

A Qualitative Exploration of Work Values and Job Satisfaction Among Sign Language Interpreters

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Cover Page Footnote

I would like to express my gratitude to the participants who took the time to share their experiences with me. It was a deeply inspirational and humbling experience to hear their stories. I would also like to thank my dearest friends and colleagues for their invaluable support and feedback, particularly Robin Nevin, who served as the cross-coder on this project. For their generous guidance, I thank my grandparents, Nancy and Bob Parrish, who have always remained voices of reassurance when the path seemed long. I am grateful for my mother and step-father, Deb and Michael DeJacimo, for their continual compassion and support, without which I would not have the rich and fulfilling experience of being part of the Deaf world.

INTRODUCTION

The current project developed out of a personal interest and curiosity regarding the factors that motivate interpreters to feel satisfied in their professional lives despite work-related demands and stressors. This study has employed a heuristic approach to qualitative inquiry, which utilizes the researcher as the primary instrument in gathering and analyzing data (Patton, 2015). Therefore, I begin with an introduction of myself as the researcher, and as is customary in Deaf culture, I will describe myself in terms of my experience within the Deaf community. Both of my biological parents are Deaf, and I consider myself bilingual, with both American Sign Language (ASL) and English as my native languages. I hold both state and national certifications. I have worked as a professional interpreter for 15 years in a variety of settings (i.e., medical, educational, government, mental health, and video relay), and I have performed various roles within the interpreting community (educator, mentor, and agency coordinator). My interest in job satisfaction evolved out of observations of interpreter colleagues and students and their varied responses to the demands of the profession (i.e., experiencing burnout, making the decision to become educators, remaining stagnant, leaving the profession altogether).

I was first exposed to the qualitative approach to research in graduate school when completing a class assignment exploring CODA's (children of deaf adults) experiences of identity as it related to living between Deaf and hearing worlds. The current study was guided by the same phenomenological principles of utilizing several sources of data. The past experience of the researcher as well as principles of theories of vocational psychology were incorporated with data from semi-structured interviews among working sign language interpreters to understand the essence of work values and job satisfaction. By incorporating this data with semi-structured interviews among working sign language interpreters, the goal of this

research was to provide a rich description of the experience of interpreters and to uncover the phenomenon of work satisfaction.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

There has been very limited research related to the work values or job satisfaction of sign language interpreters. To date, there has been only one research study that has examined predictors of job satisfaction (Swartz, 1999), while several other researchers have examined related factors, such as burnout and compassion fatigue, to which interpreters are vulnerable (Dean & Pollard, 2001; Harvey, 2001; Schwenke, Ashby & Gnilka, 2010). Given the impact interpreters have on the lives of deaf and hearing consumers, it is important to understand interpreters' experiences of job satisfaction (Swartz, 1999).

The most recent study conducted specifically on the topic of sign language interpreters and job satisfaction is Swartz's thesis study from 20 years ago (1999), which points to the scarcity of previous research on this topic. Swartz emphasized the importance of job satisfaction for the profession of interpreting, given the increasing necessity of interpreting services and the "far-reaching impact that interpreters have in the lives of deaf and hearing individuals" (1999, p. 3). Swartz conducted an online survey among sign language interpreters within the United States and found that higher levels of autonomy were shown to be correlated with higher levels of work satisfaction. Swartz noted that education and support from a supervisor appeared to have a weaker relationship to job satisfaction than autonomy, pointing to the emphasis of independence and flexibility among sign language interpreters (1999).

BURNOUT AND VICARIOUS TRAUMA

Sign language interpreters' experiences of job satisfaction can be understood through the lens of occupational stress and burnout. The demand-control theory developed by Karasek

(1979) was applied to sign language interpreters by Dean and Pollard (2001) to provide a framework for understanding how interpreters deal with occupational stress. Dean and Pollard documented the factors that contribute to burnout, including occupational stress, vicarious stress, and role conflict. This theory encouraged interpreters to recognize both the demands of the work as well as the factors over which interpreters have some sort of control, including linguistic, environmental, interpersonal, and intrapersonal factors. In recognizing that interpreters have control over their output and can increase these controls through gaining skills and resources, they are better able to reduce the effects of burnout.

Research by Schwenke et al. (2010) highlighted the negative impact of interpersonal and emotional struggles on interpreters' job satisfaction due to occupational strain. Schwenke et al. (2010) studied 117 sign language interpreters and perceived causes of burnout. Researchers found that interpreters experience affective responses to uncertainty in the field and interpersonal struggles, particularly the difficulty in simply working with a variety of people. While high levels of occupational stress were shown to lead to higher rates of burnout, personal accomplishment was revealed to be an important factor that kept individuals in the field despite their struggles with stressful work conditions.

