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WHERE ARE MY PEOPLE? THE CASE FOR CULTURALLY COMPETENT INTERPRETERS

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Where are My People? The Case for Culturally Competent Interpreters

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Through participation in LGBTQI conferences, one can gain political knowledge, leadership skills, professional networking opportunities, and personal development experiences. These opportunities become more complex to navigate for Deaf individuals who hold other marginalized identities, such as those who identify as Queer Trans Deaf People of Color (QTDPOC). By applying Disability Justice Principles, interpreters must highlight and uplift the experiences of QTDPOC and increase their cultural competency so that no one is left behind (Berne et al., 2018). This study seeks to answer the question: How does the presence of interpreters who do not identify as Queer and Transgender Interpreters of Color (non-QTIOC) influence the experiences and the expressions of QTDPOC in LGBTQI spaces? Embedded within queer phenomenology analysis, the research acknowledges the dearth of Queer and Transgender Interpreters of Color (QTIOC) and explores the lack of LGBTQI content in American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting education programs (IEP) and its inherent impact on the experiences of QTDPOC. This paper aims to encourage interpreters, students, and the interpreting field as a whole to increase efforts to acknowledge, be intentional, and hold themselves and others accountable in and beyond their scope of work.

Through professional and personal development opportunities (e.g. study abroad, leadership, conferences, events) one can gain experience with and exposure to sociopolitical movements and grassroots community organizing. For instance, social justice within Lesbian, Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer and Intersex¹ (LGBTQI) communities occurs in spaces like support groups, conferences, forums, and much more. Through participation in LGBTQI conferences, one can gain political knowledge, leadership skills, professional networking opportunities, and personal development

¹While not all letters of the acronym are not listed, this paper utilizes LGBTQI to refer to individuals who identify as such, gender variant or not as cisgender heterosexual individuals. Additionally, I want to acknowledge and uplift queer communities of color who may not use the acronyms because they are English based, and they may utilize terms in different languages that are ethically and culture specific.

experiences. For individuals who identify as Deaf² and utilize sign language interpreters in these spaces, having an LGBTQI culturally competent interpreter is critical. This dynamic becomes even more complex for Deaf individuals who hold other marginalized identities, such as those who identify as Deaf and as a Person of Color (POC), when navigating these spaces.

According to the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), 86% of interpreters who hold RID memberships are white females (RID, 2018). In a similar note, there is not any organization or entity that counts the number of interpreting Students of Color enrolled in Interpreting Training Programs. Inherently, the low number of Interpreters of Color (IOC) is a contributing factor for the types of interpreters that are assigned to LGBTQI conferences. Improving our understanding of LGBTQI cultural and racial competence allows members of Deaf, interpreting, and academic communities to understand more effective ways of working with Queer and Transgender Deaf People of Color³ (QTDPOC). By applying the 10th principle of Disability Justice⁴, “Collective Liberation: No body or mind can be left behind – only moving together can we accomplish the revolution we require” (Berne et al., 2018, p. 229), interpreters must highlight and uplift the experiences of QTDPOC and increase their cultural competency so that no one is left behind.

²By using the capital D, Deaf, it is possible to recognize experiences shared by all members of these diverse communities, while honoring Deaf communities that utilizes American Sign Language and considers themselves a part of Deaf culture.

³Queer and Trans of People of Color is another common way LGBTQI individuals of color identify themselves.

⁴The Disability Justice Principles are as follows: Intersectionality, Leadership of those Most Impacted, Anti-Capitalist Politic, Commitment to Cross-Movement Organizing, Recognizing Wholeness, Sustainability, Commitment to Cross-Disability Solidarity, Interdependence, Collective Access, and Collective Liberation.

This study seeks to answer the question: How does the presence of interpreters who do not identify as Queer and Transgender Interpreters of Color (non-QTIOC) influence the experiences and the expressions of QTDPOC in LGBTQI spaces? Embedded within queer phenomenology analysis, the research explores the dearth of QTIOC as well as LGBTQI content in American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting education programs (IEP) inherently impacts the experiences of QTDPOC.

Literature Review

The key aspects discussed in this section will allow for a thorough understanding of the research's approach. The literature review takes a critical look at the various perspectives of Deaf and LGBTQI identities and how those identities intersect each other.

Intersectionality

Critical Race Theory scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) analytic framework of intersectionality is defined as the overlapping of social identities and the impacts of lived experiences. Crenshaw offered this lens as she recognized Black women were being excluded from sociopolitical movements. The focus of intersectionality is not about prioritizing ability, gender identity, or sexual orientation, but focuses instead on the person's experience of all of their identities simultaneously and with equal importance (Crenshaw, 1991). While Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" in the 1989 this concept had originated in various social movements between 1960s and 1980s, raising the claim of "the interconnectedness of race, class, gender, and sexuality in [of People of Color] everyday life experiences" (Hill & Bilge, 2016, p. 71). Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) coined the term "intersectional invisibility" to demonstrate how individuals

with two or more marginalized social identities often become invisible, including pressure to separate one's social identity and only focus on one. Intersectionality allows for an "all approach," looking at the individuals holistically to understand the discrimination they face and their experiences (Chan et al., 2017). This study focuses on the intersectionality of multiple identities including Deaf identities, racial identities, gender identities, and/or sexual orientations and examines how QTDPoC navigate communication and their identities.

