Deaf Employees' Perspectives on Signed Language Interpreting in the Workplace

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Work brings a host of benefits to the individual. Studies have shown that active participation in the workforce provides increased self-esteem, positive health outcomes, and economic self-sufficiency. Waddell and Burton (2006) conducted a review of studies comparing work with unemployment, health effects of reemployment, and the effects of work on people with various illnesses and disabilities. The studies support the common-sense assumption that work benefits the health and well-being of individuals, provided the individual has "a good job" (Waddell & Burton, 2006, p. 34). According to Waddell and Burton (2006), four characteristics of a good job include a workplace that: (1) provides an environment that is accommodating, supportive, and nondiscriminatory; (2) offers control and autonomy; (3) leads to job satisfaction; and (4) fosters good communication (p. 34). For employees who are Deaf, these four elements may be experienced differently than non-Deaf employees in the same workplace.

In the United States, Deaf people who use a signed language are viewed both as a linguistic and cultural minority and as a protected class of citizens with a disability and rights to workplace accommodation (Lane, Hoffmeister, & Bahan, 1996; Padden & Humphries, 1988). For almost 50 years, federal laws, including the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990, have mandated reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities in the workplace. For Deaf workers, this may mean the provision of signed language interpreters to enhance access to communication. Initially, interpreters were only provided in settings that received federal funding, but later, legal protections were expanded to cover a broad range of settings including places where consumers received products and services, private workplaces, and services and employment by state and local governments.

As recognition of the importance of legal protections grew in the late 1960s and early 1970s, studies conducted at the time focused on rehabilitation and workplace success. In one of the first studies of Deaf professionals in the United States, Crammatte (1968) examined various aspects of their professional life and cited communication as one of the "on-the-job problems" (p. 88). In his analysis, Crammatte attributed success to Deaf employees who speak and lipread, while scant mention is made of the use of interpreters in the workplace. His study further puts the onus of communication on Deaf employees by suggesting that they should take personal responsibility for successful communication in order to perform the functions of their jobs.

More recently, literature about interpreting for Deaf employees in the workplace has expanded. For example, Hauser and Hauser (2008) describe the designated interpreter model used in some workplaces in the United States and highlight interpreter decision making related to language register and variation, filtering environmental information, logistics of interpreter placement, and other factors that make the work of these interpreters unique. They argue that the designated interpreter model provides a level of "seamlessness" that would be unlikely to be achieved with even a highly trained and experienced ad hoc interpreter.

In 2008 and 2009 articles, Dickinson and Turner described the issue of interpreters' role conflict and role confusion in workplace settings in the United Kingdom by examining data derived from interpreter journals along with other sources. Dickinson and Turner traced the source of this conflict, and the resulting interpreter "guilt, anxiety and frustration" (2008, p. 231), to unresolved contradictions about perspectives on interpreter role and the degree to which the interpreter is an active participating third party in the interaction and ultimately in the workplace. Dickinson (2010, 2013, 2014, 2017) observed that the frequent presence of the same interpreter in the workplace may parallel the benefits described by Hauser and Hauser (2008); however, she cautions that this familiarity may lead to the crossing of personal and professional boundaries that, ironically, the earlier conduit model—the metaphor of the interpreter as an "interpreting machine"—was intended to correct. Dickinson argued that the interpersonal risks inherent in workplace interpreting require a highly trained, self-aware, and reflective signed language interpreter.

Through the author's professional experience and anecdotal evidence from members of the Deaf community, it was expected that this study

would identify concerns about the *amount* and *quality* of interpreting services available in the workplace. In a quest to explore this assumption, this study updates and extends earlier work by investigating the perceptions of communication access in the workplace for Deaf people who communicate exclusively or primarily through American Sign Language (ASL). Specifically, I seek to illuminate Deaf employees' perceptions of the role played by signed language interpreters.

METHODS

Participants

Eight Deaf employees participated in the study in two separate focus groups. Two participants identified as female and six as male. Seven of the participants were between 40 and 50 years old, and one participant was between 20 and 30 years old. Seven participants identified as Caucasian or white, and one participant identified as Hispanic/white. The participants held the following educational degrees: associate's degree ($n = 1$), bachelor's degree ($n = 1$), and master's degree ($n = 6$). Six participants had 15 to 20 years of experience working in federal government settings. Their tenure with their current employer varied from 6 months to 6 years. Participants' job titles indicate professional positions in line with their educational attainment (e.g., specialist, analyst, officer), and they worked in a variety of white-collar professions, including human resources, procurement, graphic design, ethics compliance, workplace health and safety, finance, and information technology. Among the participants, there was one attorney and one participant identified as having a supervisory role. Participants reported federal General Schedule (GS) pay grades roughly evenly distributed between GS-11 and GS-15, which indicates salaries of approximately $73,270 (GS-11, step 5) to $145,162 (GS-15, step 5) per year (Office of Personnel Management, 2016, n.d.). Participants were recruited through the researcher's personal contacts in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area and were compensated $20 for their involvement in the study.