Harvey (2001) provided a narrative of the experience of sign language interpreters that weaves together themes of empathy, empowerment, and vicarious trauma. Through this narrative, readers may develop an increased understanding of how interpreters are exposed to the daily oppressions that deaf individuals face and how this exposure to trauma can have a profound impact on the emotional experience of the sign language interpreter. Harvey described burnout as a gradual process of emotional exhaustion that can leave an interpreter vulnerable to experiencing vicarious trauma in which the interpreter is traumatized by witnessing and wanting

to help a person who has been traumatized.

THEORY OF WORK ADJUSTMENT

The Minnesota Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA) was chosen for this investigation as a theoretical framework within which to work because of its emphasis on the importance of both individual and workplace factors (i.e., skills and values) on job satisfaction. The TWA is a model of person-environment fit which can be used to predict the relationship between work values and job satisfaction (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). According to the TWA, adjustment has been achieved and career choice maximized when individuals are both satisfied with their employment and the employer is satisfied with the worker, creating a state of equilibrium within their career (Swanson & Schneider, 2013). Dissatisfaction may lead to the adjustment of expectations or change in skills or tasks on the part of employers and the employees. Employer dissatisfaction is likely to lead to environment change (i.e., increasing tasks or skills required for the position) or employee layoffs, while dissatisfaction on the part of the employees may serve as the impetus for changes within individuals (i.e., increasing skills) or leaving the job environment. One of the main factors that influence individuals' experiences of job satisfaction is work values. Individuals are happier with their jobs when they are engaged in meaningful work (Swanson & Schneider, 2013). Because of the complexities within the interpreting profession, TWA provides a valuable framework to understand the relationship between interpreter values (and the profession's reinforcement of these values) on their experience of job satisfaction, with an emphasis on work values and job satisfaction. Values are defined as "beliefs and standards that guide individual action and thought and motivate individuals to act in a manner that is expressive of the self" (Rounds & Jin, 2013, p. 421). These values are theorized to be fairly stable across contexts and time and have been understood by the TWA model as having six core

clusters of values and needs. The six core values are achievement (feeling accomplished and using one's abilities); comfort (experiencing minimal levels of stress at work); status (achieving recognition and advancement); altruism (fostering harmony and being of service to others); safety (experiencing stability, order, and predictability at work); and autonomy (the ability to be independent and creative at work and taking responsibility for the work produced) (Rounds & Jin, 2013).

Because people spend a large portion of their life at work, job satisfaction has major implications for overall life satisfaction, physical and mental health, and well-being. Job satisfaction is defined as the generally positive emotional state resulting from appraisal of work experiences, or put simply, the degree to which people like their job or work environment. According to the TWA, job satisfaction stems from the alignment between work values of the individual and environmental reinforcers. Job dissatisfaction, therefore, is the absence of something positive or the presence of something negative (Swanson & Schneider, 2013).

While work values hold different significance for every individual, the current study will focus on these six identified work values to understand the experience of job satisfaction for sign language interpreters. Given that the role of the interpreter includes aspects of linguistic and cultural mediation as well as social advocacy (Moody, 2011), this study will also explore the emerging work value of empowerment in order to understand its impact on interpreters' job satisfaction.

EMPOWERMENT

Social and political changes within the Deaf community have brought increased attention to the role of power and control within the interpreting setting, with particular attention being paid to the use of empowerment by interpreters (Lane, Hoffmeister, & Bahan, 1996; McIntire &

Sanderson, 1995). This deliberate distribution of power, or empowerment, has been defined by Mason and Ren (2012) as “providing support in order to allow individuals to use power that is naturally their own” (p. 243). Language is one way of communicating power dynamics; therefore, interpreters are consistently attempting to maintain neutrality, while balancing their visibility and invisibility, which can cause interpreters to be vulnerable to burnout and compassion fatigue (Bahadir, 2010). More information is needed regarding the use of empowerment by interpreters and its impact on job satisfaction, and the current study considered empowerment as an exploratory work value.

