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Finding their Fit: An Exploratory Study of Interpreters' Perceptions of their Membership in the Deaf Community

Cami J. Miner
Gallaudet University, camiminer@gmail.com

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Gallaudet University

ABSTRACT

In the U.S., Deaf individuals who use a signed language as their preferred and dominant means of communication are considered a distinct linguistic and cultural group known as the Deaf community. Sign language interpreters, particularly non-native signers who are leaning ASL, are frequently encouraged to associate with the Deaf community as part of their language acquisition process. However, interpreters who are not deaf or native signers, especially students, often experience tension as they interact with the Deaf community. The literature is divided on whether hearing interpreters who learn ASL later in life, even those who are arguably bilingual and bicultural, are able to attain Deaf community membership. The guiding questions for this study are: According to their own perspectives, can hearing, ASL-English interpreters be members of the Deaf community? If they are members, what qualifies them as members, and if not, why not? Three interpreters were interviewed to elicit their views on hearing interpreters' fit within the Deaf community. Qualitative analysis in ELAN uncovered three primary themes; participants' definition of Deaf community and who can be a member, what participants' saw as requirements for interpreter membership, and caveats to such membership. While ASL fluency, attitude, and cultural competency were found to be important, a key finding is that participants agree interpreters' membership is dependent upon the Deaf community extending an invitation and is not something they can claim for themselves.

In the U.S., Deaf[1] individuals who use a signed language as their preferred and dominant means of communication are considered a distinct linguistic and cultural group known as the Deaf community. There is a great deal of variation within the Deaf community, and the definition of Deaf community has evolved over time and continues to be contested (Ruiz-Williams et al., 2015).

[1] The use of uppercase "D" for Deaf was first used to designate cultural affiliation distinct from audiologic status by Woodward (1972). This is not universally agreed upon within the community (Woodward & Horejes, 2016). The use of capital "D" or lowercase "d" for the term D/deaf could be seen as being inherently a judgement of cultural competency (Kusters, et al., 2017; Woodward, 1972). I find the distinction important for this discussion and will use "Deaf" for cultural references and "deaf" to refer to people with that audiologic status and will default to "deaf" for any ambiguous or mixed groups.

Some hearing people[2] (including signed language interpreters), may have ties to the Deaf community through familial connections or shared language. Sign language interpreters, particularly non-native signers who are leaning ASL, are frequently encouraged to associate with the Deaf community as part of their language acquisition process (Stuard, 2008; Witter-Merithew, 1999). Some interpreters also recognize that there is an element of reciprocity and community involvement expected of them in order to gain trust as a professional working in the community (Mindess, 2014). However, interpreters who are not deaf or native signers, especially students, often experience tension as they interact with the Deaf community. What is the line between positive and reciprocal community engagement and taking advantage of the community's language to earn a living as an interpreter? The literature is divided on whether hearing interpreters who learn ASL later in life, even those who are arguably bilingual and bicultural, are able to attain Deaf community membership. These interpreters' perception of their membership or lack thereof in the Deaf community likely affects their overall approach to their work with Deaf clients. This may impact their connection with clients, specifically professional boundaries and if they consider themselves neutral or an ally. The question of hearing interpreter membership and the evolving viewpoints in the literature is addressed in this study by investigating interpreters' understanding of the Deaf community and their perceptions of their own positioning within. The guiding question for this study is: According to their own perspectives, can hearing, ASL-English interpreters be members of the Deaf community? If they are members, what qualifies them as members, and if not, why not?

Research has been done specifically on the identity and community membership of Deaf-parented interpreters who are native signers (Shield, 2004). However, the question of nonnative signing, hearing interpreters' membership in the Deaf community has been discussed by Deaf Studies and Interpreting scholars but has not been directly asked through interviews with interpreters and reported in this way.

SITUATING THE AUTHOR

As a signer who has been learning and using ASL for the past 15 years and a certified interpreter with over ten years of experience, considering if interpreters are members of the Deaf community is inherently a personal question for me. I recognize I bring my own bias to the research. Before beginning this study, I would have been fairly confident saying I am a member of the Deaf community. As an ASL second language learner with no Deaf family, my connection to the community is through my own choice to learn ASL, associate with Deaf people, and pursue a career as an interpreter. My connection to the community is also impacted by having a Deaf partner and experience as a Gallaudet student. I was taught through my own interpreter training and subsequent socialization that interpreters should be engaged with the Deaf community and not

[2] The term "hearing people" in this paper refers to individuals who do not have significant hearing loss and do not identify as culturally Deaf. This term has both audiological and cultural implications within the Deaf community (Lane, 1992; Padden, 1980).

merely use their knowledge of the language for their career, with no reciprocity. All of these elements impacted my lens as I conducted this study.

I am aware that my presence a hearing, female, white, certified interpreter and researcher impacts participants and their responses. This study is emic in nature because as an interpreter myself, I am an insider to the group I am studying. I interviewed participants that share identity as interpreters, adult nonnative learners of ASL, and hearing women. This may help mitigate but does not eliminate the observer's paradox.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review identifies key elements of membership at various levels of affiliation and acceptance. Translation and Interpreting Studies (TIS) literature has only begun to address the perceptions held by interpreters themselves and the Deaf community regarding hearing, ASL-English interpreters and their membership in the American Deaf community. This study will lean into a Deaf cultural lens derived from Deaf Studies and their framing of hearing people and, more specifically, hearing interpreters who learned ASL as a second language within in the Deaf community.

DEFINING DEAF AND "DEAF COMMUNITY"

According to Bahan (1994), the term "Deaf community" has been used as far back as the turn of the twentieth century, although the term has been heavy with connotations since its inception, and the meaning has evolved over time. As a means of clarifying, Bahan used the sign glossed as DEAF^WORLD to describe the culture and community created through the connection among Deaf people. He stated that cultural competence is something Deaf people attain over time and used this term to be inclusive and accepting of the various experiences and backgrounds of Deaf signing people. Padden (1980) further defined this Deaf community as including both Deaf people and the hearing people who come alongside them to work towards achieving the goals of the community. In the same text, she described Deaf culture as the learned behaviors of a distinct language-sharing group, a specifically Deaf phenomenon not open to hearing participation. This distinction allowed for the reality of hearing people's interaction with Deaf people in the community while preserving a distinctly Deaf space within Deaf culture.

