

Deaf Studies as a Transformed and Transformational Field: Inspirations Across Disciplines and Nations

Deaf Studies Conference Transformations Proceedings

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Abstract

This presentation firstly focuses on the definition and foundation of Deaf Studies as a field, both narrow and expanded to include linguistics, ethnography and other fields with deaf themes. Secondly, it focuses on innovation in the field of Deaf Studies, outlining ongoing transformations in methodology, theoretical frameworks and dissemination pathways. Thirdly, it asks whether it still makes sense to conceive of Deaf Studies as a demarcated field. Throughout the presentation, the presenter draws on research experience in Surinam, Ghana and India.

Keywords

Deaf studies, epistemologies, deaf sociality, Deafhood, ontologies, deaf space, deaf gain, intersectionality

Presentation Transcript

(Slide 1)

Let's get started. I am honored that my presentation will be opening this conference. I am thrilled to be here and to see the diversity of attendees; it is inspiring. I will be using International Sign. I know several sign languages. British Sign Language (BSL) is my everyday language, and I do know a little bit of ASL, but I will be using International Sign. I hope you will understand me. You can either attend to me or the ASL interpreter to my left based on your preference. Now, I am going to start my presentation.

(Slide 2)

What is the focus of my presentation today? I will explain the title first. I have spent a long time thinking about the title and about what to present today when this thought came to me. I will go through the title and explain more about each word.

(Slide 3)

First "transformation", what does that word mean? Deaf Studies as a field has been around for a while. Can we say the field has been transformed? Have there been shifts through time? What about the future of the field?

(Slide 4)

From this point on, we will look at what transformations Deaf Studies has caused in other fields, who have been involved and where they happened.

(Slide 5)

Work in Deaf Studies can inspire scholars working in other disciplines, such as anthropology, education, and linguistics. I'll explain more about that today.

(Slide 6)

Next, Deaf Studies has spread across different "nations" or countries. That's my topic, my whole presentation will connect to this overall title. All of the questions surrounding the title as well as the title comprise my presentation.

(Slide 7)

Deaf Studies is incredibly broad and has covered multiple subjects. These subjects have been part of Deaf Studies since the beginning and you can see them on the screen. Deaf communities, spaces, and networks. Ontologies and epistemologies. Everyday language practices and language ideologies. History. Education. Arts and literature. There are also other related subjects which are either located inside or outside of Deaf Studies, namely these.

(Slide 8)

Some people propose that these subjects listed on the right are part of Deaf Studies, while others disagreed. The question is do sign language education, neuroscience, interpreting and linguistics come together in Deaf Studies? Do they belong in Deaf Studies? That is still an ongoing discussion.

(Slide 9)

It would depend on the perspective you are taking. The benefit of listing those areas listed under "Deaf Studies" as core to the field is that they foreground a focus on the lives of deaf people, on how deaf people lead their everyday lives.

(Slide 10)

The benefit of including the fields on the far-right side of the screen is that we can bring together all deaf-related research of different disciplines. It also means we could create common ethical guidelines such as for asking informed consent from research participants, e.g. with regard to confidentiality of findings.

(Slide 11)

So my focus today will be on the three areas here to the left. Those have been the focus of my research career.

(Slide 12)

Now, as we know, Deaf Studies research takes place in many centers around the globe including here at Gallaudet where there is a dedicated Deaf Studies department. Other universities have dedicated Deaf Studies departments with teams researching in this area.

We also have many cases where there are individual researchers working in other kinds of departments, carrying out deaf related research such as within anthropology, psychology and other disciplines.

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It may be that those individuals would not identify as being 'Deaf Studies' researchers. They may be looking at deaf lives, but not call themselves Deaf Studies researchers. There is great variation here.

(Slide 14)

Deaf Studies emerged back in the 1970s. At that time, there were three main topics being looked at, which you can see on the slide. First, one was the overturning of the medical, audist view of deafness and shifting the attention to sign language and culture. The second aim was to research and therefore demonstrate the validity of deaf communities and cultures. So the focus of this research was on deaf clubs, deaf schools and looking at the value and behaviors within those deaf worlds and documenting those. Moving on to the third of these themes, there was also a focus on disseminating research that addressed and challenged forms of oppression such as audism and the internalized oppression that is linked to deaf education. These three topics were considered very important, as the foundations of Deaf Studies research.