QUALITATIVE APPROACH

A phenomenological qualitative investigation begins with a topic that has both social and personal meaning and significance (Moustakas, 1994), and this study begins with the experience of the sign language interpreter. The aim of the study was not to find a causal relationship but to reveal the essence and meaning of interpreters’ experiences through a careful, methodical qualitative analysis of the descriptions provided by participants. The current research is framed within a constructivist paradigm, which posits that the meaning of reality is created through subjective, not objective, experiences (Patton, 2015). By using a phenomenological approach, this study has sought to understand the way individuals create meaning based on their experience of reality, which further shapes their subsequent experiences (Patton, 2015). Keeping this approach central to the study, this research focused on understanding the meaning behind interpreters' past work experiences in order to understand their present experiences of work values and job satisfaction (Patton, 2015). This study utilized a hermeneutic approach, which considers the interpretation of experiences central to understanding individuals and the groups to which they belong. That is to say that, although each person has a unique set of experiences that

constitutes their reality and determines their individual behavior, it is safe to assume that commonalities can be identified in order to reveal a meaningful, shared experience (Patton, 2015).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given the qualitative approach of this research, the current study was guided by the following research questions: First, how do sign language interpreters experience the following seven work values: (a) achievement, (b) comfort, (c) status, (d) altruism, (e) safety, (f) autonomy, and (g) empowerment? Second, how is job satisfaction impacted by each of these seven work values?

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

For this study, participants were selected via purposive and maximum variability sampling in which the population included sign language interpreters who possess a National Interpreter Certification (NIC) with the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). Consistent with phenomenological inquiry (Moustakas, 1994), the present study sought to interview 8-12 participants who hold an NIC certification, have a genuine interest in exploring the topic of interpreter work values and job satisfaction, and who are representative of the general interpreting population in the United States.

An invitation to participate in the study was distributed through RID's monthly newsletter and Facebook page. The invitation began with an introduction of the researcher, an introduction to the study, and a web link to participate in the pre-screening process. Individuals who were interested in participating followed the link to the informed consent and pre-screening questionnaire. Nine individuals volunteered to participate in the study, and all nine completed

the interview process.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

This study utilized a semi-structured interview in order to gain a deeper understanding of job satisfaction among sign language interpreters. An Interview Guide (Table 1) was developed utilizing several theoretical resources, including concepts from the Minnesota Theory of Work Values which cover the six core work values of interest and the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) to explore facets related to both work values and job satisfaction (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). As suggested by Moustakas (1994), the interview process was an informal and interactive process in which all participants were asked the same open-ended questions to ensure that important topics are covered, while allowing participants the freedom to discuss their individual experiences. The interview first defined each of the seven work values (i.e. achievement, comfort, status, altruism, safety, autonomy, and empowerment) and then asked each participant to describe their experience of each of these as they relate to job satisfaction.

The Interview Guide was sent to participants ahead of time via email in order to allow them time to consider their previous experiences and feelings of job satisfaction related to work values. Interviews were conducted via phone, and all interviews were audio recorded.

Table 1
Interview Guide

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What things are most satisfying to you about your work? 2) Describe your primary frustrations or sources of dissatisfaction. 3) Achievement has been defined as feeling accomplished and using ones abilities.

How do you experience achievement as a sign language interpreter?

How does achievement contribute to your job satisfaction, if at all? 4) Comfort has been defined as experiencing minimal levels of stress at work, and can |
|---|

include factors such as independence, variety, and compensation

How do you experience comfort as a sign language interpreter?

How does comfort contribute to your job satisfaction, if at all?

- 5) Status has been defined as achieving recognition and advancement and often relates to perceptions of prestige and social status.

How do you experience status as a sign language interpreter?

How does status contribute to your job satisfaction, if at all?

- 6) Altruism has been defined as fostering harmony and being of service to others.

How do you experience altruism as a sign language interpreter?

How does altruism contribute to your job satisfaction, if at all?

- 7) Safety has been defined as experiencing stability, order, and predictability at work and can describe the work environment itself or the individuals with whom you work.

How do you experience safety as a sign language interpreter?

How does safety contribute to your job satisfaction, if at all?

- 8) Autonomy has been defined as the ability to be independent and creative at work and taking responsibility for the work you produce.

How do you experience autonomy as a sign language interpreter?

How does autonomy contribute to your job satisfaction, if at all?

- 9) Empowerment has been defined as providing support in order to allow individuals to use power that is naturally their own.

How do you experience empowerment as a sign language interpreter?

How does empowerment contribute to your job satisfaction, if at all?

- 10) Now that we have discussed (a) achievement, (b) comfort, (c) status, (d) altruism, (e)

safety, and (f) autonomy, and (g) empowerment, which two or three values are most important to you?

11) While I have tried to cover all aspects of work values, you may still have experiences that come to mind related to your job satisfaction. What else, if anything, would you like to share with me about contributors to your job satisfaction?