Microaggressions

To investigate and uncover the experiences that QTDPoC face, it is essential to understand the following: microaggressions, racial microaggressions, and cissexism. Microaggressions are, "the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership," (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). The most commonly discussed form of microaggression is racial microaggressions, that specifically illustrate forms of racism. The term racial microaggressions was coined by Dr. Chester M. Pierce in 1970, to describe "subtle insults (verbal, non-verbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously" (as cited in Yosso et al., 2009, p. 60). Another type of microaggression is cissexism and cisnormativity, a form of sexism appealing to norms that enforce the gender binary. This leaves those who identify outside the binary, or as transgender, to experience oppression and discrimination (Erickson-Schroth, 2014).

LGBTQI

The most common acronym utilized to describe those who do not fall under the heterosexual and/or cisgender category is the LGBTQI acronym. Within the LGBTQI acronym, Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual (LGB) relates to a person's sexuality; that is their nature of attraction to the same gender, a different gender, or to more than one gender. Most people confuse sex and gender, using the two interchangeably (Serano, 2009). In theory, sex is defined as one's biological make-up at birth, while gender is normed on social interactions and roles one takes on as they age (Erickson-Schroth, 2014; Serano, 2009). The term Queer is utilized to describe political movements connected to gender and sexuality and to study these movements academically (Faderman & Timmons, 2006). Furthermore, queer is used interchangeable with the LGBTQI acronym to account for the diversity within the community. Intersex is a term utilized to refer to those who were born with variations in sex characteristics (e.g. chromosomes, hormones, genitals) (Erickson-Schroth, 2014). Over the years, the LGBTQI community has grown and in order to better reflect the diverse identities existing within it, Queer and Trans People of Color or QTPOC was created (Barker & Scheele, 2016). Finally, transgender and cisgender are commonly used to describe gender identity and are discussed further below.

Transgender and Cisgender

Transgender refers to individuals whose gender identity does not align with their sex assigned at birth (Erickson-Schroth, 2014). Transgender also functions as an umbrella term that is commonly used to signify the numerous identities within transgender communities, including those outside of the western mainstream culture

(e.g. female-to-male [FTM], male-to-female [MTF], trans men, trans women, transmasculine of center, transfeminine, third gender, two-spirit, nonbinary, gender non-conforming, and genderqueer individuals; Castana, 2014). In contrast, cisgender individuals are those whose assigned sex (e.g. male, female, and intersex) and gender identity (e.g. man, woman, and transgender) are congruent (Serano, 2009).

Contrary to popular belief, each transgender individual's journey is unique, and some may not aim to or may be unable to afford transition. Transition can be considered social and/or physical altering one's body and behaviors to align one's gender identity with their gender expression (Erickson-Schroth, 2014). One way a person acknowledges and begins their transition is through social transitioning. This transition process can include, but is not limited to, changing names from their deadname⁵ or birth name to a chosen name, chosen pronouns, titles (e.g. Mr., Ms., or Mx.⁶), and changing gender expression (e.g. how one dresses or behaves). Individuals who feel they do not identify with he/him/his or she/her/hers, might decide to use pronouns that are more gender neutral and request others to observe them as well, such as they/them/theirs or ze/hir/hirs (Erickson-Schroth, 2014). According to Rafferty (2018), pronoun markers, along with one's choice of clothing, hairstyle, and names support individual's affirmation and social interactions. Transgender individuals may either pass or be read by others as their identified gender, or not pass, meaning they are inaccurately perceived as their identified gender. Likewise, it is critical to examine Deaf identities further to understand more of the QTDPOC experience.

⁵Deadname refers to a transgender persons' name before they started transitioning. In comparison to birth name, deadname has a negative connotation. A transgender person utilizing deadname refers to their former name as they relate to themselves as a new person and not as their former name.

⁶Mx. Is a gender neutral title (e.g. Mx. Ray).

Deaf Identities

This research utilizes the definition of “Deaf”, to include people, who may identify as, but are not limited to, Deaf, deaf, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, hard of hearing, late-deafened, and hearing impaired (Gertz & Boudreault, 2016; National Deaf Center, 2017). By using the capital D, Deaf, it is possible to recognize experiences shared by all members of these diverse communities, while honoring Deaf communities that utilizes American Sign Language and considers themselves a part of Deaf culture. American Deaf culture is defined as Deaf people who have their own language (ASL), beliefs, values, rules, and traditions (Padden & Humphries, 2005; Bauman, 2007). In other instances, lower case “d” is utilized to demonstrate the medical view or to acknowledge the identities of those individuals who are deaf and not immersed within the culturally Deaf community.