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This slide shows that while these foundations are still important today, we've broadened the field to include many more new topics. The important topics today are those listed here. What we have seen is research cropping up under these listed topics. The first of these examples is research studying oppressed groups within the community that are underrepresented, such as race, gender, sexual orientation and class. So there is more attention paid to these groups and research emerging; however, still not enough. Next we have language ideologies and everyday language use and multi-modality; this includes different ways of expressing yourself with your body, mouthings, facial expression and so on, and there is much research in this area going on right now. Next we have emerging research looking at deaf spaces and networks. Following on from that, another hot topic is the area of rights and development in areas such as citizenship, human rights, group rights, language rights and sustainable development. The last point on this slide describes the many emerging studies focusing on when deaf people from different countries meet one another and how they have feelings of sameness or difference as well as how they connect to one another.

(Slide 16)

Another very important current concept in research is deaf ontologies. As it says here, this means deaf ways of being. The book, *Innovations in Deaf Studies*, was just recently published and showcases the work of deaf people carrying out research in Deaf Studies, and how these resultant shared ontologies shape research processes. This recent book is important as in the history of Deaf Studies, many researchers have been hearing people. Furthermore, the book provides an introspection into what it means to be a deaf person researching this field. Also the book is timely because we are seeing the emergence of many deaf researchers.

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Traditionally Deaf Studies has been a white western dominated discipline. Those first researchers who established the foundations of Deaf Studies were themselves white people, therefore reflecting their own experiences and lives, disregarding other kinds of experiences.

More recently, studies of non-white people have been carried out increasingly, but predominantly by white people. We need to recognize the need for more non-white people to be carrying out this research into non-white people's experiences. The dominance of white researchers has had an impact on the methodologies and theoretical frameworks within Deaf Studies. Within these processes are unequal power relationships. It is also interesting to note that some of the early foundational Deaf Studies theories relating to identity conceptualized deaf identity as a prescribed, linear one-way path towards a defined goal. These theories were developed predominantly by white people, and of course we do in fact know that there are many avenues to deaf identities.

(Slide 18)

To go back to the title of my presentation, there is one word I haven't yet expanded on: Inspirations. I want to think about who can be inspired by Deaf Studies and how. Plus, where do Deaf Studies researchers gain their inspiration from, and how.

(Slide 19)

One example from my own research history: I grew up in mainstream schooling, not using sign language, and studied anthropology at university. I followed an MA course of study with a dissertation. There was a large number of options for research topics, one of which was deaf culture. I was immediately intrigued and interested in this. So I started reading some foundational texts which are important and seminal works in our field, as shown here. These readings inspired me to carry out my own research in South America, in a country called Surinam. This is a small country that was colonized by the Dutch; I chose it because my native language is Dutch, and my English at that time was not very good. I chose Surinam because I thought there would be less of a language barrier. When I arrived there, I learned their sign language in order to conduct my research. My research focused on the topic of deaf culture. In Surinam there is one residential school for the deaf, with the dormitories adjoining the school.

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I conducted my research through several different processes; through observations, through meeting, mixing and mingling with the people there - in other words, accepted and recognized anthropological methodologies. I met with deaf children and deaf adults in different places and social settings. I made comprehensive field notes from my observations, over a period of two and a half months, which provided me with a lot of data. I also did interviews with deaf children, deaf adults and school teachers. At the time I was inspired by the foundation texts in the field of Deaf Studies which led me to develop interview questions.

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You can see examples of my interview questions here. I asked questions about their marriage preferences, whilst in the back of my head and from my reading about deaf culture, I knew that

deaf people often prefer to marry other deaf people. I asked them if they thought that deaf people should be seen as disabled - again, I knew from the literature that many deaf people reject that label so I was interested in their conceptualization of this. I asked what's the difference between deaf and hearing people. The next question related to whether they have jokes about hearing people or about deafness. I also asked if their lives contain much gossip. Furthermore, I enquired as to their knowledge of the term 'deaf culture' and what they thought it means. Those were examples of the types of questions I asked but I didn't get great responses.

