

## **SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETING AS A SOCIAL JUSTICE PROFESSION**

*Jamie L. Mc Cartney*

People who work in social justice professions typically work with those who do not have a voice in the public square. Historically, these groups have been children, the aged, those poor and/or homeless, and the disabled, among others. This paper shows that those who interpret for deaf people should be classified as working in a social justice profession because its definition pertains to what sign language interpreters do. Social justice professions strive to give everyone a fair and equal opportunity in life, just as other groups enjoy. Although deaf people should be advocating for themselves, sign language interpreters do this de facto, as they get bombarded with questions regarding deaf people's capabilities, get caught in the culture debate, and observe as discrimination of the deaf person abounds. This type of vicarious trauma can cause people in social justice professions to burn out. One hundred sign language interpreters were given a survey assessing their level of grit (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). The range of grit scores (1-5) was 2.33 - 4.75 ( $\bar{x}$  3.7, mode 3.33). Interpreters were also given qualitative questions regarding what drew them to the profession and what keeps them in the profession. Initially, only 49 got into the profession for social justice reasons, but now 70 interpreters listed social justice as the reason they continue to work in the profession. They are exhibiting what is known in the profession as 'Deaf Heart'. Interpreters are coming alongside deaf people in order to help level the playing field.

Note to the reader:

Identity is very important within the d/Deaf community. This identification communicates to others how the individual chooses to associate: as a deaf person or as one who can hear. People who call themselves *deaf* may refer to word or spell it out in one of two ways. The first way is called capital or big 'D' Deaf, which refers to those individuals who follow norms, behaviours, and customs of the Deaf Culture in America. These individuals value things such as eyes, hands, American Sign Language, solidarity of the Deaf community, residential schools, information-sharing, and their collectivist culture (Humphrey & Alcorn,

2007; Lane, Pillard, & Hedberg, 2011; Leigh, 2009; Mindess, 2014). The second way is called lowercase ‘d’ deaf, which means that the individual may sign, but choose not to associate with other d/Deaf people. An all-encompassing way in the literature to refer to those who may subscribe to Deaf Culture norms and those who do not is designated as “d/Deaf.” If the words are specifically used in this paper without the other category added, that is intentional, as only one of the specific populations of people is being referred to. Individuals who identify as hard of hearing prefer to align themselves with people who can hear and are not included with that designation of d/Deaf.

### **Introduction**

When people are asked to think about social justice professions, they may think of those professions that work on behalf of people who cannot speak for themselves, either physically or because of a lack of power to do so. If they *are* able to speak out, they have historically not been able to get the right kind of attention to change anything about their situation. People in these types of groups include children, the aged, homeless people, disabled people, and so on. Sign language interpreting is not typically a profession that people would automatically associate with social justice.

There could be several reasons for this, but the main one certainly must be the fact that deafness and hearing loss are invisible disabilities (Braden, 2010; Disabled World, 2017; Invisible Disabilities Association, 2016; Tye-Murray, 2015). According to the Invisible Disabilities Association, 2016), this label speaks to disabilities that “may not be obvious to the onlooker, but can sometimes or always limit daily activities, range from mild challenges to severe limitations and vary from person to person” (para. 6). Additionally, deafness is a low-incidence invisible disability, so it is unlikely that people think about d/Deaf much simply due to the fact that deafness and hearing loss do not occur that often (Tye-Murray, 2015). If the general public is not thinking of d/Deaf people and what their lives are like, undoubtedly, they are not thinking about their extension: sign language interpreters. However, anyone who has worked as an interpreter knows that tenacity is a necessity and that the barriers sometimes seem insurmountable.

Social justice refers to the overall fairness of a society and the manner in which it divides its rewards and burdens upon groups of people...Working with marginalized groups, social justice agents or advocates are concerned with bringing equality within society. (John Glenn College of Public Affairs, n.d., para. 1)

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Social justice requires a high level of fortitude and a desire to level the playing field. Sign language interpreters work with d/Deaf people and, thus, are privy to the treatment they often receive. History teaches us that d/Deaf people have indeed been treated unfairly by their parents, friends, medical practitioners, and the whole of society.