The concept of a Deaf community centers around the view that deafness brings people with a shared experience together into a group. Deaf people are drawn into a community by outside forces of oppression and inside forces of language and culture (Lane, et al., 2011; Murray, 2017). Signing Deaf people also consider themselves a linguistic minority (De Meulder, 2018). This linguistic and cultural lens views biocultural diversity as natural and desirable. This is in contrast to the pathological view which considers difference a deviation from some socially established norm (Bauman & Murray, 2014; Kusters, et al., 2017). More recently, Bauman and Murray (2014) used the term Deaf Gain to consider deafness not in the frame of "loss" (as in hearing loss), but instead, embracing deafness as a distinct way of being in the world. Deaf people provide perspectives, perceptions, and insights less common to the hearing majority. Therefore, there are benefits to being Deaf such as having something unique to contribute to the wider society (Bauman & Murray, 2014).

Few deaf people are born into the culture and raised with Deaf, signing parents (De Meulder, 2018). Because so many deaf people do not have parents to teach them ASL, Deaf culture, and introduce them to the community, there are multiple other paths to Deaf culture acquisition and joining the Deaf community than birthright (Maxwell-McCaw & Zea, 2011). While there are many aspects of Deaf culture, language is a key element of any culture, and every language expresses a unique worldview. One of the most fundamental features of Deaf culture is the use of a natural sign language like ASL as an expression of the Deaf community's visual orientation; therefore, ASL proficiency, particularly ASL mastery, is seen as a measure of cultural membership (Burke, 2014; Lane, 1984). Multigenerational American Deaf people, particularly white middle-class signers with connections to Gallaudet, were first to claim authority on sign language, implicitly sending a message to the larger population of Deaf people, particularly those born to hearing, non-signing parents, that they were viewed as less-than (Murray, 2017).

While multigenerational Deaf people have had much to contribute to defining ASL and Deaf culture by drawing on native ASL exposure and their life-long experiences, looking only to these families and individuals as the torch bearers of Deaf culture can be problematic. This is, in part, because of a lack of diverse representation (Miller, 2010). One example is the dominance of white teachers and administrators in Deaf primary and post-secondary education, which has resulted in deaf students of color being intellectually oppressed, stuck in what the authors describe as a "bottleneck of opportunity" (Simms et al., 2008, p. 349). Indeed, historically the population serving as the representative of Deafness was mostly middle-class, white, abled-bodied, Deaf-parented, Deaf people who attended residential deaf schools (Murray, 2017; Ruiz-Williams et al., 2015). This excluded the perspectives of other classes, races, and ethnicities. There has been concern regarding the political ramifications of such a narrow definition of Deaf culture, with the impact of marginalizing people from the community (Bahan, 1994; Leigh, et al., 2014). In 2003 Foster and Kinuthia interviewed Hispanic, Black, and Asian Deaf students at NTID and found that most reported conflict in their racial and ethnic identities with Deaf identity and belonging in the Deaf community. Some have suggested that Deaf people with additional minority status constitute separate subcommunities within the larger Deaf community (Woll and Ladd, 2003).

As an understanding and awareness of Deaf culture and community has grown, tensions and unanswered questions of membership have remained. An overly rigid and dogmatic view of both Deaf community and culture has, as a result, been suspect in more recent Deaf Studies literature (Kusters, et al., 2017; Friedner & Kusters, 2015).

HEARING PEOPLE IN DEAF CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

Audiological status and membership in the Deaf community are strongly linked. While deaf adults who do not learn sign until later in life are granted entry into the community, they may experience rejection as "not deaf enough" (De Meulder, 2018). Deaf community membership becomes especially complicated when considering people who do not share the element of audiological deafness. The most common theme found in reference to these non-deaf people in Deaf Studies literature is one of otherness. Therefore, it is generally agreed among scholars that the identity of "Deaf" cannot be conferred to a hearing person (Krentz, 2014; Lane, et al., 1996).

HEARING ABILITY AND SIGNIFICANCE.

Audiological deafness has been cited as a requirement for full acceptance as a member of the Deaf community (Lane, 1992; Lane, Hoffmeister, & Bahan, 1996) and participation in Deaf culture (Padden, 1980). In fact, some have suggested that the experience of deafness is more important for connection and acceptance than any other cultural marker (Leigh, et al., 2014; Scott, 2011). As described by Bahan (1994), audiological deafness is the **"**Deaf-same" phenomenon in which Deaf people find solidarity through their shared experiences. More recent Deaf Studies scholarship challenges the "Deaf-same" concept, stating the binary Deaf vs. hearing framework minimizes other intersectional identities (Ruiz-Williams et al., 2015).

For hearing people, though, this means there is a degree of separation between them and the Deaf people with whom they associate. Krentz (2014) contextualized this separation by comparing this divide to W.E.B. Du Bois' color line, noting that similarly, there is a "hearing line" dividing Deaf and hearing people and their cultures. Similarly, if Deaf people resist the inclusion of hearing people in their culture, it is likely an act of self-protection (Cokely & Baker-Shenk, 1992). That is, Deaf people may be reacting to the colonization and oppression of their language and culture by separating themselves from the oppressors.