During the interviews, researcher notes were made in order to keep track of participant responses, emerging themes, and potential follow-up questions. All interviews were transcribed by the main researcher in order to provide immersion into the data. After themes were organized, participants were provided an opportunity to review the list of themes that emerged from the data and to provide feedback. This is called a member check and provides enhancement to the quality of the study (Patton, 2015). Participant feedback was included in the final data analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

The current study applied Giorgi's steps (1997) for qualitative inquiry, including (a) collecting data, (b) reading data, (c) breaking down data, (d) organizing the data, and (e) synthesizing data to present for discussion. The research process began by conducting the semi structured interviews and transcribing each of them. The ultimate goal in phenomenological inquiry is to reduce data down to essential themes or universal essences, revisiting themes often throughout the study (Moustakas, 1994). This process was accomplished by identifying units of meaning and clustering important themes into meaningful units of data related to job satisfaction and work values. Interviews were first coded by hand identifying holistic and in-vivo codes directly onto the transcripts, as suggested by Saldaña (2013). Using a Word processing program,

codes were further broken down into in-vivo codes, (e.g., I HAVE CONTROL, CHOOSE ASSIGNMENTS, SPLIT-SECOND DECISIONS), with the intention of emphasizing verbatim participant responses that stood out to the researcher. Holistic coding was also used to attempt to grasp basic themes that emerged in the data by grouping them with other similar theme (e.g., DECISION-MAKING). At first, every statement was treated as an equal meaning unit in which all comments were covered and summarized before organizing and synthesizing the data into larger themes (Moustakas, 1994).

The pieces of data previously broken down were categorized into themes, which are used to develop descriptions of the essence of work values and job satisfaction among sign language interpreters (Giorgi, 1997). As codes emerged, they were combined across interviews and coded into larger chunks relevant to the fields of interpreting and psychology. For example, themes of altruism and selflessness were expected to emerge across interviews, as well as various responses to work conditions related to comfort and status. These themes were coded in terms of the seven work value categories. Other data emerged that did not fit into these pre-established themes and other themes were needed created to encompass these data. Saturation was reached during the ninth and final interview when no new data or themes, all data was able to be categorized, and all key concepts were defined (Patton, 2015). The main themes discovered throughout the data collection process were then organized into sub-themes that allow the reader to understand the essence of the experience of sign language interpreters and job satisfaction.

TRIANGULATION

Triangulation is a process utilized in qualitative research to enhance credibility and trustworthiness of the analysis by utilizing multiple sources of analysis (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). Four sources of triangulation were utilized in the present study in order to verify

themes that emerged within the data and to enhance the quality of the study. Source triangulation involves the use of multiple interviewees in order to provide a variety of data from which to work and highlights both common and unique experiences. These experiences included shared positive and negative perceptions of certain environments or relationships. In order to validate the credibility of the analysis, participants were provided an opportunity to provide feedback on the themes in the form of a member check. The researcher provided via email a list of themes and subthemes along with descriptions of each and asked participants for their responses. Five participants responded with reports that they agreed with the themes developed by the researcher. One participant commented on her support for the theme of empowerment being included with altruism. No new data were presented or incorporated.

Throughout this process, a cross-coder was utilized as analyst triangulation to simultaneously code several of the interviews in order to achieve an agreement of the meaning and relevance of data among two independent people (Patton, 2015). The cross-coder, a graduate student with little foundational knowledge of Deaf culture and interpreting (in order to prevent cross-coder bias), was provided with a brief description of the study and applied codes to five of the nine transcripts during the initial analysis stage. She utilized the chunking and splitting process of coding as described earlier in which codes and themes were clustered into meaningful units and revisited often throughout the analysis process to ensure all participant comments were synthesized (Moustakas, 1994). The fourth form of triangulation used was heuristic triangulation, which included the researcher seeking disconfirming evidence of personal biases. Recordings of researcher's personal thoughts and reactions were made after each interview in an attempt to identify biases (i.e., personal preference for autonomy over achievement) and develop follow-up questions for future interviews (Patton, 2015). As suggested by Patton (2015), after the first few

interviews, the researcher recorded her own answers so as to attempt to separate her thoughts from the participants' data.