This is not a new phenomenon; d/Deaf people have faced ill-treatment from the beginning of time. The treatment and education of d/Deaf people have been largely based on how they were viewed by society. In antiquity, females would commit infanticide if their child was deaf because this was thought to be a sign of sin (Etherington, 2014; Panda, 1999). Before the 1600s, deaf people were thought to be mentally retarded, demon-possessed, and ineducable. They were never included in society because of this. Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), a leading Greek philosopher and scientist, said “those born deaf all become senseless and incapable of reason...men that are born deaf are in all cases dumb; that is to say, they can make vocal noises but cannot speak” (Daniels, 1997, p. 1). This manner of thinking that equated deafness with a lack of intelligence continued into the 16<sup>th</sup> century. During those years, deaf people were restricted from owning property, inheriting land or money, and were labelled mentally insane (de Saint-Loup, 1996; Sacks, 1989). Some people attempted to educate deaf children, but only through lipreading and speech. However, starting in the 1600s, a handful of individuals were able to educate deaf people by using motions made with the hands. Even though it was in the latter 1700s when positive changes occurred to advance deaf people into the upper echelons of society, injustices did not cease. There was plenty of experimental testing that continued on into the 17th century, which involved doctors pouring hot fluid into patients’ ears, puncturing patients’ eardrum, or bleeding and leeching to ‘cure’ them of their deafness (Lane, 1989).

This maltreatment at the hands of the majority culture continued into the 1800-1900s. An individual who is not thought of as being an oppressor of deaf people is Alexander Graham Bell, undoubtedly for his great invention of the telephone. Bell was also a teacher of the deaf and a proponent of educating deaf people through speech and discouraging sign language. Although he had a mother who was hard of hearing and a wife who was deaf, Bell was a staunch believer that d/Deaf people should not marry other d/Deaf people. He noticed the numbers of those born congenitally deaf were higher when both parents were deaf. His stance on eugenics and his desire for a pure race culminated in a paper he wrote in 1883 entitled “Upon the formation of a deaf variety of the human race.” He went so far as to say that intermarrying and having children would lead to a “defective race of human beings [and that it] would be a great calamity

to the world” (Gannon, 1981, p. 75). Bell believed schools for deaf children only encouraged this type of intermarrying (Evans, Broido, Brown, & Wilke, 2017). At the infamous Conference of Milan in 1880 where the use of sign language was indubitably quashed for the better part of a 100 years, Bell was there adding his voice to the ones who wanted sign language vanquished (Rooted in Rights, 2017).

Between 1933 and 1945, oppression climaxed in Hitler’s Germany when the view was perpetuated that deafness, among other things, was going to pollute the German race. Thus, eugenics became a reality when d/Deaf people were forcibly sterilized and/or ordered to concentration camps or the gas chambers (Biesold, 1999; Dunai, 2002; Ridley, 2015; Ryan & Schuchman, 2002).

It has only been within the past 50 years in which the United States took notice of d/Deaf people and their ill-treatment. Recent developments which should have given d/Deaf people a hand up are the amount of legislation that came about starting in the 1960s during the Civil Rights Movement and continuing on until today. Legislation passed in the 1970s until the current time include the following: *Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act*; *Public Law 94-142* (renamed the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* in 1990); the *Americans with Disabilities Act*; the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments*; and the *Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act*. These legislations mandate that deaf people be treated differently and be given certain “helps”; however, d/Deaf people still run into institutionalized oppression and discrimination.

It is somewhat surprising that d/Deaf people would still be labelled as marginalized in the United States considering that this is the land of privilege “with liberty and *justice for all*” (4 USC §4, italics mine). These laws were seemingly passed to pave a better way for deaf people in terms of their education and rehabilitation. Although the legislation has helped moderately in the U.S., d/Deaf people are still marginalized and disenfranchised (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007). This manifest itself in employment: the types and amount of employment that people get, unemployment, or underemployment. It also occurs in the strong-arming of agencies and professionals who do not feel they need to adhere to those legislations because they feel the laws do not apply to them and/or deaf people rarely litigate. Whereas d/Deaf people in other countries struggle for more basic needs, those in the United States mostly struggle with institutionalized discrimination and have been counselled out of the academic setting and into a vocation (Bowe, 2003). This can take the form of d/Deaf people struggling for fair job opportunities, wages, and communication access.