Materials

The researcher developed a set of questions for use with the focus group that included the following topics: satisfaction with job, workplace,

workplace communication, and interpreters, with an emphasis placed on the latter two topics. A set of secondary prompts focused on interpreter performance; relationships and connections between Deaf workers, hearing colleagues, and interpreters; and logistical questions about how Deaf workers secure interpreters.

Procedures

Participants were recruited by e-mail to participate in a focus group. Upon arrival to the testing site, each participant was provided refreshments and completed background information, consent to participate, and video consent forms. The focus group was conducted in a private conference room on the campus of Gallaudet University and videotaped using two cameras, with each camera capturing participants on opposite sides of a conference table. Once participants settled into their chairs, I reviewed the consent form, described the study, and began by asking the first question. I moved to subsequent questions once participants seemed to exhaust responses to the previous one. Focus groups lasted approximately 90 minutes.

Analysis

Videotaped interviews were viewed multiple times to allow preferences and perspectives, themes, and categories to emerge in an iterative process. Portions of the data illuminating preferences and perspectives on workplace communication were translated from ASL into English. I first performed open coding on the translated text followed in subsequent reviews by iterative focused coding.

RESULTS

Key findings from the study group fall into four themes: (1) interpreter boundaries, (2) interpreter monitoring strategies, (3) impromptu interpreting, and (4) engagement with institutional systems.

Interpreter Boundaries

Participants discussed various issues tied to boundaries with interpreters. The topics related to boundaries included: (1) interpreter conveying

information to others, (2) interpreter relationships with hearing colleagues, and (3) small talk between Deaf consumer and interpreter.

Participants provided examples of interpreters conveying information to others and "stepping out of role" or being "too comfortable." For example, one participant remarked about what is most bothersome, by saying:

> Brian:[1] When they act like they are one of the team. I don't want to say "Know your place" but that is kind of what I mean. For example, if a coworker asks the interpreter "What did Brian say about X?" a good interpreter would say "Ask Brian." The interpreter should not answer the question themselves. I want to know if this coworker didn't understand me and he should ask me directly. The interpreter should not assume the role of behaving as if they know what I would say and responding. That isn't their position.

Similarly, one participant expressed concern that conveying information about the Deaf consumer reinforced the notion that the interpreter was the employee's personal assistant. He stated:

> Joshua: The interpreter needs to reinforce that they are not my personal assistant because it can really cause perception problems. I'd rather them say "Just wait until Joshua gets back." The challenge is how to approach that the right way without sounding rude. It can be a sticky situation especially if the interpreter is there frequently and the office is comfortable with them. It is human nature.

In addition, participants sometime find interpreter relationships with hearing colleagues in the office problematic. One participant expressed this concern by stating:

> Nathan: Even though the interpreter isn't staff, she is there four days each week and I see that kind of thing happening. I'm trying to figure out how to fix that. She and another woman in the office are friends. I notice they go out to lunch together. It is fine, but . . . it happens fairly often. Other interpreters go to lunch and eat on their own. I see her eating with other staff more than I do. I think she is a little too comfortable . . . too much at home.

This participant was clearly concerned about the friendship and compared it unfavorably to his own relationships with hearing people in the office. He further stated that interpreter relationships with hearing

coworkers in the office resulted in interpreters chatting with hearing people excessively prior to the start of a meeting, not attending to their interpreting in those moments, and missing information. He also mentioned lack of interpreter availability during the lunch break, which was exacerbated by the office friendship. In this example, the interpreter crossed an unexplored boundary.

Finally, although some Deaf workers did not support interpreters' connections to hearing coworkers in the office, conversely, they may expect a level of personal conversation and connection between themselves and the interpreter. One participant, Larry, stated that he uses conversations to gauge an interpreter's connection to the Deaf community, dedication to the profession, and ASL fluency. He said, "Are they just in this for the money? After the assignment are they willing to make that personal connection? It's important. That is part of our culture." Variations on this perspective were expressed by another participant:

> Mia: I also don't like it when interpreters aren't warm and friendly. I have one interpreter who gives me the cold shoulder and I don't like that. I'm really gregarious and like to chat and connect. I've mentioned to this interpreter "It seems like you're really quiet. Is there something wrong or is that just your personality?" I'm not scared to push that a bit. And I really am curious.