RESULTS

DEMOGRAPHICS

The final analysis included data from nine participants, and Table 2 presents their demographic information. Eight participants identified as female, and one identified as male, and their ages ranged from 25 to 57. Six participants identified as White/Caucasian, one as White/Hispanic, and two identified as having mixed ethnicity. Two participants had both deaf parents and deaf family members, while one had only a deaf family member (husband), and six participants had neither deaf parents nor deaf family members. Years of work as a sign language interpreter ranged from 7 to 33. Five participants identified as freelance interpreters, and four worked as full-time interpreters. All of the participants had interpreting experience in community and post-secondary educational settings, and all but one participant had experience working in a K-12 educational setting. The least common settings were VRS (Video Relay Service) and VRI (Video Remote Interpreting) with only half of the participants having experience in each of these. Six of the nine participants also held certifications other than the National Interpreter Certification (NIC) required for participation in the current study, including CI/CT (Certificate of Interpreting and Translation), EIPA (Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment), and SC:L (Specialist Certificate: Legal).

Table 2
Participant Demographic Information

Name	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Deaf Family	Deaf Parents	Years of Experience	Status	Current Setting(s)
Maria	40	Female	White	No	No	9	Freelance	Community, College
Elizabeth	37	Female	White	Yes	No	16	Freelance	VRS, College
Wanda	57	Female	White/ Hispanic	No	No	33	Freelance	Community, Legal
Lucy	29	Female	Irish/ Hawaiian	No	No	7	Full Time	K-12
Cathy	44	Female	White	No	No	23	Full Time	Community
Layla	29	Female	White	No	No	7	Full Time	Community
Mark	33	Male	White	Yes	Yes	10	Full Time	VRS, VRI, Community
Teresa	48	Female	Trinidadian/ Scottish	Yes	Yes	20	Freelance	Community, Legal
Heather	28	Female	White	No	No	10	Freelance	Community

IMPACT OF VALUES ON JOB SATISFACTION

At the end of the interview process, participants were asked to choose the top two or three values that impacted their job satisfaction. Eight of the nine participants in this study chose autonomy as one of the most salient values. Empowerment was chosen by seven participants, followed by Altruism, Status, and Achievement. Status was the only value that was not chosen to be related to job satisfaction (see Table 3).

Table 3
Salient Values by Participant Ranking

Work Values	Number of Participants
Autonomy	8
Empowerment	7
Altruism	5
Achievement	4

Comfort	3
Safety	3
Status	0

After reading each transcript carefully, all meaning units were categorized into one of the seven initial work value codes (the six TWA values and empowerment). The researcher used in vivo coding, searching for meaningful language and experiences. Although the original interview questions were structured based on the values outlined by the TWA, many participants also described salient experiences related to emotions and social connections. After reviewing final codes, the theme of Relationships emerged as separate from the initial TWA work values, and TWA themes were combined to reflect overlapping elements.

The final six themes that were developed to represent the broader concepts represented in the interviews were: (1) Autonomy, (2) Altruism, (3) Relationships, (4) Achievement, (5) Comfort-Safety, and (6) Status. Table 4 provides a list of themes and subthemes found in the data. Each code and each theme was endorsed by at least two participants. Themes will be discussed in the order of their contribution to job satisfaction.

Table 4
List of Themes and Subthemes

Theme 1	Autonomy
	1.1 Decision Making and Personal Control
	1.2 Independence
	1.3 Creativity
	1.4 Taking Responsibility
Theme 2	Altruism
	2.1 Fostering Harmony
	2.2 Serving the Deaf Community
	2.3 Empowering Deaf Clients
	2.4 Serving Other Interpreters
Theme 3	Relationships
	3.1 Relationships Within the Interpreting Community
	3.2 Being Empowered by Colleagues and Supervisors

	3.3 Relationships with Clients
	3.4 Other Roles and Relationships
Theme 4	Achievement
	4.1 Using One's Abilities
	4.2 Development Over Time
	4.3 Recognition and Reputation
	4.4 Interpreting as a Calling
Theme 5	Comfort-Safety
	5.1 Variety
	5.2 Stability and Predictability
	5.3 Stress and Coping
Theme 6	Status
	6.1 Compensation
	6.2 Demographic Factors and Social Status
	6.3 Personality Factors

AUTONOMY

The first theme includes ideas about the presence and absence of Autonomy and describes decision-making and personal control, independence, creativity, and taking responsibility. Participants described various types of autonomy, including having the ability to choose what types of work to do and setting their own schedule (for freelance interpreters). Educational interpreters described having less autonomy in their work due to systemic demands of their organization. All interpreters described the value of independence and making professional decisions daily. Even when working as part of a team, trust enhanced autonomy and feeling of independence. Participants described factors that were also important to job satisfaction, such as creativity (e.g., collaborating with a colleague) and taking responsibility in their work. An example of a quote regarding Taking Responsibility includes,

Ultimately, at the end of the day, our decisions are our own, how we handle them are our own, whether positive or negative. We have to be able to say, that was the best I could do at that time.

