrant deaf community. You may have noticed that we use the terms *deaf* and *Deaf*. What is this all about? The term *deaf* refers to individuals whose hearing loss makes it very hard or impossible to understand spoken language through hearing alone, with or without the use of auditory devices (hearing aids, cochlear implants, FM systems, etc.). Many of those individuals who call themselves “deaf” tend to rely on auditory assistance devices, prefer to use spoken language, and tend to socialize more often with hearing people than with deaf people.

“Deaf” represents what we see as the culture of Deaf people. These people use sign language and share beliefs, values, customs, and experiences that create a very strong bond and group identity (Holcomb, 2013). They often prefer to socialize with other culturally Deaf people and do not see themselves as tragically isolated from society, contrary to what many hearing people think. They see benefits to being deaf that many are unaware of.

Here you see the term *culture* used.

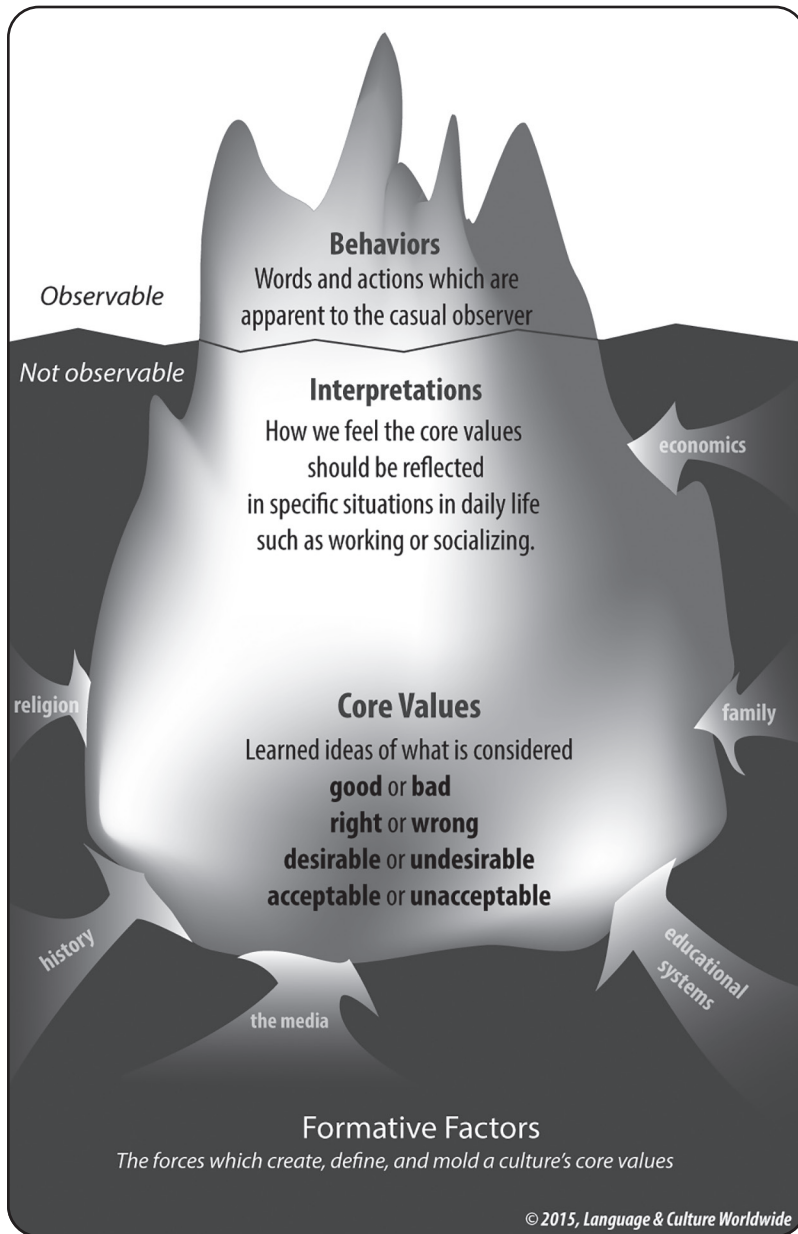
What is your definition of culture?

*Culture* is a term that has been debated for a long time and has multiple definitions (Eagleton, 2013). One way to define culture is that it includes the values, beliefs, social forms, and traits of a

group of people. These values represent specific meanings, beliefs, and practices that guide the group in individual and social development. It is common to think of culture as representing the many observable characteristics of a group that can be seen, most obviously their behavior. We need to understand the reality that cultural behavior is only an external representation of the deeper and broader concepts of culture, specifically the complex ideas, attitudes, and values (Languageandculture.com, 2015). As seen in Figure 1–4, the image of a cultural iceberg helps us to understand what aspects reflect cultures. The observable part of the iceberg includes behaviors and practices that can be seen or observed, while the buried or hidden part of the iceberg incorporates how the core values (learned ideas of what is acceptable or desirable, including religion, family practices, and so on) are shown in specific situations such as working or socializing. Although different cultural groups may share similar core values, such as respect, such values may be interpreted differently in different situations and incorporated differently into specific attitudes for daily situations. These internal core values may become visible to the casual observer who sees the observable behaviors such as the words that are used, the ways people in the culture act, and so on.

Can you think of examples that show how respect is demonstrated in different cultures?

Now consider this: What is your definition of Deaf culture?



**Figure 1–4.** The Cultural Iceberg. Used with permission of Language & Culture Worldwide, LLC. <http://www.languageandculture.com>

A lot of people have no idea that there is such a thing as Deaf culture (see, for example, Jassal, 2017; Solomon, 2014). When we write about Deaf culture, we are writing about the beliefs, mores, artistic

expressions, behaviors, understanding, and sign language expressions that Deaf people use (e.g., Holcomb, 2013; Padden & Humphries, 1988). Atherton (2016) states that Deaf culture reflects “those