Deaf LGBTQI Identity

Two anthologies that focus on the intersection of Deaf LGBTQI identities are *Eyes of Desire 1: A Deaf GLBT Reader* and *Eyes of Desire 2: Deaf GLBT Reader* (Luczak, 1993, 2007). In total, both volumes provide over 80 stories from interviews, treatises, papers, interviews, and poems by Deaf LGBTQI people. Of the authors in both volumes, fewer than half were QTDPOC-identified. The authors who disclosed their QTDPOC identity explicitly stated being proud of their Deaf, racial and queer identities. For example, Sharma in “I am a Deaf Hindu Lesbian”, shares, “I feel that I’ve overcome a lot of barriers such as being Deaf, Hindu, and Lesbian. I’m proud of myself” (Sharma, 2007, p 175).

Luczak's (2015) most recent publication titled, "A Queer Disability Anthology," features fiction, poetry, nonfiction, and comics by writers who identify within the queer and disability intersection. Out of 48 writers, 7 of them identify as Deaf; however, none of them explicitly identified as QTDPOC. In a poem titled, "Invisible Within the Ten Percent," Smith (2015) reveals that Pride festival organizers omit disability communities from the conversation about accessibility at festivals. Their poem reads, "lived realities of dis/abled folk are omitted from these discussions / their intersecting oppressions are actively erased and invisibilized" (Smith, 2015, p. 171). This solidifies the marginalization of queer disabled people, even within LGBTQI spaces.

Queer Transgender Deaf People of Color

In this research, the term Queer Transgender Deaf People of Color (QTDPOC) is an umbrella term to describe the intersecting identities of individuals who identify as Queer or Transgender, Deaf and as People of Color (Deaf Queer Resource Center, 2019). This term was first utilized in the publication, *Real Talk: Deaf Queers Creating Change* video⁷ that was filmed during the National LGBTQ Task Force's Creating Change conference in January 2019 (Deaf Queer Resource Center, 2019). This acronym was created within the community and focuses on the specific intersections of LGBTQI, Deaf, and People of Color identities.

QTDPOC's experiences have been highlighted in research and writings (e.g., Ruiz-Williams et al., 2015; Moges, 2017; Miller & Clark, 2019). In the paper "My Deaf Is Not Your Deaf: Realizing Intersectional Realities at Gallaudet University," four graduate

⁷This gathering included QTDPOC individuals and allies, including Kriston Lee (Community Advocate CSD Unites), Mervin Primeaux-OBryant (HIV Advocate Mervin P. O'Bryant Foundation), Deafies in Drag, Socorro García (Co-Founder Alma de Muxeristas), Melissa Yingst (Show Host, Melmira), and Bethany Gehman (Certified Sexuality Educator & LGBTQIA+ Advocate).

students reveal the barriers and challenges they experienced as multi-faceted individuals and their personal transformations through their combined autoethnographies (Ruiz-Williams et al., 2015). The researchers state, “We continued to dismantle the restrictive category Deaf as meaning white, cisgender, from the United States or developed Western countries, sighted, and able privileged, realizing that there could not be an authentic, totalizing deaf-same framework”⁸ (Ruiz-Williams et al., 2015, p. 265). In terms of Deaf culture scholarship, the authors note that despite their experiences studying at a university focusing on liberal arts for Deaf individuals, they still struggled to find connections within the Deaf community as the “Deaf-same framework” (e.g. all Deaf people are the same) did not fit their narrative and experience.

In more specific detail, Moges (2017) analyzes literature produced by Queer-identified people and interviews Deaf Queer and Trans individuals. She examines Deaf Queer and Trans individuals’ and experiences growing up as Deaf people realizing their queerness and eventually gaining awareness of their sexual orientation (Moges, 2017). Her analysis points to the lack of literature pertaining to QTDPOC people:

There is still inadequate published work that concentrates on varying intersectional backgrounds of Deaf-Disabled and Deaf-Blind people within Deaf Studies and in Deaf Queer literature overall...I look forward to more works of “Pablo,”⁹ Dragonsani Renteria, and other Queer-identified People of Color in both academic literature and creative, textual, and visual literature. (Moges, 2017, p. 237)

⁸In the introduction of *It's a small world: International deaf spaces and Encounters*, Friedner and Kusters (2015), DEAF-SAME or “I am deaf, you are deaf, and so we are the same” emphasizes at the feeling of deaf similitude and is one of the most power phrases in the deaf worlds. (p. xi). While DEAF-SAME demonstrates a likeness, there are many substantial differences including gender identity, race, class, educational levels, nationality ability, mobility, etc. (Ruiz-Williams et al., 2015).

⁹“Pablo” is the pseudonym name of the author of “Black, Deaf, and Gay: True Identities. “Pablo was one of the few QTDPOC authors in the *Eyes of Desire: A Deaf Gay & Lesbian Reader*. In their submission, they describe the complexities of the intersecting identities.

Ultimately, Moges (2017) recognizes that most scholarship is written by white, Deaf, cisgender, and able-bodied authors, acknowledging the need for more research. Since there is not a great deal of literature for, by, and of the experiences of Deaf individuals who identify as QTDPOC, there is much more needed on their lives.