ALTRUISM

Altruism emerged as another important factor related to job satisfaction. Interpreting provided participants an opportunity to serve the Deaf community in a meaningful way. Empowerment was found to be encompassed under the values of altruism and relationships, as an extension of providing a service to others. Some participants described using their awareness of power, responsibility, and privilege to create empowered interactions between deaf and hearing individuals. Most of the interpreters in this sample endorsed feeling satisfied in their ability to foster harmony among others. One participant shared,

I'm not taking credit for their hard work at all, but I feel like whatever small part I played in providing that service to them so that they could do their thing, I feel like that is my way of contributing, by being in support of the deaf community and fostering harmony.

Acts of altruism and empowerment often extended beyond working with deaf clients into the mentoring arena. Many participants shared having hope in the future of the profession and working to lift up newer interpreters to better support the larger Deaf community.

RELATIONSHIPS

The theme of Relationships emerged as separate from the initial work values. This theme includes positive and negative aspects of relationships with colleagues, agencies, deaf and hearing clients, and involvement in other roles (i.e., interpreter training educators, ministry related work, and family roles). Participants reported having both positive and negative interactions with other interpreters, agencies, and professional organizations, and many expressed that these interactions often had an effect on their satisfaction at work. Regarding Relationships within the interpreting community, one participant shared

I very nearly decided this wasn't the job for me. It was too negative, too back-biting and

competitive and not fun, and luckily ended up doing something a little different for a while and coming back to it and had a much better experience.

Several participants spoke to the impact of being empowered by others and spoke to cultural tensions between the deaf and interpreting communities and expressed discomfort with changes in the profession. Maintaining healthy relationships was identified as a salient factor that helped balance work-life demands, which contributed to increased job satisfaction.

ACHIEVEMENT

All nine participants in this study specifically expressed developing a sense of achievement from personal and professional growth and gaining new levels of abilities over time. Each interpreter also spoke to the importance of having a positive professional reputation among the deaf and interpreting communities. Many participants noted, however, that this recognition did not necessarily contribute to job satisfaction as much as it increased their confidence in their own abilities and strengthened their relationships with their colleagues and clients. One of the participants shared,

I think this goes for any person in any job in any position you have, if you work hard at staying relevant in your field, you're just going to do a better job and that, in turn, is going to make you happier and want to do more of it because you are working so hard at it.

Of particular importance is that all nine participants in this study described their work in terms of achieving their purpose or calling. Some shared that they were led by God while others spoke in terms of fulfilling a need and having passion for their work.

COMFORT AND SAFETY

The work values of Comfort and Safety were combined as they were found to include

overlapping themes, including variety, stability, and predictability. Stress and coping factors were described, which included accounts of various types of stress encountered by interpreters as well as coping strategies used. Interpreters in this sample described various aspects of comfort, safety, and status and expressed that these values were not significant contributors to overall job satisfaction. Most participants agreed that variety, instability, and unpredictability were natural parts of the work of interpreters. When stressful situations emerged, participants utilized a variety of coping techniques, including reaching out to their support system and learning to manage the portions of their work over which they had personal control.

STATUS

The sixth theme focuses on Status factors related to compensation, demographic and social status, and personality. Several participants described aspects of social status and personality that impacted their work. Some noted that their age and gender impacted the way others perceived their status and the status of the profession. Others shared that simply being well-educated, multilingual professionals gives interpreters increased status. Some interpreters mentioned that their personality status as curious or social people was a good fit for the interpreting profession in which they are able to interact with others daily.

DISCUSSION

The results of this exploration point to the importance of aligning work values with different types of interpreting work. Autonomy, altruism, and achievement were highlighted as values important in the lives of this sample of sign language interpreters and their experiences of job satisfaction. In contrast, comfort, safety, and status appeared to be less important than autonomy and altruism. All participants described ways to navigate emotional stress utilizing

coping techniques to balance demands of the job and remain satisfied. Results of the current study appear to be largely consistent with previous research on the impact of work values and job satisfaction. The current study did not directly explore burnout, but it was discovered that themes related to safety and comfort were not salient factors that impacted job satisfaction, except when describing stressors that participants were unable to control. In fact, most participants described instability and emotional stress as inherent in the work.