Most often, the general hearing public simply does not understand Deaf people and Deaf culture (Bauman & Murray, 2014). Instead, they bring with them a pathological view and a "hearing agenda" aimed to "eradicate the DEAF^WORLD" (Lane, et al., 1996, p. 379). On the contrary, some hearing individuals do not bring such a worldview. Andrew Solomon, a hearing scholar, wrote, "I found myself wishing I were Deaf… I understood that true membership in this society had a great deal to do with the actual shared experience of deafness" (Bauman & Murray, 2014, p. ix). In this way, Solomon describes a type of "deaf loss" in which he recognizes his missing out on the world of the Deaf. He expresses appreciation of the validity of Deaf Gain without having full access to it. Even for those coming in with views similar to Solomon's, hearing people who interact with the Deaf community are subject to power dynamics that underlie Deaf resistance to a hearing presence.

HEARING PEOPLE INTERACTING WITH THE DEAF COMMUNITY.

Early views on membership in the DEAF^WORLD limited membership to Deaf people and their hearing children who are "admitted," but without the sense of full inclusion (Bahan, 1994). Bahan further states that on rare occasions hearing people other than hearing children of Deaf parents are given "access" to the DEAF^WORLD, but this is predicated on the connection to Deaf people and the hearing person's signing skills. Even those individuals with adequate signing skills will still have "insurmountable difficulty in entering the Deaf World" (Bahan, 1994, p. 243).

The notion that some hearing people can have the right attitude by showing cultural sensitivity and understanding has been discussed in the literature (Elliot & Hall, 2014; Mindess, 2014; Smith & Savidge, 2002). While a somewhat ambiguous GOOD ATTITUDE (Mindess, 2014, p. 102) sets these individuals apart from other hearing people, this attitude is also the most fundamental prerequisite for any sort of involvement in the Deaf community (Bahan, 1994; Napier, 2002). In addition to a positive attitudinal orientation, use of a signed language and respect for cultural norms have also been identified as elements for the Deaf community's acceptance of hearing people. Padden and

Humphries (2005) state that membership in the community is a question of authenticity; it is unclear who has the authority to offer, claim, or verify membership. Throughout the various ways boundary lines have been drawn around the community, and who is excluded, consistently a clear and pervasive binary between Deaf and hearing has been taken into account (Friedner & Kusters, 2015).

The Deaf Identity Development Scale (DIDS) developed by Leigh, et al. (1998) was originally created to investigate Deaf identity within the Deaf community and was later modified to include hearing individuals while focusing on those with Deaf parents. Hearing people were not allowed to identify as "Deaf" in the scale, but they could potentially identify as bicultural. This adaptation may indicate that hearing professionals, like interpreters, who work with Deaf people, are perceived as having some position within the Deaf community. However, the researchers state that these individuals are not seen as a part of Deaf culture and question "who is truly entitled to claim membership in the Deaf community" (p. 331). They found most hearing participants, including those with professional affiliations with the community, identified as bicultural. This identification may have been made perhaps, in part, by assessing social desirability rather than cultural competence. Hearing participants may have been selecting the responses in the survey that seemed like the most socially acceptable choice for hearing subjects, leading to a "bicultural" identity result.

INTERPRETERS AND THE DEAF COMMUNITY

While competent interpreters are valued for their role in accessibility, historically Deaf people have been hesitant to share ASL "for fear that hearing people will use it to exert influence in the community and gain even more power over Deaf people" (Cokely & Baker-Shenk, 1992, p. 5). There is sometimes hostility directed towards interpreters and other hearing signers as they are seen as interlopers in the Deaf community (Shield, 2004) because the hearing majority has often exhibited paternalism and oppression (Lane, 1984). This is compounded when, in an attempt to remain neutral and professional, interpreters may draw boundaries separating them from and leading them to the othering of Deaf people (Cokely, 2005). These boundaries include socially distancing from Deaf clients and abandoning Deaf cultural norms of interacting in the name of professionalism (Mindess, 2014). The historical trajectory of the professionalization of interpreting has increasingly excluded the Deaf community as gatekeepers, escalating tensions between the Deaf community and interpreters (Cokely, 2005; Lane, et al., 1996; Mindess, 2014; Witter-Merithew, 1999). However, by virtue of their ASL fluency and their role in providing access, hearing interpreters may be viewed differently than other hearing outsiders (Bienvenu, 1987). Witter-Merithew (1999), for example, advocates for interpreters to approach their work with the goal of being an ally advancing the aims and objectives of deaf clients to ameliorate this hostility.

Interpreters must be versed in cultural norms in order to function as bilingual and bicultural communication facilitators (Mindess, 2014; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005). Stuard (2008) surveyed perceptions of interpreter qualifications and found that hearing interpreter, Deaf interpreter, and Deaf consumer respondents agreed that ASL-English interpreters need to understand Deaf culture, respect Deaf people, and socialize within the Deaf community. However, this does not necessarily mean Deaf participants viewed interpreters as members of the Deaf

community. One Deaf participant in Staurd's (2008) study referred to interpreters as "a 'member' of the social aspect of the Deaf community…" putting the term member in quotes and qualifying their statement by saying that hearing interpreters' membership is purely social in nature (p. 187).

These various statements have in common a need to qualify or limit hearing interpreter membership in the Deaf community. Some researchers have described interpreters as having Deaf-World "affiliation" or "alliance" (Subak, 2014). However, Mindess (2014) states that interpreters with "Deaf heart" can be members of the Deaf community. Likewise, in her review of the literature, Napier (2002) concludes that "hearing people – and sign language interpreters in particular – can become members of the Deaf community" (p. 146). While "Deaf people seem to agree that a hearing person can never fully acquire that identity and become a full-fledged member of the deaf community" (Lane, 1992, p. 17), Smith (1996) describes interpreters as an exception, being "somewhere in the middle, between Deaf and Hearing" (p. 27). Likewise, Cokely (2005) states that interpreters are culturally and socially "positioned 'between worlds'" (p. 2). The intersection between hearing and Deaf people, particularly interpreters, has also been referred to as a "third culture," occupying the space outside of the core of the Deaf community which is reserved only for Deaf people (Bienvenu, 1987). It is possible that interpreters may alternately view their identity as tied to their work as interpreters and participate in an "interpreter" community of practice, which perhaps exhibits some degree of overlap with the Deaf community (Hunt, 2015). Deaf Studies researchers outside of the American context make note of occasions when interpreters seem to participate in the Deaf community regardless of their professional or hearing status including at international festivals and Deaf social events (Friedner & Kusters, 2015). It may be that the scarcity of and value placed on access through interpreters in this global context outside of the US, as documented in this text, impacts how interpreters are perceived by the community.