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Video relay, which began in 2003, is another place where inequalities surface. People who are d/Deaf are also discriminated on phone calls because much of the time, they are calling people who are not deaf. People who are d/Deaf used to place a phone call by using a teletype machine, or TTY. The teletypewriter had couplers in which a regular telephone handset would fit into and convert beeps (when each key was struck) into letters, so deaf people could read it on the display. When d/Deaf people call places to request an interpreter, they are told quite often that the place has never hired one before, so they must not have to do it. Additionally, d/Deaf people are told many times that they need to bring their own “signer”.

The Americans with Disabilities Act is clear on the places where d/Deaf people have a right to request an interpreter. If places have over 25 employees and the venue is one where a person has a right to an interpreter, then the place has to pay, unless doing so would cause undue hardship. The number of employees for state and local government to comply with the legislation was initially 25; then, the number was lowered to 15. Currently, the law is that state and local governments must comply with the ADA *irrespective* of the number of employees places have (The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2005). The U.S. Department of Justice (2014) states that,

The ADA requires that title II entities (state and local governments) and title III entities (businesses and non-profit organizations that serve the public) communicate effectively with people who have communication disabilities. The goal is to ensure that communication with people with these disabilities is equally effective as communication with people without disabilities. (para.2)

It goes on to say that a sign language interpreter is one of the acceptable ways to communicate with a d/Deaf person. People still buck the system and try to get around having to pay for an interpreter. This unfair practice often goes unchecked because of the reasons previously mentioned.

Even though these legislations require certain allowances, deaf people still struggle to find acceptance regarding their communication preferences. Although many d/Deaf people do not view themselves as disabled, the medical community does. These professionals, with due diligence, strive to “fix” deaf people by suggesting cochlear implants or auxiliary aids and by dissuading d/Deaf people and family members from learning sign language. They say this because they believe doing so will interfere with a child’s ability to learn English, even though that has been shown to be untrue (Clayton, 2015; Cummins, 2006; Marschark & Hauser,

2012; Nussbaum, 2012). Since those in the medical community have clout, their advice is often heeded. This has had a detrimental effect on d/Deaf people's ability to access a first language and their ability to navigate their familial structures, friendships, and society.

Sign language interpreters spend a large percentage of their time, not only interpreting between individuals who are d/Deaf and those who can hear, but they spend an inordinate amount of time educating people who are not deaf. Interpreters answer questions dealing with the driving, working, and parenting abilities of deaf people, explain and justify their own role as the interpreter, and so on. The preference, far and away, would be for interpreters to just interpret these questions from the non-deaf person and the answers from the d/Deaf person. However, interpreters are often sought out when the d/Deaf person is not present and asked these questions. Partially, it must be due to the fact that the person who can hear feels more comfortable talking to someone else who is able to hear. People who are d/Deaf may not be comfortable asserting their rights or may not wish to cause conflict; thus, interpreters are often put in this position of educating and advocating. Advocating, according to Baker-Shenk (2014) is one who "listens to the concerns of the oppressed group and then advocates/speaks for them in the halls of power" (p. 7). This constant process of combating misconceptions with education can lead to burnout in the sign language interpreting profession (see Bower, 2015; Dean & Pollard, 2001; McCartney, 2004; Schwenke, 2012). It can also lead to vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue. Humphrey and Alcorn (2007) expertly explain the difference between these two. Whereas vicarious trauma is when a person feels like the injustice and abuse have happened to him/her personally, compassion fatigue is when the person has observed it so many times, that s/he becomes numb or jaded to it. Several authors have warned against the dangers of vicarious trauma as it relates to the sign language interpreting profession (Anderson, 2011; Andert & Trites, 2014; Dean & Pollard, 2001; Harvey, 2003; Macdonald, 2015). The ways in which vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue occur is talked about, so that interpreters can be proactive, as opposed to reactive.