In “Deaf and Queer at the Intersections: Deaf LGBTQ People and Communities,” Miller and Clark (2019), emphasizing emerging Deaf queer and transgender trailblazers and how they are evolving social movements through advocacy, art, leadership and research. Most importantly the authors highlight QTDPOC and how they paved the way in expanding political, social, and educational spaces (Miller & Clark, 2019). While the scholarship above provides insights on the QTDPOC experience, there has yet to be scholarship that specifically educates interpreters on best practices and the types of cultural competency required to provide services for and with QTDPOC.

Interpreters

The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) is a non-profit organization with national reach that strives to grow and develop the profession of American Sign Language interpreters. The organization advocates for the highest interpreting standards by overseeing the only nationally recognized certification, encouraging and disseminating publications, and sharing resources (Registry Interpreter for the Deaf, 2018). RID annually collects demographic information, including membership types (i.e. associate, certified, student, supporting, trial, and audiologic status), racial identity, and sex assigned at birth (Registry Interpreter for the Deaf, 2018). At the time of this research, the 2018 report was the most recently published report finding that 86% of interpreters, that identified themselves as certified, self-identified as female and white

(Registry Interpreter for the Deaf, 2018). Other demographics, including sexual orientation and gender identities other than cisgender, are not collected by RID. Similarly, Interpreter Education Programs (IEP) do not explicitly track the number of students who may identify as queer or transgender.

Interpreter Education Programs

One route to becoming an ASL interpreter is through an IEP (also called Interpreter Training Programs [ITP] or Interpreter Preparation Programs [IPP]). This formal interpreting training is pursued through universities, community colleges, or technical schools, and includes learning ASL and the processes of interpreting (Registry Interpreter for the Deaf, 2020). In 2016, the National Interpreter Education Center (NIEC) conducted a needs assessment report, titled “Understanding the Needs of Interpreters of Color.” This report and associated findings highlight the dearth of interpreter trainees of color and faculty of color in such programs. The study shows most programs have only one student of color in the entire class, as well as a shortage of racially and multilingual diverse classrooms and curricula (National Interpreter Education Center, 2016). Due to the lack of interpreter trainees of color, faculty of color, and classmates of color, interpreting students had to work even harder to find extra support and to complete their interpreting education (National Interpreter Education Center, 2016).

LGBTQI diversities should be a core part of cultural competency when developing interpreter training programs, resources, and other materials; however, this study demonstrates that these competencies are not put into practice. A significant number of interpreter trainees of color reported that they were taught how to work only

with a homogenous population of Deaf people rather than learning, “cultural awareness related to services to Deaf individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds” (National Interpreter Education Center, 2016, p. 6).

One public resource published by RID and available to IEPs and interpreters is a corpus of white papers titled, “Standard Practice Papers” (SSP). SSPs outline common practice in various interpreting settings and identify issues prevalent in those specialties, which include interpreting in Health Care Settings, for DeafBlind individuals and communities, and in Performing Arts settings (Registry Interpreter for the Deaf, 2019). Within the SSPs, there is no mention of cultural competency guidelines for interpreting in LGBTQI settings or interpreting in multicultural and otherwise multilingual diverse communities including in predominantly people of color spaces. Interpreters, interpreting educators, and emerging interpreters are not given tools from RID, the field’s national professional organization, to prepare them when interpreting for LGBTQI communities. SSPs are monoculturally-oriented as they are not inclusive of a variety of marginalized cultural subgroups.

Another professional body with influence on interpreter education is the Conference of Interpreter Trainers (CIT), which hosts conferences, publishes the International Journal of Interpreter Education (IJIE), and disseminates other resources related to Deaf communities for interpreters (Conference of Interpreter Trainers, 2019). The IJIE highlights research findings through conferences and publications on literature that focus on interpreting in legal, medical, K-12, and higher education settings, in addition to linguistics, interpreter processes, trilingual and multilingual interpreters, and curriculum design and development (Conference of Interpreter Trainers, 2019).

Reviewing the corpus of IJIE, only one conference paper was submitted and presented about interpreting in LGBTQI settings. During the CIT's biennial conference, Dr. Tamar Jackson Nelson (2014) addressed the critical issues of gender identities and sexual orientation in relation to ASL-English interpreter education, fostering safer and more inclusive environments for LGBTQI interpreting students, and the necessity of understanding these identities when providing interpreting services for consumers. She concludes it is not only the responsibility of those interpreters within the LGBTQI community to become familiar with working with LGBTQI consumers, but the responsibility of all interpreting students and interpreters to educate themselves (Jackson Nelson, 2014). Turning to interpreting education and curriculum standards can also provide us with insight about the gaps in interpreter education.

In order to create education standards for interpreters, CIT established the Commission on Collegiate Interpreter Education (Commission on Collegiate Interpreter Education, 2018). CCIE identifies the knowledge, skills, and perspectives students need to gain in order to enter the field of professional interpreting. Standard 4.6 states that IEPs should employ faculty who “are collectively diverse and/or the students have documented exposure to diverse populations” (Commission on Collegiate Interpreter Education, 2018, p. 3) CCIE does not provide an explicit standard related to educating interpreters on competencies related to LGBTQI settings, stating only that the “curriculum addresses competencies related to interpreting theory and knowledge” (Commission on Collegiate Interpreter Education, 2018, p. 6). This in turn impacts QTPOC and their access to interpreters who have similar racial, sexual orientation,

and/or gender identity or interpreters to have cultural competency about LGBTQI communities.