The literature indicates that the Deaf community's relationship with sign language interpreters has historical and current tensions that underly the question of interpreters' ability to claim community membership (Cokely, 2005). Deaf perspectives on hearing people are generally that of other, however interpreters are unique in their position providing access. Deaf and interpreter perspectives on the ability for interpreters to hold membership in the Deaf community is unclear. This study probes the question of hearing interpreters' membership in the American Deaf community through semi-structured interviews. As a pilot study, this is a first step towards eliciting perceptions of interpreters regarding their views of where they and others like them "fit" within the Deaf community.

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

Three hearing interpreters participated in the study: Kate, Carol, and Mary (pseudonyms). These individuals were recruited from the researcher's professional network via email invitation and were paid $20 as a token of appreciation for their time. Each interpreter represented one of the following categories: 1) novice interpreters (Kate), 2) expert interpreters (Carol), and 3) interpreter educators/academics (Mary). Kate is a novice interpreter working full time as a staff interpreter at an agency. Carol is an expert interpreter with over 30 years of experience, working as a staff

interpreter. Mary is an interpreter and interpreter educator, and she represents the interpreter educator category. Their demographics are provided below in table 1.

Table 1. Participant Background

	Kate	**Carol**	**Mary**
Years signing	6	33	38
Years interpreting	1	33	35
Racial identity	Black/African American	Mixed race	Caucasian
Interpreter training	BA degree	none	some
Highest level of education attained	BA	MA	Ed. Specialist
Certifications	NIC written	NIC Master	RID CI/CT, EIPA 4.9, BEI Master, NAD 5
Professional Affiliations	NAOBI board, NAD, local RID chapter	None	NAD, local RID chapter

For this study, interpreter educators are defined as educators currently teaching in interpreting programs and who currently or previously worked as interpreter practitioners. Expert interpreters are nationally certified, having at least ten years of professional experience, and currently working in the field. Likewise, novice interpreters are defined as final-year interpreting students, student interns, and pre-certified interpreters in their first three years in the profession. All of these interpreters learned ASL as a second language rather than being raised with sign as a first language.

DATA COLLECTION

Prior to the interviews, participants filled out a background questionnaire. All interviews were conducted in ASL in recognition of the intimate relationship between sign language use and participation in the community. Interviews took thirty minutes to an hour. They followed a semi-structured format based on an interview protocol. In addition, one binary question was asked to indicate if participants overarchingly perceived interpreters as being members of the Deaf community or not. All interviews were video recorded, and participants signed both informed consent and video consent forms in line with approval by the Gallaudet University Institutional Review Board.

During the interviews, participants were asked questions to elicit their views on hearing interpreters' roles within the Deaf community. Questions covered topics including: if these interpreters are perceived as members or guests of the community; what attributes or behaviors signify cultural affiliation and competency of these individuals; and what marks interpreters as being culturally incompetent, resulting in being perceived as outsiders. In addition to the open-

ended questions, each participant was asked to give a one-word answer to the final question, "Are interpreters able to be members of the Deaf community?" in order to elicit a summary response to the complex research question addressed in the interviews.

ANALYSIS

Interview video files were uploaded to ELAN, a software program that allows for time-stamped coding of video data. Four tiers were used for coding in ELAN; 1) noteworthy quotes, 2) themes, 3) subthemes, and 4) notes. Using the video files, data were analyzed in ASL, rather than translating signed text and creating transcripts. By discussing Deaf community membership in ASL, the language of the American Deaf community, culturally rich terminology and nuances were elicited that could have been lost in any resulting translation into English. However, quotes presented here in English were translated from the original ASL by the researcher for their inclusion in the presentation of data.

Three primary themes emerged from the data. The first being the participants' definition of Deaf community and who can be a member. The second and third theme are regarding what participants' saw as requirements for interpreter membership and several caveats to such membership. These reoccurring themes were further subdivided, and the consistency of themes across participants determined salience.

In this study the creation of the semi-structured interview questions in English without a uniform ASL translation had interesting ramifications within the study. The bilingual approach taken to this research project used written English in designing and proposing the study as well as final reporting; however, the interviews, resulting data, and analysis were completed in ASL. This is a common approach to ASL and interpreting research. However, the translation of both interview questions and responses may have impacted results. One interesting observation derived from signed interviews is that the term "membership," which seemed the appropriate terminology to use in English, when signed as MEMBER elicited interesting responses from participants, who seemed uncomfortable accepting that sign as a description of their connection to the Deaf community. Different signs and expressions than those used by the researcher to discuss these concepts came up during the interviews. As such, the researcher often adjusted her sign choices to reflect those used by the participants. For example, the sign MEMBER was used less by the researcher and replaced with signs like INVOLVEMENT in alignment with the flow of conversation around this idea. Future studies should reconsider if the concept of "membership" and specifically the sign MEMBER is the best ASL term for discussing the relationship between interpreters and the Deaf community.