In this case, the probing did not help, and the afternoon progressed with the Deaf employee working and the interpreter looking on awkwardly in silence. Perspectives on the value and need for small talk with interpreters varied among participants. One participant, Kelly, remarked that she likes interpreters to be "friendly but I don't want to chat a lot with the interpreter. Mia and I are complete opposites. I have a lot to do. After a brief friendly greeting and a minute of small talk, that's enough. That's just my personality."

Participants gave several examples of boundaries both in the workplace and in the relationship to the Deaf community. Several participants mentioned that interpreter involvement in the Deaf community felt less engaged in the Washington, DC, area compared with other states. One participant hypothesized about what may drive the perception that interpreters are reserved or aloof:

> Joshua: I've noticed that interpreters often stay somewhat removed from the community because of concerns about "information leak."

I notice when I'm chatting with interpreters in social situations they may slip and mention something that tells me who they work with. The Deaf community is small, and it doesn't take much to figure out who they're talking about. It can be really disconcerting for them when it happens. I suspect some interpreters have those boundaries because they don't want to slip and divulge information about their consumers.

Interpreter Monitoring Strategies

Participants monitor interpreter performance. Sighted Deaf consumers have visual access to the interpreter's ASL production and can easily monitor the quality of the target language production, but participants also commented on their strategies for monitoring interpreters' English production in several ways, including: (1) gauging apparent misunderstandings, (2) speech reading, (3) attempts to trigger specific English lexical production, (4) using trusted interpreters as informants, (5) observing interpreter behavior, and (6) intuition.

First, several participants described drawing on apparent misunderstandings during the conversation to provide clues about interpreter performance. Brian remarked, "I think you have to watch how the communication is going. If it is with my boss or someone and there are a lot of misunderstandings, I know something is wrong here. I'll say, 'wait a minute.'" This participant mentioned several ways of handling the misunderstandings from attempting to clarify on the spot with the same interpreter, following up later with a different interpreter, clarifying using e-mail, or simply ignoring it.

Second, participants stated that they monitor interpreters' English production by speech reading. As Nathan said, "Most of the time I just pay attention to what they're saying by reading their lips. If I catch something wrong, I make a correction. Like Brian said that happens a lot with new interpreters if they're fresh out of college. I'll need to interrupt and make corrections." Deaf consumers monitor specific interpreter lexical choices while the interpreter is working into English. As one participant put it:

Brian: Sometimes I'll catch interpreters who are really making a poor choice of words . . . words that I would never use. I have to stop, make a correction, and then move on. That happens fairly often. I select the words I use carefully. I make clear to interpreters the vocabulary

I expect. Interpreters who work with me long enough are right there with me and do a nice job.

Third, participants also reported making decisions about their own ASL production based on their predictions of the English word choices of interpreters. One participant who has a large extended Deaf family and signs ASL in social situations signs in a much more linear, "English-like," manner at work because of his perception that it is easier for the interpreter and, further, that he can exercise more control over the resulting English word choices.

> Brian: At work I sign in a way that doesn't require that much interpreting. They really only need to transliterate. A good interpreter will notice that and follow along. Some new, less experienced, interpreters will do a lot more work than they have to and try to interpret. I tell them "You don't have to! I'm doing your job for you! Just say the words that I'm saying!"

A fourth way participants reported they evaluate interpreters is by asking other trusted interpreters. The definition of "trusted" was relative. In meetings with two interpreters, one participant explained that he would ask the interpreter he has known the longest about the quality of the work of the other interpreter. Several participants commented that apparent high-level fluency when working into ASL may not correspond to highly effective interpreting into English.

Fifth, participants reported observing interpreters' behaviors to assess the quality of their work, including asking for or receiving a feed, overusing specific ASL discourse markers, and pausing target language production while listening to the source language. Participants in these focus groups did not mention feeds as a strategy to ensure a high-quality target language product; rather, they commented that it was indicative of a problem. Interpreters overusing ASL discourse markers intended to hold the floor was also discussed as problematic. "If they use a filler sign a lot you know they're missing a lot too. . . . You know, [averted gaze, nodding, and discourse marker], you can tell the interpreter is buying time and not interpreting things." Much like the previous point, pausing while listening, even without holding the floor, was not described in a positive manner.