Research Design

I chose to do this research due to my own intersectionalities as a transmasculine of center¹⁰ (they/them/theirs pronouns), Black, second-generation Filipinx¹¹ hearing, and sighted individual. I am also an interpreter of color and have noticed insufficient research and support for interpreters of color and Deaf people of color. I wanted to create space for Deaf folks who have been marginalized for generations to be included in the interpreting field. Jones (2010) notes that “engaging in intersectional reflexivity requires one to acknowledge one’s intersecting identities, both marginalized and privileged, and then employ self-reflexivity, which moves one beyond self-reflection to the often-uncomfortable level of self-implication” (p. 122). “Intersectional reflexivity” informs my scholarship as I am acknowledging my marginalized identities, privileged identities and, most importantly, my positionality (Jones, 2010). While my identities provide both a unique and valuable perspective in the interpreting field and the LGBTQI community, I must also recognize I am a sighted hearing and a non-native signer. I recruited and connected with participants who specifically identified as QDTPOC with the intention of uplifting the intersections we do not share (Hsiung, 2008). Additionally, I attended the same annual LGBTQI conference, which allowed me to gain access and

¹⁰ This term coined by B. Cole of the Brown Boi Project. According to a Tagg Magazine interview with B.Cole, “the term recognizes the breadth and depth of identity for lesbian and queer folks who tilt toward the masculine side of the scale. Some of these individuals include a wide range of identities from butch to trans-masculine to androgynous” (Bell, 2017, para. 4).

¹¹ Filipinx I use the term Filipinx to decolonize the way of thinking of gender in a binary frame (men and women only). Filipinx is gender inclusive and encompasses all genders that Filipinx people are (Libarios et al., 2018).

build trust while engaging intimately by asking questions, responding thoughtfully and co-constructing and unpacking experiences together.

An important foundational part of the methodology for this research that requires unpacking and exploration is Ahmed's queer phenomenology (2006). The framework provides a spatial metaphor comparing space and how one navigates the world; specifically, this model examines one's tendencies that establish one's starting position, proximity to objects of desire, people, activities, directions of movement, and ease in moving through a given space in order to survive. The orientation established historically by society is one in which an individual must live in a 'straight line' that is close to whiteness, cisgender identity, and heterosexuality (Ahmed, 2006). In *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, McRuer and Bérubé (2006) argue that the idea of "Able-bodied heterosexuality" is the default orientation. Queerness disrupts this "straight line," causing that narrative or orientation to look and feel different for those identifying within the LGBTQI community. Within this framework, queering disability creates disabled spaces overlapping with the critical queer spaces and actively challenges the default orientation (McRuer & Bérubé, 2006). In moments of disorientation, one may "push the strange object away", or move away from whiteness and demonstrate resistance to spaces that embody values of whiteness (Ahmed, 2006). In order to reorient, or to orientate themselves back to a sense of conveying and feeling one's authentic self, one must move forward by taking new directions and paths (Ahmed, 2006). In this research the participants demonstrate how they disorient and reorient in an LGBTQI conference space and how the interpreter is an additional factor in that process.

Participants

Participants were recruited through a 2 minute and 30 second video I recorded in ASL with English captioning. The video included information about the study and how to participate. In order to be considered for this study, participants needed to identify as Deaf, Deaf-Blind, or Hard of Hearing; utilized American Sign Language; identify under the Queer or Transgender umbrella; identify as a Person of Color or as biracial, multiracial, multiethnic, mixed or use the most comfortable language to describe their adjacent identities; and have recently attended the 2018 LGBTQI Conference. The video was posted on my personal Facebook page, shared on the Bisexual, Lesbian, Gay, Intersex, Trans* Interpreters/Translitterators (BLeGIT*; 2009) member section Facebook page, reposted by several colleagues, and shared through email to the participants that attended the same annual LGBTQI conference I attended in 2018.

A total of four individuals matched the criteria and agreed to participate in this study. The names of participants and the interpreters they mention, as well the name of the conference mentioned above over the course of the interviews and referred to here have been changed to pseudonyms to maintain anonymity. During data analysis, all recorded data was kept on a password protected laptop. Because LGBTQI conferences are few in number, naming the conference explicitly would jeopardize the anonymity of the participants. I have chosen to only reference the conference as the 2018 LGBTQI Conference. The chart below details the self-reported information from the demographic form completed by the participants and demonstrates the wide range of QTDPOC experiences obtained in the course of this research (Table 1). The questionnaire

provided as many answer options as possible, while leaving an ‘other’ option to allow participants to fill in the form with a self-selected label.