One unexpected finding was the sense of calling and fulfillment expressed by participants. Previous research points to a calling as work that includes having a skill that meets a need beyond oneself and having a sense of purpose and meaning. A calling has also been defined as participating in work that is other-oriented and contributes to the common good (Dik & Duffy, 2009). These authors noted that the difference between a calling and a vocation is that a calling has an external motivation (ie., God or the needs of society), while a vocation includes purpose and contribution to society to the extent that it is beneficial for the self. Interpreters in this study appeared to hold values consistent with a calling, but future studies may benefit from exploring the impact of internal versus external motivation on overall job satisfaction.

Interpreters in the current study reported acts of empowerment through cultural mediation, social advocacy, and language access consistent with previous studies (Bahdir, 2010; Mason & Ren, 2012; McIntire & Samson, 1995; Moody, 2001). Participants provided descriptions consistent with previous explanations of the impact of empowerment of the Deaf community, such as experiencing backlash from the community and recognizing the historical and individual oppression perpetuated by individuals, including interpreters themselves (Harvey, 2001; Lane et al., 1996).

The Demand-Control Theory (Dean & Pollard, 2001) was also supported by the results of

the current research. Participants described linguistic, environmental, and intrapersonal factors similar to those proposed by Dean and Pollard (2001), and autonomy (i.e., decision latitude) was found to be a salient value related to the amount of control interpreters had over their environment (Karasek, 1979). To further support this theory, Badhir (2010) described the stress inherent in power imbalances when working as an interpreter. Participants in this study provided examples of how they manage the stress of having power in interpreting situations and emphasized the importance of having the ability to be independent and autonomous to navigate the complex work of the interpreter.

IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERPRETERS

Interpreters, trainers, and employers of interpreters may find support from this study in understanding the factors that encourage job satisfaction, particularly which values they endorse and how closely their personal values align with their work environment. When individuals are satisfied with their work, they are less likely to change jobs or careers (Moore et al., 2006). Results point to the salience of autonomy, altruism, and relationships in maintaining job satisfaction, and many participants described the importance of balancing work demands (i.e., unpredictability and instability) by focusing on aspects of their job over which they have control in order to gain a sense of autonomy. A list of recommendations for enhancing job satisfaction has been developed in order to encourage interpreters to consider factors contributing to their own satisfaction with their work (Table 5). This list reflects suggestions and salient themes that emerged from the original interview guide and participants' responses. Several participants noted that they learned about themselves simply by participating in the interview process, pointing to the value of introspection in understanding one's own experience of job satisfaction.

Table 5
Maintaining Job Satisfaction for Sign Language Interpreters

<u>Autonomy</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpreters should seek to utilize their autonomy in healthy ways in order to balance the stress inherent in interpreting work. • Interpreters who value independence may benefit from working in a more flexible environment. For example, freelance or agency work typically offers more autonomy. • Interpreters whose work values more closely align with needs for safety and comfort may benefit from working in a more structured environment in terms of compensation, schedule, or consistency. For example, working in an educational setting or a VRS environment may offer more predictability in terms of scheduling and financial stability.
<u>Altruism</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpreters who value being of service to others are encouraged to take time to recognize the impact of their work. Interpreters provide communication access for a historically disempowered community of people and expand the awareness of Deaf needs and rights to the hearing community. • Interpreters should explore the motivating factors behind becoming an interpreter and gain an understanding of their own experiences of power and oppression. • Interpreters who value empowerment can seek to reduce power differentials wherever possible and to take accountability for their actions. One way to do this is to have a friend or colleague who acts as an accountability partner with whom you can confidentially discuss issues of privilege.
<u>Relationships</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpreters should develop and maintain healthy relationships with clients whenever possible and seek to resolve client conflicts when they arise. • Interpreters should maintain healthy interpersonal boundaries with clients, colleagues, friends, and family members. • Interpreters should maintain supportive relationships (within and outside of the interpreting profession) in order to reduce the impact of work-related stress.
<u>Achievement and Status</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpreters who value professional development and growth are encouraged to take time to recognize their career achievements (i.e., enhanced certification or education; obtaining a meaningful position, etc.). • Interpreters who value achievement but are struggling to obtain success are encouraged to evaluate their skill level, motivation, and their ability to articulate their professional worth and personal needs. • Interpreters should gain awareness of their personality styles and how they might match or conflict with interpreting in general or within certain work environments. For example, if an interpreter is a more concrete thinker and prefers stability, she/he might be more satisfied with a full-time position at an agency or school district. For

individuals who have more free-spirited or outgoing personalities, a freelance position may be a better fit.