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The answers were brief and did not lead to in-depth discussion. It was a challenge to elicit more information. The participants, particularly the children, did not understand why I was asking all those questions. This gave me pause to consider whether the Deaf Studies texts were helpful in my approach to this research and I began to question that. I also noticed that there were recurring themes coming from the participants in my field work and I made notes of those as you can see from the next slide.

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One of the most recurrent topics in these discussions was about the places where deaf people would meet and congregate. Secondly, the topic of Dutch colonialism and subsequent emancipation was seen as very relevant to their lives. The most prominent example being language change at the deaf school. Whereas previously an oral philosophy had prevailed, and informally, Surinam Sign Language emerged and was used by the deaf children, when the teaching philosophy changed to accept sign language, it was Sign Language of the Netherlands that was imported. This conflicted with the naturally occurring Surinamese sign language. This topic came up again and again in the interviews. Interviewees also talked prolifically about the empowerment of deaf people, their increased mobility, evidenced by such changes as deaf people being allowed drivers' licenses. These changes were welcomed and celebrated. Also the subject of leadership came up. Historically, within the adult Deaf population, hearing people took the lead, which created resistance and latterly change. In light of these recurrent emerging themes, I struggled with the use of the term and concept of "deaf culture" to analyze the situation in Surinam. Still, I accepted to include it in my dissertation as the key framing. In my dissertation, I used "deaf culture" as a processual concept, rather than a fixed entity with an attendant checklist of features. Rather I was more interested in the process of deaf culture whereby people could examine who they were, to discuss and develop notions of identity.

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Still after all these years, I struggle with the term 'deaf culture'. I wonder whether it really is helpful in our research processes. Definitions that are applied to this one term 'deaf culture' are very broad and varied in number. If we think of deaf culture as an umbrella term then it encompasses a wide variety of concepts such as the arts, deaf people's use of peripheral vision, technology such as flashing lights, deaf ontologies and deaf values. As well as being too broad a definition, this concept often situates deaf and hearing culture and separate and oppositional. Whereas the reality is that as deaf people we grow up mixing and mingling with all manner of hearing people, including family members, so we must question whether this separation is artificial. At the same time, can we think of deaf culture as being unitary or are there many deaf cultures? All of this is food for thought.

(Slide 25)

It's very important to consider different terms. While not altogether rejecting 'deaf culture', there are lots of other terms that could be applied to different research themes. These include not just 'deaf culture' but also 'deaf epistemologies, deaf sociality, Deafhood, deaf ontologies, deaf space, deaf gain and intersectionality'. All of these terms are available to us and can be applied to the research that we do. That's how I view the situation.

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One example of this is from my previous research in India. I first went to India in 2006 where I participated in a deaf youth camp event. After that I went to Mumbai where I was given a tour of the city by a deaf person. I was inspired by the ease and comfort by which deaf people navigated this teeming mega-city and communicated smoothly with hearing people through gestures. These observations made me want to research this social phenomenon further. I arrived in India to conduct my research. I started with a very broad focus but soon honed in on what was happening on the local Mumbai trains and particularly within the 'handicapped' compartment. These trains had such compartments, as well as those for women only in addition to the general compartments. Deaf people would congregate and socialize in these 'disabled' compartments every day. I was fascinated by these interactions and this became the topic of my dissertation for my MSc in Deaf Studies. I was considering my theoretical framework and reluctant to use "deaf culture". During my studies in Bristol, I had come across and was inspired by the concept of 'deaf geographies'. This conceptualizes "deaf space" in a different way to how it is considered here at Gallaudet, as in architecture and the layout of buildings. In Bristol, Deaf Space was conceptualized in a very different way. There the focus is more on where deaf people met one another, how they inhabited those spaces in terms of embodiment, sight lines, composition and positioning. I felt that this approach perfectly suited my observations of what was happening on the Mumbai trains and the deaf spaces created therein. Taking a longitudinal approach is of value in this type of research. In this case, I lived in India for 3 years, married an Indian man and had a child by him. I often travelled in the Mumbai trains whilst living there. Thus I was able to observe changes over time as aspects of these settings were not static and this dynamism led to further research. I then focused on how the deaf passengers related to their disabled co-passengers – was there conflict or camaraderie between them? What further interested me was the situation of deaf women and deaf transgender people because they were often undecided about which compartment to travel in as the 'disabled' compartment typically had many men so deaf women would make last minute decisions about which compartment to enter. This became an interesting part of my research.