Finally, several participants mentioned that Deaf workers use the gestalt of the interaction to monitor and evaluate interpreter performance. Said Nathan, "I pretty much follow my instinct. Does it feel right?"

Impromptu Interpreting

Participants expressed varying degrees of interest in impromptu interpreting. This type of interpreting relies on having an ad hoc interpreter available. Deaf consumers use impromptu interpreting for: (1) strategic information gathering, (2) general networking, (3) small talk with hearing colleagues, and (4) brief unscheduled meetings. This chapter explores the first of these functions.

Participants engage in strategic information gathering using an ad hoc interpreter. They identify an informant in the office, cultivate a relationship, and then receive information about office politics. In the following passage, the participant describes building a friendly relationship with the department secretary:

> Brian: I've started using the interpreter a lot to talk with the secretary and I'm really close to her now. She tells me everything that goes on in the office. Everything. I'll frequently know things that are going on in the office before my boss does. It's almost like a backup communication system. If I miss something, she fills me in. She tells me everything. I often know more about what is going on behind the scenes in the office than other hearing colleagues. Of course, occasionally she'll ask me to do favors for her too and that's fine. For example, I've given a talk about Deaf culture to her son's Boy Scout troupe and I'm happy to do it. Whatever keeps her happy. A little thing like that really pays off. If I'm running out for coffee, I'll get her a cup. She appreciates that. My $2 investment yields a wealth of information. You just don't realize what a difference it makes. My boss mistreats that secretary horribly and so she passes along dirt about him. We have a great relationship. I make it a practice to be nice to all the secretaries.

Another participant, Nathan, who had not thought of engaging the interpreter in this way commented, "I have to figure out who that would be for me in my office." He mused that he always seems to be the last to know when something major is happening in his office and this may be one reason why.

Engagement with Institutional Systems

Deaf consumers in this study widely viewed their engagement with institutional systems as crucial for increasing satisfaction with workplace interpreting. This includes how Deaf consumers manage bureaucratic

systems at their workplace to engage in (1) strategic interpreter selection and (2) strategic interpreter scheduling. This chapter does not explore the important institutional systems that were also discussed (e.g., the mechanics of interpreter requests and approvals, centralized versus decentralized budgeting, agency and interpreter contracts).

Participants manage strategic interpreter selection by choosing specific interpreters to match the setting, type and goals of the interaction, participants involved, and relative level of importance of the interaction. Participants reported that ongoing interpreters are more convenient in terms of time saved briefing interpreters. Preferred interpreters are able to provide a higher level of interpreting services and a more seamless experience.

Deaf consumers also make careful decisions about interpreters who will be working with them on an ongoing basis. Most participants, with one exception, preferred having a small pool of three to five interpreters with whom they work on a weekly basis. Jason was newly hired and scheduled a different interpreter each day as his on-call interpreter in order to get to know them. "I've had a couple of interpreters I've 'interviewed' over the last two weeks. Of those I'll pick the interpreter who will become my ongoing interpreter." A relatively unusual arrangement, another participant manages his own interpreting budget and contract because it allows him to carefully select his interpreters. He contracts with one interpreter who manages the contract and who subcontracts regular days each week out to a small group of different preapproved interpreters. Even with the additional access work required on the part of the Deaf employee, he prefers being able to book the interpreters he wants and make a change if someone is not working out.

Participants provide their contracted interpreting agency criteria about categories of interpreters, in this case new interpreters, and use specific settings to evaluate their effectiveness. As Nathan described, "I always tell the interpreter coordinator to only send me new interpreters when I go to training. I generally won't be saying much during a training and can just watch the interpreter. They just have to sit there and sign. You have to train them." This example indicates that this participant views the interpreter working from English into ASL during a medium to large group interaction as relatively low consequence and uses the situation as an opportunity to evaluate overall interpreter skill. For this participant, satisfactory performance working from English to ASL suggests future satisfactory performance when interpreting in a more interactive setting. The consumer uses

information about an interpreter's work into one language to make decisions about higher stakes interactive communication in which the interpreter will also be working into their other language. This comment also makes it clear that the Deaf worker feels that he or she has a role in preparing interpreters to become more effective in the workplace.

To effectively make use of strategic interpreter selection, participants must have some measure of influence over bureaucratic systems related to interpreting services. Participants in this study all expressed a high level of autonomy related to interpreter selection. As Jason put it, "I have full control. I can select whomever I want." Brian said, "I have the same person coming on a regular day each week. And I have full control. I can replace someone if they aren't working out."