Safety and Comfort

- Interpreters should acknowledge the continual challenges that are posed in the work of the interpreter and recognize when stress levels are being increased beyond healthy limits.
- Interpreters who are experiencing stress at work are encouraged to assess their environment for sources of strain and attempt to gain control over some aspects of their work wherever possible (i.e., change schedule, environments, etc.)
- If a working environment becomes too stressful, interpreters should utilize their personal autonomy to determine whether they would like to change positions, environments, or professions.
- Interpreters are encouraged to practice emotional awareness and stress-reduction techniques (e.g., taking time off work, processing emotional responses, having a confidante).

LIMITATIONS

Some of the limitations of this study include drawbacks inherent in qualitative work. The sample size was small (n=9) and may not be generalizable to the broader population of sign language interpreters. The sample was homogenous, and while diversity factors were considered and included as much as possible, the sample was ultimately representative of the population. Future studies may explore a wider variety of demographic variables with a larger sample.

Secondly, the initial demographic questionnaire did not ask participants about their educational background and, therefore, the study was unable to explore the impact of education on work values or job satisfaction. Individuals in this study were required to hold RID's NIC (National Interpreter Certification) which limited the participant pool. Future researchers may choose to explore a wider variety of certifications and specialties (i.e., EIPA [Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment]), certifying bodies (i.e., state boards), and education levels. Another possible limitation to the current study is volunteer bias. It is likely that individuals who volunteered to participate in research about interpreting and job satisfaction may inherently

create more meaning in their work or differ in other ways than interpreters who would not choose to participate in research.

STRENGTHS

These limitations are countered by an important strength. The process of scientific research inherently lends itself to a hearing perspective, organizing information in a linear or categorical fashion to understand a phenomenon. Job satisfaction is best understood through understanding of individuals' work experiences, and qualitative inquiry lends itself to understanding these experiences (Kristoff-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). The researcher chose to explore interpreters' experiences through a qualitative approach, which is more consistent with the Deaf culture's love of storytelling (Lane, 1996). Future research using mixed-methods would be helpful in clarifying values and job satisfaction as they apply to a wider range of participants.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study highlighted the importance of a variety of work values for sign language interpreters—particularly autonomy, altruism, and achievement—and how alignment of these values with work environments improves job satisfaction (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). The current study could be further supported by quantitative studies, which would be able to capture the values of a larger sample of the interpreter population. For example, future studies may utilize the Minnesota Importance Questionnaire (MIQ), based on the TWA, which highlights six work values and 21 related needs (Rounds & Jin, 2013). To expand on the TWA, future studies could include person-environment fit factors for sign language interpreters. Interpreters often have choices about the settings in which they choose to work, and particular environments may support specific work values. Interpreters who enjoy working in the educational environment,

for example, appear to value comfort and safety, and this could be explored through future studies focused on various interpreting settings and roles (e.g., educational, VRS, or community; freelance or full-time). Another possible area of future research would be to further explore how work values play out within the context of Demand-Control Theory (Dean & Pollard, 2001; Karasek, 1979). Autonomy was found to be a strong predictor of work satisfaction, and future studies might explore the extent to which autonomy allows interpreters to control their environments.

The current study focused on factors that affect job satisfaction; that is, how happy individuals were with their jobs. Participants also described dissatisfaction in a variety of areas (i.e., lack of autonomy, lack of support from colleagues or supervisors, extreme challenges, frustrations with agencies and organizations). Future research might focus on which work values relate most closely to job dissatisfaction and how these challenges might be managed.

CONCLUSION

To date, this has been the only study conducted exploring the experience of sign language interpreters and job satisfaction using qualitative analysis. The results of this study can be used to inform interpreters, their employers, vocational counselors, and interpreter educators about how the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA) may be applied to individuals working within this profession. Interpreters work in many environments (e.g., educational, medical, legal, community) and in many roles (i.e., freelance, contract, or full-time), and when they make use of their autonomy, they are able to combine elements of their work into an experience that is satisfying for them. Empowerment was initially predicted to be an emerging work value among sign language interpreters. Instead, it was found to be encompassed within the values of altruism and relationships. An intriguing discovery highlighted the importance of relationships in

experiencing job satisfaction. Previous research posited that positive supervisory relationships do not directly impact job satisfaction for sign language interpreters. However, the results of this study show that relationships are a salient factor that supports satisfaction with their work and that conflictual relationships may lead to individuals seeking other employment opportunities. Individuals' experiences at work are impacted by both positive and negative relationships, which in turn impacts their ability to sustain a healthy work-life balance.

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