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Another example is shared signing communities. I'm sure you are aware of Martha's Vineyard, a small island off the coast of America, described famously in the book *Everyone here Spoke Sign Language*, which was about the predominance of deaf genes within an island community, which gave rise to a local sign language used by deaf and hearing people. There are similar examples of such communities from all across the globe. Examples include villages in Mexico, Bali, Israel and Ghana. In these places we see village communities where deaf and hearing people intermingle and communicate in sign language because of preponderance of hereditary genes causing deafness. It's interesting to note that researchers visiting these villages would often say

that that there was no deaf culture, deaf identity or deaf community being evidenced at these sites. The reason given was that both deaf and hearing people mixed and signed together. This gave me pause for thought. I was really interested in the experience of growing up in such communities and of deaf sociality which led me to question if it could be possible for these deaf people to have no meaningful contact with other deaf people. So I went to Ghana to a village called Adamorobe.

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This was my PhD research from a while years ago. I did not use “deaf culture” as the lens for this study. I wanted to see how the deaf villagers socialized and communicated as well as the topics that formed their daily discussions. As you can see from these pictures, deaf people came together in distinct groups on a daily basis. Whist they did mix and intermingle with hearing villagers, they also had their own, discrete group meetings and conversations. I used the term ‘deaf spaces’ to describe what I was observing in the village. Also I found that the term ‘deaf sociality’ was helpful in describing the social connections that deaf villagers had. So the term ‘deaf culture’ didn’t really seem to apply. There was no great separation between the hearing and deaf villagers. They shared many of the same values, topics of conversation and village life for both groups was remarkably similar. A separate culture seemed doubtful whereas I was confident in describing ‘deaf spaces’.

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Later this research became a book and you can see that I chose for inclusion in the title the term ‘deaf space’, not ‘deaf culture’. The reason is that I felt this term best fitted this research project.

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In the examples I have given so far, you can see a lot of me observing and becoming interested in phenomena and researching it, looking for emerging patterns and themes and developing theories as a result. This approach falls into the lower of these two categories of research shown on the screen: inductive research. However in Deaf Studies what we see a lot of is research following the uppermost example on the slide: deductive research. This is where researchers already have theories or concepts and seek examples through observation in order to confirm the validity of the theory.

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The uppermost of these, deductive research is a theoretical approach that has risks. We see that it results into a persistent overuse of recurring terms such as deaf culture.

(Slide 32)

We do not see enough of this second type of research, inductive research in Deaf Studies, whereby we build theories and allow concepts to emerge from observed patterns. We certainly need a lot more of this type of research in the future. However, this approach is also not without its risks. Inductive research is incredibly time consuming and labor intensive.

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As I was saying, I have doubts about the term “deaf culture” but I’m not suggesting we get rid of the term. It’s still very important as it’s used in the deaf community by deaf people on an everyday basis. Deaf people talk about having a deaf culture and this is observable. What this means for us as academics is that we can look at how people use terms such as deaf culture and other theories in everyday language use. It’s important to make a distinction between the everyday use of the terms in comparison to the construction of academic theoretical frameworks. Therefore, we shouldn’t be prescriptive about the use of such terms in academia.

(Slide 34)