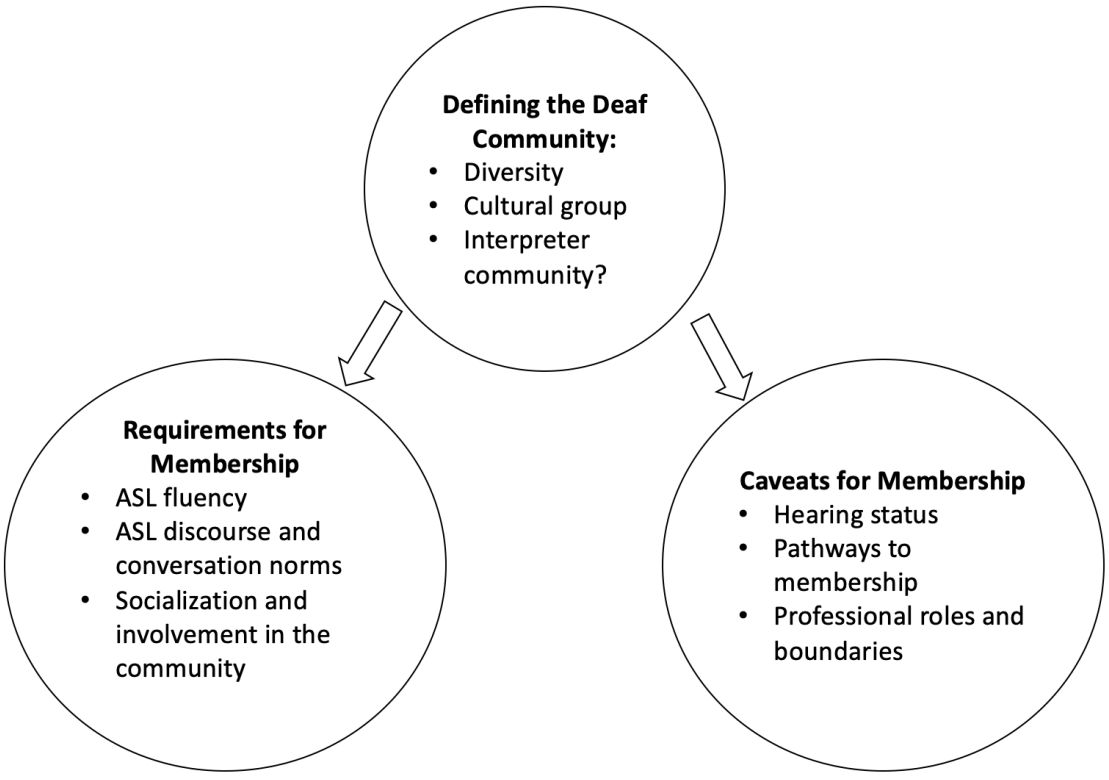
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interpreters in this study reported that they do tentatively see themselves as members of the Deaf community. However, they presented caveats regarding the broader membership status of interpreters as a group, stating that hearing interpreters are not guaranteed membership, nor can membership be assumed. In response to the primary research question "According to their own perspectives, can hearing, ASL-English interpreters be members of the Deaf community?" participants report yes, this is possible. Ultimately, though participants affirmed that hearing

interpreters can be "members" of the Deaf community, the concept represented by the sign MEMBER might not be the best fit.

The more noteworthy results, however, are found in the discussion of the requirements and caveats to membership that addressed in the secondary research question: If they are members, what qualifies them as members, and if not, why not? Participants had both overlapping and conflicting responses to these questions. First, how each participant defined the Deaf community and membership within it provided a critical foundation to the discussion. Subthemes surrounding the Deaf community were diversity within, comparing to other minority cultures, and where an interpreter community fits within the Deaf community. Secondly, each participant shared their perspectives on the requirements key to membership that must be developed by new interpreters in order to be accepted as members. These included the use of ASL, attitude, reciprocity, and socialization or involvement in the community. Thirdly, caveats to membership emerged as a major theme as well. Subthemes were organized along the issues of hearing status, the concept of taking space, pathways to membership, and the interaction of their personal and professional lives as interpreters in the Deaf community. These themes and subthemes are represented in the following figure and further examined below.

Figure 1. Themese and Subthemes



DEAF COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIP: DEFINING THE DEAF COMMUNITY

All participants agreed that the Deaf community, including the use of a signed language and Deaf culture, is dynamic. They also agreed that there are subgroups of affiliation within the Deaf community. This reflects the conception of a multifaceted Deaf community as described by Deaf Studies scholars (Maxwell-McCaw & Zea, 2011; Miller, 2010; Ruiz-Williams et al., 2015; Woll & Ladd, 2003). Thus, membership is reported to be complicated. In order to further clarify the discussions, participants were asked their definition of the Deaf community and who can be a member. Common across answers was the concept of diversity, comparisons made to other minority culture-sharing groups, and the concept of an interpreter community within the Deaf community.

DIVERSITY

Participants noted that the Deaf community is not homogenous, and instead discussed aspects of diversity in defining the community. Carol mentioned Deaf people who were mainstreamed, oral, or had cochlear implants as those who could be considered on the fringes of, but still having a place, in the Deaf community. Mary also alluded to the range of experiences, access, language, education, and level of integration into mainstream American society as part of this diversity. Carol specifically identified hearing people, stating their membership is STICKY. This phrasing reflects Deaf Studies literature on the complicated relationship between hearing people and the Deaf community (Bahan, 1994; Krentz 2014; Padden, 1980). Similarly, Mary relayed that people, regardless of hearing status, actively choosing to associate together and build shared experiences creates the Deaf community. Kate focused on intersectionality and the experiences of navigating oppression as what brings together those identifying with the Deaf community into a dynamic culture-sharing group. This is reminiscent of Lane et al.'s (2011) conceptualization of Deaf community as being brought together by outside forces of oppression and inside forces of language and culture. According to these interpreters, this diversity within the community is directly related to the acceptance of hearing interpreters as members.

COMPARISONS TO OTHER CULTURES

In defining the Deaf community and discussing interpreter membership, the three participants made comparisons between the Deaf community and other culture-sharing minorities from an American cultural context. Carol stated her first exposure to the Deaf community felt no different than previous cross-cultural experiences as she, "had already seen various languages and different [hearing] cultures, and I saw the Deaf community as no different." She drew parallels across different minority cultures she encountered where she learned a new language to connect with a new group of people and observed the impact of internalized linguicism. She suggested that people can sense motivation and the heart behind an attempt to learn a language to interact with groups different than your own, which parallels the concept of having a good attitude or "Deaf heart" in order to be accepted into the Deaf community (Mindess, 2014).