Social justice entails working as an advocate in order to advance the status of the group as a whole. The only difference between sign language interpreting and other social justice professions is that interpreters should never speak out *for* the people; rather, interpreters should encourage d/Deaf people to speak out on their own behalf. Within the interpreting profession, this is termed functioning as an 'ally' (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007). In the United States especially, speaking out for deaf people can be seen as one more oppressive act that deaf people have dealt with for

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centuries. This would only promulgate the exclusion of d/Deaf people and dismantle them of their rights.

The collaborative idea that is prevalent in social justice where the whole group is helped fits nicely with the collectivist culture. Those who subscribe to a collectivist culture would be termed “Deaf,” with the “d” being capitalized. For this group, American Sign Language (ASL), relationships with others who are like-minded, residential schools, eyes, hands, Deaf Culture, and solidarity are all valued (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007; Lane, Pillard, & Hedberg, 2011; Leigh, 2009; Mindess, 2014). This solidarity seeks to offer encouragement to deal with the institutional oppression that occurs at the hands of the individualistic mainstream. Because Deaf Culture is not the prevailing culture of the United States or any country in the world for that matter, it is not typically highly regarded or realized by those in the larger culture. “By assuming one normative way to do things (move, speak, learn, and so forth), society privileges those who carry out these functions as prescribed and oppresses those who use other methods” (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 242).

Another aspect of working in social justice is “... promoting a just society by challenging injustice and valuing diversity” (Toowoomba Catholic Education, 2006, para 1). It would be helpful if deaf people were seen as being members of a linguistic minority, as opposed to a disability group. The United Nations has a charter to protect individuals who are of a different linguistic minority: The Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992). Most people do not consider deaf people to be included in this group (United Nations Charter, 47/135). It seems that because most people in power do not understand the language, they continue to label deaf people as disabled. Those who are d/Deaf cannot get out from under this oppression and, thus, choose to call themselves disabled in order to receive financial assistance from the government. It is an iterative process.

As opposed to being viewed as one of the subsets of the broad term *disability*, Eckert (2010) and others have suggested that an ethnic group comprised of Deaf people be examined. In light of how the ancient Greeks defined *ethnos* and how current day Smith (as cited by Eckert, 2010) defined ethnic groups as having a “collective name, myth of common descent, a shared history, a shared culture, an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity” (Smith, as cited by Eckert, 2010, p. 317), it makes sense. This push for Deaf people to embrace the concept of “Deafnicity” is to counteract the oppression, microaggressions (Sue, 2010), and audism that d/Deaf people experience daily.

Further research shows that characteristics that enable people to be recognized as having a distinct ethnic group includes a collective name,

feeling of community, norms for behaviour, values, knowledge, kinship, customs, social structure, language, art forms, and history (Lane, 2005). Deaf people fit into this category like any of the other groups. Many of the requisites above are predicated on the fact that Deaf people subscribe to a different culture: a collectivist culture (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007; Mindess, 2014).

Audism is a term coined by Tom Humphries who is Deaf. He defined it as the “notion that one is superior based on one's ability to hear or to behave in the manner of one who hears” (Humphries, 1977, p.12). It is used to describe someone who makes decisions or comments that demonstrate his/her belief that hearing is better and more valued than not hearing. People who are d/Deaf do not only face discrimination in the educational realm, but they experience it everywhere: in the public square, in their workplace, with their healthcare, and in the legal/ criminal justice setting. Just like people who are able to hear, deaf people go about their daily lives interfacing in public. They go to stores and social events; they make phone calls and go to appointments. However, people who are d/Deaf do not have the same luxuries that people who can hear have. Within the profession and the Deaf Community, this is called ‘hearing privilege’ (Feminist Technology Collective, 2014; Nelson, 2012; The Goodwill Project, 2017). People who are able to hear do not understand the benefits they enjoy simply because they speak the language of the majority culture. They are able to go to public places at any time without alerting the place that they are coming and are able to take full advantage of whatever the place has to offer. They also do not need to alert amusement parks or movie theaters in advance in order for them to prepare for them. When they fly, they may roll their eyes at the flight attendant’s spiel; however, d/Deaf people have never heard it. They see gestures from the flight attendant, but it is hardly linguistically commensurate.