Up to now I’ve been talking about concepts within the field of Deaf Studies, such as deaf space and deaf culture. I would like now to put these aside and consider more broad terms that are ‘hot topics’ from other disciplines, which you can see on the left of this slide. Examples include: Translanguaging, Linguistic Repertoires, Superdiversity, Intersectionality, Mobilities, Geography of Disabilities, and Translocality. We see many of these terms regularly occurring in fields such as Anthropology, Geography and Sociology. Deaf Studies scholars should not ignore these mainstream ideas and concepts, rather we should be exploring, reading about, working with and incorporating these theories into our work as well as contributing our perspectives back into those fields. Thereby we improve their knowledge through the richness of our field and contribute to the wider world. One important way that we can do this is through publications and the dissemination of our ideas. Not only publishing in our own journals but also in journals of Geography, Anthropology and others, thereby connecting with wider theoretical frameworks. Networking is also very important and in my experience it’s particularly valuable at smaller events. We must also proactively build bridges with the wider research community. We also should organize events where we invite leading experts so that they can see what Deaf Studies has to offer and be likewise inspired by our work. Also I think it’s interesting that if like me while at Bristol you end up in this academic echo chamber, it’s important for Deaf Studies scholars to see what there is in the wider academic world. My post doc was at a research centre in Germany, which focused on diversity. This meant that the academics there were from a wide variety of backgrounds such as, Anthropology, Sociology and Political Science amongst many others. I was the only deaf scholar at the institution and I was constantly bombarded with new ideas and theories from many different fields. I then had to explain and find ways to relate my work to these fields in an inter-disciplinary fashion. We, as deaf scholars, should be doing this much more in the future.

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In Germany, my post-doc was focused on gestures. I explained previously that I had lived in India and there I had noticed the prolific use of gestures by hearing people who did not know a signed language. I was intrigued by the smooth communication and interactions I observed. I was fascinated by this and wanted to research it further. My focus was on interactions in shops, in restaurants and on transport. I studied 6 deaf individuals, one of whom was deafblind. They would go to buy items at the shops or sell items themselves such as in their own shop. I interviewed them as to what they thought the differences were between signing and gesture as well as about the different barriers they faced depending on who they were communicating with.

I asked them a series of questions to elicit their language ideologies. I then directed a film the title of which you can see here. It is freely available on the internet and had English subtitles.

(Slide 36)

I'm now going to show you a short trailer for the film which should give you a quick idea of the whole.

(Slide 37)

I showed you this clip because it demonstrates how my research can fit into to multiple other disciplines. To date, there have been many studies of multi-modality. For example, looking at when hearing people use gestures, body posture and facial expressions with speech. Researchers have looked at the co-occurrence and relationship of such. Also we have the rapidly burgeoning research in the field of multilingualism which looks at how people with multiple languages adapt and adjust their language use in different situations. Typically studies of multimodality and multilingualism have been treated separately. I feel there is a need to bring these together. In signed languages, we use mouthings and when deaf people meet other deaf people from different language backgrounds, not only do you see their signs change, their mouthings change also. People do not just “speak” or “sign” but combine modalities. Hence the need for bridging the gap between these two fields.

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We bridge this gap with this term you can see here, ‘Semiotic Repertoire’.

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So what does this term mean? Well it can encompass all of the communication types you can see on this slide, such as, gestures, signs, objects, drawings, speech, body posture, smell, writing, emoticons, tattoos, pictures, and facial expressions. In everyday life, people don't just use speech or signs. They will pull from whichever of these is in their repertoire, using them in combination, often simultaneously.

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This concept of repertoires has had an impact on the general field of applied linguistics so we have contributed our research to those studying spoken languages and by doing so making them more aware of what they are observing when looking at multimodality and multilingualism.

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This is an example from my project. As a further example, MobileDeaf is a project I currently manage, which focuses on how deaf people communicate with each other and experience other people from different cultures and backgrounds when crossing international borders. The project looks in-depth at these processes and has four strands. The first is forced migration looking at the situation of refugees within a refugee camp in Kenya, Africa. The second strand comprises research focusing on labour migration of deaf people in London. Many deaf people move to London with the aim of finding work there. Next we have professional mobility which examines deaf people who attend international conferences, sporting events, arts and theatre festivals where attendees come from many different countries and intermingle with each other. This

happens to be the strand that I am researching. The last strand of research is tourist mobility in Bali, Indonesia, a destination that many deaf tourists flock to and where they meet deaf locals. These four strands all relate to deaf mobilities in international contexts and are linked by two key theoretical concepts. All four researchers use both of these which are: Intersectionality and Translanguaging.

