

Poster

**Title: Perceptions of social networks by adults who are deafblind**

Presenter: Katrina Arndt, St. John Fisher College, USA  
Co-presenters: Dr. Amy Parker

Main focus: Mainly research/Acquired deafblindness

Abstract: The workshop will include a discussion of study methods and three main findings.

Theoretical frameworks that influenced the study are grounded theory and phenomenology, with additional influence from the constructivism paradigm. Grounded theory had significant influence on our decisions about coding the data after collection, and informed our decisions around using open and axial coding. A phenomenological perspective shaped the ways we considered what data sources were valid- were closest to participants' actual experiences- and this affected our interest in collecting traditional demographic data. Not least, a constructivist paradigm influenced all decisions throughout the study as we attempted to understand how the reality of being deafblind shaped participants' experiences.

Guerette and Smedema (2011) call for the collection of open-ended data to provide information about the quality of social support received by adults with visual impairments. In a study of the challenge of reestablishing social relationships after vision loss, Wang (2008) noted that in-depth qualitative inquiry is important "because quantitative methods aren't limited in their ability to reveal the richness and complexity of these experiences in people's lives" (p. 817). The methods we chose, 1:1 semistructured interviews, follow-up e-mails, and a closed discussion board, is one response to the need for rich, open-ended data.

In-person semistructured interviews, follow-up e-mails, and a closed discussion board were used to gather and triangulate data. After the retreat, participants were invited to continue the conversations on a closed discussion board; of the 10 participants who were interviewed, 2 responded. A final data source consisted of relevant e-mails from individual participants.

Ten attendees at Retreat were interviewed, and pseudonyms are used for all participants. The participants ranged in age from 26 to 62 years and included 5 men and 5 women, all deafblind. The participants were a bounded group: All went to Retreat, which indicated either the financial wherewithal to attend, support from a network to attend, or both. Three themes were extracted from the data: (a) the importance of navigating adaptations; (b) the existence of significant gaps in support from family members, accommodations by employers, and access to resources; and (c) the necessity of resiliency and advocacy for managing gaps. Each theme affected many areas of daily life.



After a review of the methods and findings, a discussion will be facilitated by presenters about two major topics: 1) how touch functions as resilience and 2) the emergence of Pro-Tactile communication has emerged in the United States. The workshop will end with discussion of community led initiatives and how those initiatives support social connectedness.

Reference: Arndt, K. & Parker, A. (2016). Perceptions of social networks by adults who are deafblind. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 161(3), p. 369-383.