Interpreters feel their profession is social justice because these audist acts are insensitive. This would be just as insensitive as a committee who decided to have a meeting on the second floor of a building with a non-working elevator when a physically disabled person was a part of their committee. The deaf experience can many times be summed up by a lack of inclusivity and an inability of the majority to see what the world would be like as a d/Deaf person. These ideas show up in policies where d/Deaf people who have to pass a speech and hearing test in order to be a teacher in a public school in some parts of the United States. Deaf people can obviously work at a residential school, but many times face a closed door when they attempt to teach hearing students in a public school through the use of a sign language interpreter.

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There are four ways into the deaf community; thus, four ways an interpreter can be involved with social justice and d/Deaf people. These ways are called the Avenues to Membership in the Deaf Community (See Baker-Shenk & Cokely, 1980, to see a diagram of these avenues) and consist of the following: social, political, audiological, and linguistic. Social entails the amount of time that d/Deaf people get together with other d/Deaf people or with those who care about the Deaf Community. The political avenue speaks to the level that an individual would go to support d/Deaf people politically, either through laws, legislation, or lobbying. This is place where interpreters can be very involved in waging the social justice war as an ally for deaf people. The audiological avenue is the amount of hearing loss an individual has. The linguistic avenue is the amount of skill/expertise that a person has with sign language. Surrounding the intersections of these avenues of membership is the word *attitude*. People who are d/Deaf appreciate those who have a good attitude. Individuals who perhaps are not as strong in one of the avenues may be chosen to work with d/Deaf people because of the individual's good attitude. Sign language interpreters (who are able to hear) will never be in the core of the Deaf community assuming they are high in every other avenue, due to the fact they do not possess audiologic loss.

Historically, people who take power away from d/Deaf people are those who are not d/Deaf. These people do this out of their own ignorance, misunderstanding, or misconception about d/Deaf people. Many of these misconceptions centre on people's perspective of deafness. There are two mindsets which people can hold toward deafness. One perspective is the medical view, which asserts that deafness is indeed a disability and something to be fixed. The deaf people in this group would try to blend in as much as possible with the larger culture by using their voice, reading lips, trying to hear, and appearing as "normal" as possible. The other mindset is the cultural view. This perspective embraces deafness and regards it not as an impairment, but rather a linguistic minority with its own distinct culture. This culture is much different from those who are able to hear.

Interpreters, as well as others, can support deaf people and not oppress them by respecting how they identify. If Deaf people prefer to identify as culturally deaf, then that should be respected. We should understand that means that these people would prefer not to be labelled as hard of hearing or as people with a hearing loss. For these people, they would use ASL (in the case of the United States and parts of Canada) and these individuals are culturally proud of their *collective* accomplishments. The contention between these two mindsets has been the cause of much angst, oppression, and disagreement for d/Deaf people.

Those who can hear need to see themselves not as benefactors to d/Deaf people, but as equals in this society and societies around the world. Perhaps if they did, sign language interpreting would not be viewed as a social justice profession, but rather a profession that works with people who just so happen to use a different first language and have a different culture. Deaf people can make significant contributions to our society, at large, and our institutions, in specific. However, Pena, Bensimon, and Colyar (2006) contend that people's lack of knowledge regarding another's culture may unwittingly stymie the oppressed individual from succeeding. This is where the social injustice starts.

### **Objectives/ Purpose of the Study**

The author felt that those involved with social justice professions, namely sign language interpreting, would need to possess tenacity. The constant discrimination and oppression can be physically and emotionally onerous to witness. Fortitude and tenacity are required characteristics for social justice work, as well (Clauss-Ehlers, 2010). This works in tandem with a recent research interest of the author: Grit. Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) define grit as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" (p. 1087). It is comprised of two traits: perseverance of effort and consistency of interest. Grit is also synonymous with persistence, fortitude, and zeal. It can also mean determination and a willingness to persevere when an individual faces an obstacle. Within sign language interpreting, challenges present themselves all the time. The way interpreters deal with these challenges can make or break an opportunity for a d/Deaf person, interpreters themselves, and the interpreting profession at large.