Several Deaf consumers discussed engaging in strategic interpreter selection, but they also engage in strategic interpreter scheduling. Deaf consumers also make strategic decisions about when *not* to have interpreters available in the workplace. Deaf consumers schedule on-call interpreters at specific times for strategic reasons. Brian explained how he manages interpreter schedules during the day in order to limit communication access.

> Brian: I don't schedule interpreters after 3:00. My interpreters could work until 4:00. I usually leave for home between 3:30 and 4:00. My boss generally works late and if he asks for a late meeting I can tell him that I can't because I don't have an interpreter available. I don't want to stay that late. You know how the traffic is on the beltway at 5:00. Please. That's why I leave at 3:30. I'll just say, "I'm sorry. I don't have an interpreter. We can meet tomorrow. See you then!" My boss is a lousy scheduler and always asks to see me at the last minute. This way if he asks to see me at the end of the day I have an excuse. My interpreter is my crutch. I'll say, "I'm sorry, I just don't have an interpreter."

Participants schedule on-call interpreters on certain days and not others. Brian also explained that he manages interpreter schedules in order to be more productive by limiting communication access. He does not schedule an interpreter on Fridays in order to be left alone so that he can catch up on work that requires focus.

DISCUSSION

Through my professional experience and anecdotal evidence from the Deaf community, it was expected that this study would identify concerns

about the *amount* and *quality* of interpreting services available. Even in workplaces where there is some level of signed language interpretation provided, I predicted that Deaf worker reports of engagement in the workplace and satisfaction with the level of access would be relatively low. In general, this was not the case.

Workplace satisfaction considered broadly was not a major emphasis of this study, and most participants in these focus groups enjoyed and were satisfied with their jobs. The focus groups revealed that these participants are dedicated and committed federal employees. Virtually all indicated that pay, the work itself, and a relatively high level of interpreter availability were important to their current job satisfaction.

The first overarching finding is that Deaf workers in this study expressed satisfaction with interpreter-mediated communication in the workplace. The overall high job satisfaction and the associated levels of satisfaction with interpreting services were not predicted. This result may be explained by knowing that the participants were relatively well-paid, highly educated Deaf professionals who have learned to navigate the byzantine federal hiring system and ultimately succeed in their careers. Further, they are all federal government workers in the Washington, DC, area, where there are many interpreters available, a high level of awareness among federal agencies about legal obligations to provide access, and a critical mass of federal Deaf employees for networking and discussions about workplace access strategy.

The second overarching finding is that Deaf workers spend a great deal of time and energy strategically engaging in order to make interpreting in the workplace more effective. These participants are satisfied *because* they expend a great deal of effort to achieve satisfying results. They are actively managing interpreters, interpreted interactions, and the levers of the institutional systems within which they operate in order to create the workplace experience that provides satisfactory communication access. This should not be interpreted to suggest that other Deaf employees who are unsatisfied with their communication access in the workplace are somehow to blame. Receptive and well-trained managers, accessibility services professionals, and human resources staff working in a responsive organization are prerequisites. Satisfactory interpreter-mediated workplace communication access should not require highly sophisticated and time-consuming efforts in order for it to be effective. However, these focus groups suggest for these participants that this level

of time and commitment is necessary for them to maintain the quality of access they experience.

Interpreter Boundaries

Interpreter boundaries is a catch-all phrase for a wide range of ideas, beliefs, behaviors, and personal alignments. The labels *professional* and *unprofessional*, *polite* and *impolite*, and *rude* and *friendly* may all be applied to the same set of behaviors, and the only difference may be the particular Deaf worker who experiences the behavior. This study does not suggest a one-size-fits-all approach for how interpreters should relate to Deaf consumers, but it reinforces the notion that this is a complex area ripe with opportunities for misunderstandings that cause offense. Boundaries are relationships, and though trite, relationships are complicated. Interpreters and Deaf consumers require a common vocabulary, perhaps a menu, to express preferences and avoid misunderstandings.

Interpreter Monitoring Strategies

Deaf people monitoring interpreters is an important addition to the list of access work Deaf people perform related to workplace communication. As was mentioned in the second overarching finding presented earlier, not only are Deaf professionals advocating for interpreting services, scheduling services, managing logistics, and, in some cases, overseeing the budget related to interpreters, but they also supervise interpreters by monitoring interpreter performance. Deaf employees communicate their thoughts and monitor their audience just like their hearing colleagues, while at the same time monitoring the interpreter. This may seem obvious, but while monitoring English production, they do it while not having auditory access to the product. This divided attention means that multiple cognitively complex processes are all happening concurrently and the impact of this on all parties and the message is not yet fully understood.