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I'd like to explain more about Intersectionality and why it's important given the history of Deaf Studies. Early Deaf Studies often posed questions about which parts of a person's identity comes first. For example, whether a person was primarily deaf or female, gay or black. This hierarchical approach was unsatisfactory because it didn't take into account the different contexts in which people operated nor the complexity of identity. The term was first coined many years ago by an American black woman called Crenshaw. Her research focused on the experiences of working-class black women and their experiences of oppression according to each of those identities and their interaction. In the years that followed this, intersectionality theory became very widespread and the definition of the term changed as other dimensions were to the theoretical framework, including disability, age, religion and other characteristics and thus the definition was expanded. Importantly, working with intersectionality theory does not just mean a focus on multiple identities: there should be a central focus on power and power differences which I'll go on to explain now.

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Crenshaw herself accepted the expansion of the definition, given the central focus remains to be on aspects of power. I'll now let you read the definition on this slide. This now focusses on when people of different backgrounds come together and how the dynamics of these encounters will always be influenced by power dynamics. When we use this lens we can look at how different deaf people from different backgrounds and from different countries meet each other and how their interactions are influenced by power. This is one of the main foci of our project.

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This slide shows our attempt to visualize the concept of intersectionality, as you can see from the overlapping circles.

(Slide 45)

These additions, the movements of the circles seen on the second slide, represent the fact that intersectionality is not static, it is fluid and dynamic, context dependent and reliant on who is doing the interacting.

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This links to translanguaging, which looks at the different languages that people have or different ways of expressing themselves. This then links back to intersectionality, people's backgrounds, how they grew up, which country they are from, which languages they have access to and their home life. All these factors combine to determine what each person contributes to the interaction though translanguaging. This is how the two concepts link together and it shows how I tried to bring theories and ideas from other fields to Deaf Studies research.

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That aside, I don't know if you are familiar with this image of an elephant being inspected by a number of blind people trying to work out what it is. One of them feeling its trunk says the elephant is like a snake whilst another feeling its tail describes it like a rope. Another blind person feeling the elephant's leg describes it as being like a tree trunk. The concept here being that none of them is actually wrong – they are all right about the different parts of the elephant they are perceiving, however without coming together as a group and discussing the different parts they would not be able to conceive of the elephant as a whole. So why am I talking to you about elephants? I believe that this is how we have been looking at deaf lives. My point being that in researching deaf lives, it's not enough for one individual researcher to remain within one field or discipline. We must embrace a multitude of perspectives.

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For many years I was a sole researcher, working on my own but now that my career is progressing, I have been applying for research funding in collaboration with a range of academics who come from different backgrounds. These are examples of current, ongoing projects. In the first of these I am working with a scholar with a linguistics background. As an anthropologist, I am working with him researching a deaf television programme in the UK; a sitcom with a host of different deaf characters, all of whom display different signing styles. One character's signing is heavily influenced by English, whilst another, a sign language teacher, uses strong BSL, another has moved to Britain and then learned BSL. My co-researcher and I are looking at whether these characters are representative of the everyday lives of actual British deaf people. He is looking at this through the eyes of a linguist, whereas I bring an anthropological perspective. Another current, ongoing research project involved me collaborating with two other researchers. One is a hearing person with a background in interpreting research who has deaf parents and the other is a deaf researcher in the area of sign language policy. As a deaf anthropologist, I make up a third of the team. As a trio of researchers, we are looking at how mixed deaf/hearing families communicate, using speech and signing.

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The point of all this is to highlight the importance of collaboration. I myself did a BA, an MA, MSc and a PhD, all as a sole researcher until coming the point in my career that I can collaborate with other researchers on an equal basis. I have also come to realize the importance of being open minded to other disciplines that you may initially dislike. As an example, I was previously resistant to the fields of Linguistics and Disability Studies. Whereas now, I'm curious, interested and open to collaboration. I think it's really important to be open in this way.

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Historically, in Deaf Studies, I feel we've been working in a multidisciplinary way, in silos focusing in Education, Psychology, Language, and everyday lives, those sorts of fields all within the field of Deaf Studies. I've observed that often articles that are published in Deaf Studies are self-referential so that authors within the field of Deaf Studies almost always cite other publications also from within the field of Deaf Studies. Recently, however we have been working in a more interdisciplinary fashion with those from mainstream academia who have no knowledge of Deaf Studies, such as Migration Studies or other fields such as Diversity research.