### **Research Questions**

McCartney (2016) conducted a study whereby 100 sign language interpreters were surveyed regarding their grit level. In addition to the quantitative information, the researcher also queried respondents for qualitative information. Qualitative analyses were assessed for the reasons interpreters gave for the following: 1) their reasons for initially choosing sign language interpreting as a profession, and 2) reasons that kept them motivated to continue working in the profession. Since interpreters are privy to vicarious trauma and oppression, the researcher felt that these interpreters must have other reasons that sustained them, specifically a commitment to social justice, within the profession. It was thought that

these reasons and a high grit score would prevent an interpreter from getting out of the profession.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The researcher presented respondents with the 12-item Grit Scale by Duckworth et al. (2007). This is a Likert-type self-report questionnaire designed to assess an individual's level of grit. This questionnaire has high validity and internal consistency of  $\alpha=.85$ . Plus, the questionnaire is easy to take and does not require a long-time commitment on the part of the respondent. Sample questions are as follows: "I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge." "New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones." "My interests change from year to year." Respondents are given five options to every one of the twelve possible questions: "Very much like me" "Mostly like me" "Somewhat like me" "Not much like me" and "Not like me at all" (Duckworth et al., 2007).

Out of the twelve questions, respondents can get a maximum of 60 points. When questionnaires are rated, the final score is divided by twelve and respondents are left with a score as high as 5. That score would indicate that the individual was exceptionally gritty, a score of 2.5 would be medium grit, and anything lower than that would be considered a low grit score.

The researcher coded respondents' answers to the qualitative research questions and grouped them into the following categories: familial reasons, intellectual reasons, societal/ social justice reasons, and monetary reasons. If respondents stated that they initially got into the profession because they had a family member who was d/Deaf, the researcher coded that as a familial reason. If respondents stated that they initially got into the profession because they liked the challenge or were good at learning languages, the researcher coded that as an intellectual reason. If respondents stated that they initially got into the profession because they wanted to be involved with social justice or felt that d/Deaf people were treated unfairly and they wanted to help level the playing field, the researcher coded that as a societal/social justice reason. Finally, if respondents stated that they initially got into the profession because they liked or needed the compensation, then that was coded as a monetary reason.

In addition to that, each answer was also grouped into one of two categories: extrinsic or intrinsic reasons. For example, if respondents stated that they got into the profession because they liked the language, then that would be an intrinsic reason. However, if respondents stated that

they were told by other people that they were good at using the language (ASL), then the researcher coded that as an extrinsic reason. These types of groupings allowed the researcher to look at respondents' answers within several different categories to see what their motivations were for getting and staying in the profession of sign language interpreting.

### **Results**

Respondents in the study demonstrated medium to high grit. The range of Grit scores (1-5) was 2.33 - 4.75, with the mean being 3.7. The mode was 3.33 and there were eleven people that had that score. There were 90 females (mean score of 3.55) and 10 males (mean score of 3.04). Those numbers are obviously nonsignificant since the groups were not of the same size. Once it was determined that respondents mostly had medium to high grit, the focus then turned to the qualitative questions. One of the statistically significant results from the study dealt with the societal/social justice category. Specifically, only 49 people who initially chose interpreting did so for societal/ social justice reasons. However, seventy (70) people listed societal/social justice as the reason they were still motivated to interpret. The 42.9% change is extremely heartening. It shows that in this particular study, respondents were concerned with how d/Deaf people were treated by others and that the respondents were trying to combat that injustice. Instead of allowing their frustration to chase them out of the profession, they were just as passionate as ever to even the scales.

### **Summary**

The sign language interpreting profession is primarily a social justice one since interpreters deal with institutionalized discrimination and oppression by virtue of being present when d/Deaf people need an interpreter. Interpreters are in high demand and the work is plentiful. They often go from one oppressive assignment to another, educating and advocating all the while. Interpreters are on the front line of fielding careless comments and experiencing vicarious trauma because of their unique position. It is beneficial for interpreter educators to prepare students for this profession, give them tools to cope, and let them know this profession deals with social justice. Sign language interpreting and social justice require someone to be strong physically, mentally, and emotionally. It cannot be done in isolation.