Mary compared the Deaf community to other oppressed and marginalized groups such as Black and Spanish speaking communities. Stating that because she is not herself Black or Latinx, no amount of language and cultural learning would allow her membership in the core of those groups or allow her to represent the communities, much like Solomon's observation about the importance

of the shared experience of deafness within the Deaf community (Bauman & Murray, 2014). In the same way, as a hearing person, she cannot be at the core or be a representative of the Deaf community.

Kate equated the idea of solidarity in the Deaf community to her own experience in the Black community. She shared the idea of SAME for both, and that people who share a core element of their identity or experience find solidarity in community that even supportive and affiliated others cannot fully experience. This sameness drives the need for dedicated space for the core of the community where they can be honest, comfortable, and have authentic experiences without the presence of others. Further, Kate described interpreters and other hearing people in the Deaf community as not being able to understand and participate in this solidarity that Deaf people experience with each other. The idea of sameness and how it was described by Kate and compared to her experience in the Black community aligns with the "hearing line" concept discussed by Krentz (2014), who drew comparisons to W.E.B. Du Bois' color line.

DO INTERPRETERS HAVE THEIR OWN COMMUNITY?

One question asked of participants in considering where interpreters fit in the Deaf community was about the existence of a separate and distinct interpreter community, conceptualized by some Interpreting Studies scholars as an interpreter community (Hunt, 2015). Each participant had a different response to this question, and the idea of a community of practice versus a broader sense of community were not specified. Mary strongly stated a belief that there is no such thing as a separate interpreter community, suggesting interpreters are part of the larger Deaf community. However, Kate firmly asserted that there is a distinct interpreting community and within this community are sub-interpreting communities based on shared identity and experience (for example, a persons of color interpreting community). She did see the larger interpreting community as overlapping with the Deaf community. Carol mentioned the historical trajectory of the profession, stating that during her lifetime she has seen the interpreting community diverge from the Deaf community, then ultimately converge again. She offered the emergence of professional Deaf interpreters being a key element in reuniting the two. Perhaps the overlapping Deaf and interpreter community described by Kate and Carol is similar to the "third culture" space on the fringes of the Deaf community described by Bienvenu (1987).

REQUIREMENTS FOR MEMBERSHIP

Participants reported that interpreters can be members, and that while "membership is not automatic, it is possible" (Mary). This is in agreement with Interpreting Studies scholars Mindess (2014) and Napier (2002) and Deaf Studies scholar Padden (1980) but in contrast to other Deaf Studies scholars (Bahan, 1994; Lane, 1992; Padden & Humphries, 2005). There seems to be a divide between hearing interpreting scholars, who seem to believe that some degree of membership is attainable, while the majority Deaf Studies scholars, who themselves are primarily Deaf, have more reservations. Even Padden (1980) who made allowance for hearing membership in Deaf community, still reserved Deaf culture as distinctly Deaf and closed to hearing participation. This study only investigates interpreters' perception of their membership; there is need for future studies to expand and compare these findings with Deaf community perceptions of interpreter membership. All of the three participants discussed various requirements for obtaining

membership in the Deaf community including: ASL fluency, following ASL discourse and conversation norms, attitude, and the need for socialization or involvement in the Deaf community.

ASL FLUENCY

According to Mary, ASL fluency is the most important piece to membership. ASL serves as a "gatekeeper" because without sufficient ASL fluency, it is impossible to be fully immersed in the Deaf community. Mary's response mirrors the emphasis on ASL fluency for hearing participation in Deaf community expressed by Deaf Studies scholars (Burke, 2014; Lane, 1984). This is applicable to, though not exclusive to, hearing signers and interpreters. Carol also cited the importance of fluency and the general aptitude to acquire language in a signed modality. Kate noted, from her personal story of learning ASL as an adult in interpreter training, how gaps in her proficiency impacted her ability to fit into the Deaf community.

ASL DISCOURSE AND CONVERSATION NORMS

In addition to fluency, participants noted that interpreters need to have fully acquired and naturally follow the rules and structure of ASL discourse. Carol mentioned turn-taking, eye gaze, repetition, and attention getting specifically. For Kate, an important linguistic behavior for interpreters was the intentional use of ASL in Deaf spaces shows respect for the community, rather than only "switching on" ASL when a Deaf person is present. Similarly, Mindess (2014) includes respectful and appropriate use of ASL as one of the cultural behaviors essential for interpreters. Mary also talked extensively about Deaf conversation space and rules of engagement, sharing her personal story of negotiating with her Deaf roommate when and where to sign, even when she was conversing with non-signers. Mary had a theory that interpreters' "stubborn refusal … to sign when Deaf people are present" is due to a culturally hearing idea of individual conversation space, while Deaf conversation space extends to anywhere in the line of sight.

ATTITUDE

Attitude is a widely discussed and vaguely defined term in the context of interpreters' acceptance into the Deaf community (Mindess, 2014; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005) and it emerged as a major theme in all of the interviews. Having the right attitude has been cited as central to a hearing interpreter's relationship with the Deaf community (Mindess, 2014) and was echoed by participants. When participants used the sign ATTITUDE and were asked to define or expand on that concept, common to their responses were the elements of humility, the willingness to make and learn from mistakes, and respect. Carol emphasized a posture of openness, vulnerability, and willingness to make mistakes and accept feedback. Kate talked extensively about humility and honesty as a new interpreter, stating that she has found "honesty trumps skill." All participants noted the distinction between confidence and arrogance as being important for the standpoint of "I can always learn more." They also acknowledged that it is possible to be overly humble and self-deprecating to the point of awkwardness and discomfort. Humility and cautious confidence seem to be key to being accepted into the Deaf community. In contrast to Mary's emphasis on ASL fluency as the most important requirement, for Carol, attitude was even more important for interpreter's membership in the Deaf community. Mary did, however, concede that ASL fluency is not enough without the right attitude.