Table 1. *Participant Demographics*

Participant	Deaf Identity	Gender Identity	Pronouns	Sexual Orientation	Racial Identity
Maria	Deaf	Cisgender female	She, Her, Hers	Bisexual, Queer	Filipinx, Chinese, Spanish, Taiwanese
Felipe	Deaf	Gender non-conforming/ Non-binary	They, Them, Theirs	Genderqueer Pansexual	Latinx ¹²
Ayotunde	DeafBlind	Gender non-conforming/ Non-binary	They, Them, Theirs	Pansexual	Black
Bee	Deaf, Deaf Plus, Hard of Hearing	Non-binary	They, Them, Theirs	Queer	Latinx ¹²

Cumulatively, participants reported that they regularly attend a myriad of LGBTQI events, including conferences, workshops, pride festivals, support groups, happy hours, lectures, and grassroots activities, indicating a high rate of participation in LGBTQI events and corresponding potential need for culturally and linguistically competent interpreters. All participants reported that they were returning attendees to the 2018 LGBTQI Conference, except for Felipe (they/them/theirs) who was a first-time attendee.

Data Collection and Procedures

The interviews were established as exploratory and semi-structured (Creswell, 2009). The researcher prepared a list of questions to lead the interview. As needed, the researcher would ask further questions for clarity and greater understanding from the participants. The questions were sequenced and subsequent into the following

¹²Latinx is a gender-neutral label utilized by people of Latin American descent and is a non-binary alternative to Latino/a and Latin@ (Salinas & Lozano, 2019).

categories: Introductions, LGBTQI Conference, Outside LGBTQI Conferences, Deaf Conferences, Logistics of requesting and working with interpreters, and Feedback for Interpreters. In order to facilitate exploration of QTDPOC individuals' experiences, I focused on asking questions about positive and negative experiences when utilizing interpreters at the 2018 LGBTQI conference and outside LGBTQI events.

As the researcher, I conducted a 90-minute interview with each participant individually, for resulting in a total of 4 interviews and 360 minutes of data. I informed the participants that their participation was strictly voluntary, and participants could choose to withdraw without repercussions. Interviews were conducted in-person, via email or through video chat and recorded via my laptop.

Once the data was collected, the interviews were transcribed into written English in separate Microsoft Word documents. Being an interpreter and fluent in both ASL and English, I translated the videos from American Sign Language to English. Once the translations were completed, the participants reviewed the content for accuracy and provided feedback when necessary.

Limitations

The limitations on the research include the sample size and the sample profile. The sample size included in this study is limited and only represents a small population of QTDPOC communities. Regarding the sample profile, it is limited to participants that attended higher education institutions and have gained the opportunity to attend the conference. More stories from QTDPOC individuals from a wider diverse background, would provide more stories from this unique community.

Findings

The research highlighted common themes from the data using a pile-sorting method in order to identify salient themes (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Using Ahmed's (2006) queer phenomenology framework, disorientation, reorientation, and new directions were utilized as a basis for analyzing and identifying salient themes. Ahmed (2006), defines "disorientation" as one who deviates from the straight orientation or as a result of an unsettling experience that pushes one to orient back to the "straight line" (p. 179). Causes of disorientation included: microaggressions, dissonance in closed spaces, and lack of cultural competency. Secondly, reorientation refers to the act of QTPOC attempting to orientate themselves back to a sense of conveying authenticity in the conference space. Subthemes under reorientation included: relying on interpersonal relationships and monitoring the interpreters' product. Lastly, new directions entail deviating from the "straight line" and allowing for a new orientation. Under this category included the following subthemes: acknowledging, internationality, and accountability.

Disorientation

Under the analysis of disorientation, the following themes were found throughout the interviews: Microaggressions, Lack of LGBTQI cultural competency, and dissonance in closed space dynamics.

Microaggressions. The first theme under disorientation was microaggressions. Participants reported consistently facing microaggressions from interpreters that invalidated their identities and experiences in the form of misgendering and inappropriate reactions to comments. Several participants mentioned experiencing

microaggressions regarding cissexism while working with interpreters. Felipe (they/them/theirs) described one interaction that elicited feelings of disorientation when the interpreter continued to use their birth name despite having socially transitioned. The interpreter insisted on using their deadname since it was the name on their Facebook account. Felipe stated, “I don’t owe anyone an explanation of why I kept my deadname on my Facebook account.” Felipe expressed confusion and frustration and, in order to get the interpreter to use their chosen name, they had to show the interpreter their name tag. Felipe’s experience illustrates the continuous effort of having to educate the interpreters on ways to respect QTDPOC.

Ayotunde (they/them/theirs) described microaggressions contributing to disorientation when interpreters based their appraisal of Ayotunde’s transgender identity on cisgender beauty standards. According to Ayotunde, interpreters made cissexist comments about Ayotunde’s gender non-conforming identity, including, “oh you should be proud to be a beautiful woman,” and “I am really impressed on how they were able to pass... I couldn’t even tell.” The interpreters’ comments caused Ayotunde to feel disoriented by distracting them from the conference. The assumption that all transgender people want to “pass” for cisgender or should be proud to look cisgender in their gender expression, can actually do more harm than good as such perspectives assume that identity is based on appearance. The lack of knowledge exhibited by the interpreters has implications for QTDPOC individuals and impacts how they interact with other people.