Regardless of how d/Deaf people choose to label themselves, society owes it to them to at least try and advance their position and upward

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mobility. These barriers that structural discriminatory practices have put in place are themselves handicapping. Allowing d/Deaf people to have a seat at the table in order to educate and share academic space would help to diversify the type of people who wield power and would certainly promulgate the “justice as transformation mindset” (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015, p. 116). It would give administrators a chance to eradicate hegemonic and discriminatory practices at their respective institutions. This small change would endorse “equity-mindedness”, (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015, p. 64), as opposed to “deficit-mindedness” (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015, p. 75) and allow d/Deaf people to be viewed as equals. These deficits have been on-going and are destructive.

Two necessary traits sign language interpreters need to have, other than grit, is that of Deaf-Heart and leadership. The Deaf-Heart Movement has surfaced in recent years as a way for d/Deaf people to discuss what an interpreter needs to do in order to be successful within the ASL/English Interpreting profession. If an interpreter does not act culturally sensitive, is not successful as an interpreter, or cognizant of the struggles that d/Deaf people have had to endure, this tends to be the reason in the minds of Deaf people: the interpreter did not have DEAF-HEART<sup>1</sup> (Colonomos, 2013; Decker, 2015). This means that the interpreter had no concept of the d/Deaf experience; was not mindful of what d/Deaf people need in order to communicate; was not an ally to the Deaf community, and so on. Within the last couple of years, a common complaint was that interpreters had lost Deaf-Heart. That mindset was not borne out in this particular study as respondents felt very strongly that societal/social justice reasons motivated them to remain in the profession. It seems interpreters in this study do understand the d/Deaf experience and they stand with d/Deaf people to petition the majority for equal opportunities and equal rights.

The second requisite trait that interpreters need to have is that of leadership in order to “empower clients” (Chung & Bemak, 2011, p. 159). Coyne (2013) contends that interpreters do need leadership in order to bring about social justice while working as a sign language interpreter. He encourages interpreters to employ transformational leadership as its “goal ... is to empower others” (para. 28). That resonates with many tenets of the NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct. Specifically, tenet 4.4 states that interpreters should “facilitate communication access and equality and

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<sup>1</sup> This convention of writing out words in all capital letters is the way that glossing in American Sign Language is done. This means that there are signs for each of these words and the words function as a compound, meaning that the two signs work together to mean one thing.

support the full interaction and independence of consumers” (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, 2005).

Social justice is broad and incorporates many professions that try to elevate the conditions of a group or groups of people. Sign language interpreters share many elements of this work in that deaf people are a disenfranchised and oppressed group of people. Although there have been many advancements in the United States, d/Deaf people still experience institutional discrimination and misconceptions. The impetus behind this contention is in large part due to how people who are d/Deaf view themselves and how others perceive them. It goes back to the disagreement between the two mindsets: the medical view and the cultural view. Deaf people who are culturally deaf and proud to subscribe to a different culture are not understood by the general populace. Interpreters strive to clarify these ubiquitous misconceptions that people hold by constantly educating. They may also be engaged in social justice by attending social events, using ASL, and being involved in political protests and fight to have legislation passed that would advance the status of d/Deaf people. Interpreters experienced a high level of tenacity, or *grit* in this study. On a scale of 1-5, the mean of interpreters’ *grit* level was 3.7.

The study (McCartney, 2016) applied the construct of *grit* to the signed and spoken language literature. No studies had been conducted until that point that combined the construct of *grit* with sign language interpreting. This study is not proposing that someone with a low level of *grit* cannot be successful. Medium to high levels of *grit* may, however, allow interpreters to remain in the profession when hardships come, instead of succumbing to burnout. Also, in this study, the reasons interpreters gave for remaining in this profession and engaging in this work was social justice. They displayed a promising amount of Deaf-Heart.

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