

Reimagining Language Research for Collaborative Engagement with the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Community

Rain Bosworth, Associate Professor at Rochester Institute of Technology.

A central goal of my current research is to understand how early language experience shapes tactile exploratory play in deaf and hearing children and the relationship between early tactile exploration and language learning. The goal of this session is to think about ways that our language research can engage, reach, and positively impact cultural communities. This talk will focus on American Sign Language (ASL) communities, used by the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (DHH) people in Northern America. Starting with a historical context over the last 50 years, I will review research questions that have been studied with ASL, including language properties, human communication, emergence of new languages, and ways that misconceptions have been perpetuated or corrected by research. I will discuss current trends and issues that reflect the needs, values, desires, and concerns of the D/HH community who are under threat for loss of education and civil rights. We will reflect on the impact of technological and medical intervention often designed for D/HH individuals without their input. Finally, I will discuss ways of ethically including D/HH individuals in future research.