SOCIALIZATION AND INVOLVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY

Engagement in reciprocity within the community was seen as an important element of community involvement. Mary gave the example of volunteering for something "not fun" in order to support the community. Carol stated that, as a hearing person who can sign, she feels it has been her role to always be willing to interpret as needed. Although different examples were given, the tone of gratitude for having a place in the community and willingness to offer some service in exchange was pervasive.

Membership in the Deaf community requires active participation. Kate stated that networking is an important part of the interpreting profession and an interpreter will not be successful if they are not interacting with the Deaf community. Carol shared that interpreters should desire socialization with the community, and rather than waiting for members to approach them, they should initiate involvement while still practicing humility. Mary spoke from her experiences of connecting and living with Deaf people as friends, roommates, and family. She focused on the need for authentic relationships within the community including functional and dysfunctional connections, fighting, forgiveness, shared interests, and respectful debate. Being present in the Deaf community, though expressed various ways, was seen as essential by all participants for interpreters' membership. This reflects Stuard's (2008) study on perceptions of interpreter qualifications, which found that socialization with the Deaf community was seen as essential by both interpreters and Deaf consumers.

CAVEATS FOR MEMBERSHIP

While agreeing that interpreters can be members of the Deaf community, participants also agreed that interpreters cannot assume "automatic" membership based on their status as interpreters. Additionally, the sign MEMBER seemed to require unpacking and a tension surrounding the concept was woven through all of the interviews. Multiple caveats to interpreter membership emerged, including hearing status, the concept of taking space, pathways to membership, and the interaction between the personal and professional aspects of interpreters' lives in the community.

HEARING STATUS: "I'M NOT DEAF"

Unsurprisingly, the hearing status of interpreters was found to impact their fit into the Deaf community. The importance of hearing status, particularly the shared experience of deafness by Deaf individuals and the otherness of hearing people within the Deaf community is pervasive in the literature (Bahan, 1994; Bauman & Murray, 2014; Padden, 1980). As someone who can never "accept or take on the label of Deaf," Kate stated she cannot fully understand the Deaf perspective. Mary echoed this sentiment, maintaining that hearing people cannot possibly know all the nuances of the Deaf community, and "They have no right to do work that positions them to represent the Deaf community. I find it heartbreaking." Carol affirmed that interpreters cannot represent the Deaf community because, as she stated, "I'm not Deaf, I don't have Deaf lived experience."

In considering the hearing status of the interpreters investigated in this study, the concept of "space" emerged. While this applies to the idea that there are certain physical spaces that are Deaf or signing spaces, such as Gallaudet University, there is also a less tangible aspect of space. While acknowledging hearing privilege, participants discussed a "core" membership exclusive to

Deaf people. In relation to this concept, hearing people in the Deaf community, including interpreters, can be said to "take space" not inherently theirs to occupy. All participants said that there are certain roles (including teaching Deaf children, teaching ASL, filling committee positions, etc.) that they, as hearing people, are not meant to fill. Carol related this to her position in the community and extended this concept to the idea of holding space with an example of "keeping a job open until a Deaf person is available to fill it," so taking on some of these roles temporarily until she could step down. All three interpreters recognized that their hearing status impacted their place in and the space they take up in the Deaf community.

PATHWAYS TO MEMBERSHIP

Since participants viewed membership as not being automatically granted, various pathways to hearing interpreter membership in the Deaf community emerged. The three of them emphasized the importance of being introduced by Deaf people into the community and the necessity of an invitation to be allowed into Deaf space. According to Carol, whomever the Deaf community welcomes can be a part of the community, including interpreters.

Mary emphasized the importance of going through the proper process to being accepted into the Deaf community and to becoming an interpreter. She acknowledged that this path can be academic, however, interpreters must also build authentic relationships outside of that sphere. Kate's own path was more academic. Carol emphasized that interpreters cannot earn a place through studying ASL or expect an automatic welcome into the community because of their training as interpreters. For her, membership was granted, not earned.

Carol perceived her membership to be dependent on individual acceptance as she stated, "Honestly, every time I meet a new Deaf person I start over." She also discussed her personal story as the only hearing signer in a public school with a few mainstreamed Deaf students which served to "fast track" her acceptance into the Deaf community at that time. However, she has faced different responses and paths in every local manifestation of the Deaf community she has encountered. For each new city she moved to, when introduced as a signer or an interpreter, that local Deaf community decided whether or not to accept her. An introduction by, or connection to, a mutually known Deaf person has often been important for her acceptance.

PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL ROLES AND BOUNDARIES

The position of interpreters in the Deaf community requires consideration of their professional role and relationships with Deaf clients. Participants shared their perspectives on the interaction between their personal and professional association with the Deaf community, highlighting historical, systematic, and personal influences on these relationships.

A common theme among participants was the changing role of the Deaf community in gatekeeping for the interpreting profession, which impacts the relationship between interpreters and the Deaf community. This has been frequently discussed in Interpreting Studies (Cokely, 2005; Mindess, 2014; Witter-Merithew, 1999) and addressed in early Deaf Studies literature (Bienvenu, 1987; Lane, et al., 1996). Carol and Kate discussed the extent and limitations of the Deaf community's ability to select or reject interpreters and how that impacts the role and relationships of interpreters with Deaf people and their community. Carol reviewed the historical timeline of interpreting

becoming a profession and the impact of professionalization on the inclusion of Deaf perspectives in gatekeeping. The professionalization of interpreting has resulted in declining interpreters' connection to the Deaf community (Cokely, 2005; Lane, et al., 1996; Mindess, 2014; Witter-Merithew, 1999). The role of Deaf people in assessing skills and granting certification has been slowly reduced, putting more distance between the Deaf and interpreting communities (Mindess, 2014). Kate also acknowledged this as a historical, and likely necessary, shift in the field while simultaneously expressing a longing to return to the days of the Deaf community's gatekeeping as an era of higher trust and connection between the Deaf community and hearing interpreters. While the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) and the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) originally worked together to create the original National Interpreter Certification (NIC) test in 2005, recently a fall-out between the organizations around the financial concerns of testing have resulted in a new certification exam being developed, solely owned and controlled by RID (CASLI, 2016). NAD has expressed concerns about the transparency of the creation process of the new NIC (NAD, 2017), indicating ongoing tensions between the organizations. The interpreters interviewed alluded to this history and how the divergence of the interpreting profession from the Deaf community impacts their personal membership in the Deaf community.