Closed Space Dynamics. Closed spaces at the conference, including workshops, support groups, and networking spaces, were created to provide safe

spaces for individuals to process their layered identities. Weldon (2006) argues that inviting marginalized subgroups to hold their own spaces tends to strengthen movements and promote solidarity both within and outside of marginalized communities. Conference attendees could elect to participate in such closed spaces, for example, in order to find connections with other individuals of color with disabilities. Ironically, Ayotunde and the other participants experienced disorientation because the assigned interpreter did not fit the criteria of who could participate in the closed space. Ayotunde described their experience about not having access to an interpreter that matched their identity in this designated space:

I went to a closed space specifically for PWD [people with disabilities], in that case I preferred an interpreter of color who may be more aware of PWD and Trans issues than a white interpreter who shares none of those intersections, but an interpreter of color wasn't provided and it jeopardized my ability to connect in that space.

Another participant, Bee (they/them/theirs), shared the same sentiments of disorientation due to having a white cisgender woman interpreting for them in a closed space. "I wished I had been given the opportunity to decide who I'd want as my interpreter, but the coordinator did not offer that option. I wanted a queer POC interpreter." The dissonance created by placing an interpreter whose identities did not align with identities of members of the closed space caused disorientation for all the participants and they reported the loss of autonomy in a space that was intended for them.

Lack of Cultural Competence. During the interviews, participants referred to their experiences of expressing themselves in ASL when discussing LGBTQI signs and concepts. Participants stated that as they attempted to share, ask questions, or

participate in the conference, they were assigned interpreters who struggled to interpret both signed and spoken information or seemed equally as uncomfortable interpreting the content due to lack of understanding. Felipe described an instance when they were attempting to share their thoughts. They explained that they felt their message was “lost in translation” because the interpreter “was just saying words but not really incorporating my tone, the heart of my message, and thoughts.” The interpreter was not able to incorporate the intention Felipe wanted to share because they lacked sufficient cultural schema.

Additionally, several of the participants reported that the interpreters continually confused the differences between biological sex, gender identity and sexuality. Ayotunde expressed their thoughts about the most common misunderstanding among interpreters who are outside of the LGBTQI community, stating that “there seems to be confusion, or maybe you can call it a lack [of knowledge] or an ignorance, about the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation.” The lack of interpreter cultural awareness demonstrated through incorrect sign usage and incorrect fingerspelling, and confusion around LGBTQI terminology and jargon contributed to QTDPOC disorientation when utilizing the interpreters.

Reorientation

Secondly, reorientation demonstrates the coping skills utilized by participants in order to express themselves with authenticity without the fear of being misunderstood. The themes included monitoring and interpersonal relationships.

Monitoring. There were instances when participants recognized they were not able to have an interpreter who was knowledgeable about content and to compensate,

the participants utilized coping mechanisms in order to ensure their messages were communicated clearly. When asked about the case of expressing herself through interpreters at the conference, Maria (she/her/hers) explained that it was situationally dependent. She stated that, “maybe this is obvious and largely psychological, but I do feel it is easier to express my sexuality and gender identity as a QTPOC if my interpreter is also a QTPOC.” Maria stated that she felt she had to monitor less if she worked with QTPOC, leading to feelings of reorientation and returning to authenticity within the conference space.

Felipe utilized their friend to help them monitor the accuracy of the interpreter in situations where the interpreter was providing a spoken English interpretation of Felipe’s signed comments. Whenever Felipe was signing and was informed by their friend that the interpreter’s rendering was inaccurate, they would put down their hands and wait until the interpreter got back on track. “If for some reason, my message was not matching, I would drop my hands and stop signing. My friend would signal to let me know.” Felipe acknowledged they were fortunate to have a friend to support them in monitoring the interpreter for accuracy and reorient them to the conference space.

Since Bee could read lips, they were able to monitor the interpreter’s accuracy in ASL to English. When they decided to share, they depended on that monitoring skill to ensure the interpreter was accurately voicing for them. Bee stated, “It’s a habit of mine to watch the interpreter’s lips.” To counteract feelings of disorientation and remain engaged in the conference, Bee’s use of lip reading to ensure accurate conveyance of their message became a coping mechanism for reorienting themselves. Other coping mechanisms included: utilizing simultaneous communication, so the hearing interpreter

could see as well as hear what the QTDPOC individual was expressing, signing slower than usual in order for the interpreter to render the message clearly, and prematurely completing their signed comments due to the frustrations with inaccuracies of the interpreter's work.

Interpersonal Relationships. The participants commented positively about interpreters with experience working with QTDPOC because they had schema related to working around social justice and queer subject matter. Participants reported that these interpreters significantly were more accurate compared with non-culturally competent interpreting services. Here, Felipe shares their contrasting experiences working with two different white LGBTQI identified interpreters.