These participants reinforced that many Deaf people have the assumption that interpreters should use a one-sign/one-word correspondence while working, and this may indicate a misunderstanding of, or at least a lack of agreement about, the task of interpreting. Several comments indicate that these participants assume that transliterating is easier than interpreting and preferable, and this increases frustration on the part of the Deaf consumer when interpreters do not seem to be willing or able to follow this expressed preference.

The manner in which participants described monitoring made it evident that they view themselves as part of the interpreting team. Monitoring interpreter performance may be the result or the cause of their feelings of interpreting team membership, but these participants are aware of the difficulty and unpredictability of the information encountered in workplace settings and actively engage with the interpreter while seeking clarification. Participants described interpreted interactions when both consumer and interpreter grappled to help one another understand the information presented.

Impromptu Interpreting

Interpreting services are used to replace other types of less effective information gathering (e.g., speaking, lipreading, and typical text-based communication in the workplace) as Deaf professionals recognize the importance of relationship building and workplace intelligence gathering on a professional's career. Strategic information gathering requires relatively easy access to an available on-call interpreter. The Deaf employee who described this phenomenon most vividly describes a calculated approach to collecting information about office politics while using an interpreter in a way that demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of both effective networking in the workplace and communicating through an interpreter in a way that puts others at ease. Reactions from other participants in the focus group suggest all Deaf workers may not consider this a priority or they may not have the convenient access to an available on-call interpreter that this requires. Some participants commented that they either had not thought of it or they were concerned that it would be viewed as a frivolous, non-work-related use of an interpreter's time.

Engaging Institutional Systems

Strategic interpreter selection was not surprising. The anecdotal history of interpreter selection has traditionally been one of Deaf people carefully selecting fluent signers with a "good attitude" or Deaf-parented hearing people as their interpreters. Participants in this study report that when given the chance, they consider carefully the most appropriate interpreter for an assignment. What was surprising was the level of autonomy expressed by most participants regarding interpreter selection within their offices. This finding may not be true of other demographic categories of Deaf workers.

A few participants in this study made comments that reveal an orientation toward engagement in interpreter support and development. Deaf consumer investment in the continued improvement of interpreters may have presumed to have gone by the wayside with the increasing shift to academic preparation for interpreters, but several comments indicated this perspective is still evident to some degree in the workplace. Whether this role is collegial, voluntary, and enjoyable—or required and provided grudgingly—is unclear. What is clear is that it is an additional measure of uncompensated labor that Deaf workers provide that their non-Deaf colleagues do not.

It is unsurprising that Deaf people request interpreters when they need them. But the comments about strategically *not* scheduling interpreters was a surprising finding. This concept reinforces the idea that at least some Deaf people have reached the point where they can reliably count on their institutions to provide interpreters and are now free to decide when it makes sense, and actually benefits them, not to have interpreters scheduled. The participant who discussed this idea most thoroughly manages his interpreter schedule in a strategic yet professional way that aligns with institutional goals.

This is an imperfect snapshot of the participants of these focus groups. It is reasonable to assume that Deaf people who work in for-profit or nonprofit enterprises, who do not have a college education, or who work in blue-collar positions may have different perspectives on these issues. This group of participants should not be assumed to present a representative picture of the current state of affairs across all federal agencies. Participants mentioned that their current level of satisfaction with interpreting services was very different compared to their experience in previous federal workplaces. It is reasonable to assume that Deaf people who still work in those federal agencies are probably also less satisfied with their jobs and the level of access provided. One participant in this study mentioned that even though he was highly satisfied with his job, workplace, and level of interpreting services he received, he also felt trapped because of the realities in other federal workplaces.

CONCLUSION

The field of interpreting continues to grapple with understanding quality as a rich description of the service provided and not a simple good/bad

interpreter dichotomy. Interpreting is a complex consumer service, and in order to fully understand its implications, the consumers of this service must be consulted. This study reinforces and expands on the need for additional research in this area and gives community validity from Deaf and hard of hearing people themselves that, as consumers of these services, their perspectives are important for formulating federal workplace and interpreter services agency policies, interpreter education curricula, and continuing education opportunities for professional interpreters.

NOTE

1. All participant names are pseudonyms.

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