The drawing of professional boundaries by interpreters taking a purely professional approach was discussed as ways interpreters distance themselves from the Deaf community. Interpreting Studies has noted that interpreters may inadvertently draw professional boundaries that separate them from the Deaf community (Cokely, 2005). Participants acknowledged that Deaf clients have differing expectations for boundaries and how professionalism is manifested, which leads to interpreters needing to be flexible and adaptable to each situation. Kate said she recognized that newer interpreters tend to set boundaries too firmly, but she has learned to adjust based on client preferences, and she has found that she can be friends with Deaf clients outside of interpreting work.

According to Carol, interpreters must navigate their relationships as a community member and friend while also maintaining professionalism, drawing distinctions, and adhering to boundaries in work settings. This all results in a sort of "sticky overlap." As a result, participant responses indicate no clear distinct separation between the personal and professional aspects of an interpreter's life and the Deaf community. Kate stated, "My opinion is that you can't separate out or distinguish your work and personal life, that's impossible in my view." This inability to separate was echoed by all participants as a complicating factor for membership in the Deaf community.

IMPLICATIONS

This exploratory study only begins to address where signed language interpreters fit in the Deaf community, but hopefully, it will lead to further discussion and research on this topic. The question of where the Deaf community's group boundaries are drawn and who is eligible for membership is a complex and interesting theoretical question. The specific question of hearing interpreters' fit in the community also has practical implications. Interpreters' perceptions of their membership within the Deaf community likely impacts their approach to Deaf clients and their work as interpreters. This means that greater self-awareness of their fit within the community could result in more clarity and confidence in interactions with clients, strengthening their working relationships. Clarity on their fit in the Deaf community could also result in stronger personal

relationships between interpreters and the Deaf people that are both Deaf community members and clients, ultimately improving interpreters' community connections. If interpreters feel confident in interacting the with Deaf community, that will improve their ASL fluency, allowing them to provide higher quality access.

Additionally, identifying the factors and behaviors of interpreters that support their membership in, or distance from, the Deaf community can have important implications for interpreter training and development. Interpreter education usually encourages students to engage in the Deaf community, both to develop ASL fluency and cultural sensitivity, but also because there is a sense that interpreters must be involved in the community to be accepted as professionals working in the community (Mindess, 2014; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005). However, the literature is unclear on how these students should respectfully engage and what level of acceptance within the community they can anticipate. Anecdotally, students especially find themselves in conflict when initiating community involvement. They have been taught the importance of being involved but fear they will cross unknown boundaries into Deaf space or be seen as taking advantage of the Deaf community for language development. Findings from this study could inform interpreter educators in setting expectations for student community involvement, particularly their approach to and perception of membership. Additionally, findings could support interpreter educators considering how to impart appropriate interpreter attitude and cultural behaviors to their students.

CONCLUSION

Deaf signers in the U.S. are considered by Deaf Studies scholars to be a linguistic and cultural minority known as the Deaf community. While hearing people, and particularly hearing second language learner interpreters, are encouraged to associate with the community, the degree to which they should be involved and expect acceptance is unclear. Literature is divided on the question of interpreters' membership in the Deaf community (Bahan, 1994; Napier, 2002; Mindess, 2014; Shield, 2004). How interpreters approach their work and connection with their clients likely hinges on their perception of where they fit within the community. Ultimately, this may have an impact on their interpreting and the quality of access they provide to Deaf clients. The findings of this study seem to indicate that the participants, even as hearing signed language interpreters who are second language learners, do view themselves as members of the Deaf community; however, there are a significant number of qualifications for, and caveats to, that membership. This exploratory study's findings reflect the opinions and experiences of these three particular participants rather than being able to be generalized to the broader hearing interpreter population. However, the significant overlap and agreement between respondents could suggest an area needing further research, and additional data collected may bolster the broader applicability of findings.

The literature suggests that engagement in the Deaf community and understanding of Deaf culture is an essential element in ASL proficiency development and becoming an effective interpreter (Godfrey, 2011; Winston, 2005). Participants also mentioned these aspects as being important to hearing interpreters' membership in the Deaf community and being significant to their work as interpreters. However, these interpreters placed more weight on the concept of interpreter attitude which is often mentioned in the literature but rarely defined (Elliot & Hall, 2014; Mindess, 2014). Participants have identified the elements of this attitude as being humility, confidence, and a willingness to make mistakes. With these suggestions and further research on the definition of

GOOD ATTITUDE as required for interpreter acceptance into the Deaf community, the field of interpreting could benefit.

The interpreters in this study also suggest personal and professional lives overlap in their association with the Deaf community. This supports the idea that interpreters' perception of their fit in the Deaf community, which is personal in nature, will impact their professional work as interpreters. The idea of a distinct interpreting community and if that community is situated in the Deaf community seems to be a contested concept requiring further research. Future studies should take this into consideration, and test if the qualifications and caveats of membership suggested by these findings hold true for the larger population of hearing signed language interpreters in the U.S.

Partly because of their hearing status, the interpreters' membership is dependent upon the Deaf community extending an invitation and is not something they can claim for themselves. This is important to consider in interpreter training. Attempts to connect interpreting students to the Deaf community for the benefit of their career prospects risks taking too formulaic an approach and encouraging students to encroach upon Deaf space. However, emphasis on the invitational nature of Deaf community involvement could help assuage this problem.

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