By looking at these different topics and working in this interdisciplinary way, we also encourage those outside our field to learn more about Deaf Studies and thus we see and exchange of ideas and cross-fertilization which synthesizes the links between disciplines. I've been wondering lately that when we talk about a transformation in Deaf Studies, whether this means that Deaf Studies must become transdisciplinary. Which as the uppermost of these graphics shows, there are no hard boundaries between, for example Anthropology and Education, no separation but rather a fluid movement between these disciplines. Is this something we should be aiming for? This is worth considering.

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So linked with that, should we still continue looking at Deaf Studies as one fixed monolithic isolated body? Personally, I don't think so. I believe the boundaries of our field should be more porous, allowing reciprocity with other disciplines. I understand that the foundations of Deaf Studies had to be, by their nature, more introspective but I believe we should now be looking further afield. I'm a European and we do not have a culture of discrete Deaf Studies departments, unlike here in the US where it is acceptable to brand oneself solely as a Deaf Studies scholar. Here in the US, at Gallaudet and many other places, you do have Deaf Studies departments and it is possible to present oneself solely as a Deaf Studies scholar. However in Europe we do not see job advertisements for Deaf Studies positions. Also in terms of research funding, if you present yourself as a Deaf Studies scholar in a funding application, this will not be regarded positively. Rather they require evidence of contributions to other fields or disciplines so, for example, I present myself as an anthropologist and an applied linguist. In my funding applications I ensure that I cite my publications from other fields in order to evidence my ability to contribute. You can see how different the European context is from the field here in America.

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But I think it's important to say we can still have a distinct Deaf Studies field. So, we do need to take different approaches when studying deaf lives, whilst being able to draw upon wider perspectives to further consolidate our work. We can still have theories, concepts and discussion that are specific to Deaf Studies for example, deaf space, deaf culture, deaf ontologies. We Deaf Studies scholars should not just work as individuals in different institutions but get together and exchange as well. How do we do this? Through education such as summer schools and conferences like this one. We are currently organizing a large conference, which will focus on Global Deaf Studies, with Humboldt University Berlin in collaboration with my project MobileDeaf. Contributing to specific Deaf Studies journals and books is another important example of how we can do this.

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So to go back to my title and by means of a summary ...

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Has Deaf Studies been transformed as a field? I would say a definite yes! There are new concepts and new theories. There are more instances inductive research whereby new theories are developed based on observations. There are also many more deaf researchers in the field.

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Has Deaf Studies become a transformational field, influencing others? Again, I would say yes! Much of what has happened in Deaf Studies has had impact on deaf lives, helping deaf people reflect and giving them deeper insights in their lives. Another important aspect is visual methods which I haven't discussed much in this lecture but will be doing so on Saturday when I give a presentation on visual methods and film-making with Erin Moriarty Harrelson. Visual methods are incredibly important when we consider data collection and dissemination. I feel that visual methods are truly transformational for deaf lives as well as by inspiring other disciplines.

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Regarding other disciplines as well as being multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary, can Deaf Studies become transdisciplinary?

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We do now see in Deaf Studies, a global focus and expansion as well as national level work, plus an examination of what happens when deaf people gather in international settings.

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Lastly, we have inspirations. How can we be inspired to research in Deaf Studies? By going out and observe, which can happen on a local as well as an international level. We can observe more without applying preconceived theories. Our literature research should include other fields, as well as Deaf Studies. Collaborate across different disciplines and look at research in areas other than those already oft repeated, such as cochlear implantation, mainstreaming and deaf clubs. Alternatively, we can look at these old themes from different perspectives and with new approaches. That's it for my presentation. Thank you for watching!

PUBLICATION FUNDING

This conference proceeding was made possible with the financial support of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Digital Humanities Advancement Grants [#HAA-258756-8, 2018]; and Gallaudet University: the Office of the Chief Bilingual Officer, Yeker Anderson Club, and Department of American Sign Language and Deaf Studies.

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T.S. Writing Services, LLC

SUGGESTED CITATION

Kusters, A. (2020). Deaf Studies as a Transformed and Transformational Field: Inspirations Across Disciplines and Nations. In P. Boudreault (Ed.), *Deaf Studies Digital Journal, Vol. 5: Selected Papers from Deaf Studies Conference Transformation 2020*, <http://doi.org/10.3998/15499139.0005.001>