I remember when we went to a polyamory workshop, we sat in a circle formation and a majority of the attendees were people of color, but the workshop was led by a white person. When we started talking about intersectionality and dating, one interpreter just could not sign well nor interpret. The concept and intentions of the discussions were not clear nor understood because of the interpreter's lack of knowledge of the subject.

Later in the interview, Felipe mentions having more confidence working with a white interpreter who was the partner of a Deaf LGBTQI person. "Conversely, Brandon's partner, Giselle is a wonderful signer. She is aware of the content and understands what the presenters are talking about including LGBTQ history and she's able to use her schema and her experience in her work."

Having a personal relationship with QTDPOC consumers facilitated easier development and maintenance of trust. This also shows evidence of how important it is to include QTDPOC representation from various backgrounds and intersections in education, Deaf, and IEP spaces.

Ayotunde described their experience working with a white Deaf interpreter they built trust in over the years. “The number of Queer Interpreters of color is non-existent,” Ayotunde stated, “... with that said, I based my interpreter selection on the trust I built with them.” Ayotunde also described the benefit of having known the interpreter a long time and being able to share feedback with that interpreter due to their positive relationship. “Many interpreters are hesitant to communicate with me using Protactile¹³ interpreting because of the physical intimacy that occurs as a natural part of the language. However, this interpreter was unafraid to communicate the information clearly, efficiently, and in my language.” Ayotunde reported that the interpreter’s willingness to be open and receptive to feedback was another quality that they seek in working with interpreters in general. In sum, when participants had their communication needs met and could reclaim their autonomy, the interpreters and participants’ interpersonal relationships contributed to participants’ experiences of reorientation.

This analysis suggests that QTDPOC leverage monitoring and interpersonal skills to increase confidence in bridging connections within the conference space and to get the most accurate information. Participants reported a desire to have more IOC as well as non-IOC with knowledge about racial topics and an understanding of LGBTQI competence. When an interpreter of color was present, the QTDPOC attending the conference felt they had greater trust and could more easily express themselves than with a white interpreter present.

¹³ProTactile is one type of language that supports access for DeafBlind communities. Protactile is given through touch and has its own sets of philosophy, attitude, culture, and language (granda & Nuccio, 2018).

New Directions

The new directions analysis highlights how participants approached disorientation and allowed for a new orientation to emerge encompassing the themes, Acknowledge, intentionality and accountability. This portion of the analysis includes participants' recommendations intertwined with Disability Justice Principles to highlight the need to increase the cultural competency of emerging interpreters within the profession and interpreter education curriculum.

Acknowledge. Acknowledging represents recognition of current trends and disparities that impact access to and navigating within hearing, sighted, able-bodied spaces for QTDPoC. It is critical to recognize that conferences are rare educational opportunities for QTDPoC people to gather in sizable numbers, connect with others of the same intersections, and obtain access that is funded by the host organization and available on a larger scale than is usually afforded. To note, 3 out of 4 participants mentioned the noticeable dearth of Queer Transgender Interpreters of Color (QTPOCI) as well as the substantially larger percentage of white cisgender women in the interpreting field.

All participants expressed the desire to have more access to IOC with greater schema about racial topics and an understanding of social justice. Within the Disability Justice Principles, #5 states, "Recognizing Wholeness: ...Each person is full of history and life experiences" (Berne et al., 2018, p. 228). Responsibility for upholding this and all Disability Justice principles lies with stakeholders, including interpreter education faculty and curriculum developers. They need to identify ways to improve future services for communities as well as ways to improve interpreter education curriculums

with increased schemata about QTDPOC experiences. Additionally, responsibility falls on community organizers, interpreting coordinators, and interpreting agencies to be intentional about selecting and hiring culturally competent interpreters, especially IOC who identify as LGBTQI.

Intentionality. In terms of Intentionality, the interpreting field needs to purposely reassess curriculum development as well as recruitment, teaching, and mentoring of interpreters. While RID has established BLeGIT* as an LGBTQI member section, RID still has yet to establish a Standard Practice Paper (SSP) specifically about interpreting in LGBTQI settings. Being intentional also involves consulting with Deaf communities as well as interpreting communities in order to develop an SSP for emerging students and seasoned interpreters.

Furthermore, curriculums should not only be updated in terms of standards. There should be constant creation of opportunities for QTDPOC to be involved in curriculum development and within the classroom. This is further emphasized by Disability Justice Principle #2: "Leadership of Those Most Impacted, ... we know to truly have liberation we must be led by those who know the most about these systems and how they work" (Berne et al., 2018, p. 227). Involving QTDPOC leadership allows them to lead and become the experts regarding what accessibility works best for them. Examples of QTDPOC leadership include but are not limited to creating co-teaching opportunities, webinars, panels, and activities that bring QTDPOC experiences into the classroom. Without a standard for working in LGBTQI settings, IEPs bear responsibility for exercising intentionality about the kinds of content incorporated into the classroom. Ayotunde stated that it is critical for interpreting students to gain exposure to working

with QTDPOC with many different kinds of experiences: “I do hope that interpreter educators would be intentional by inviting community members and compensating them for their time. Since [Interpreter Education Program] students tend to sign like their professors, students lose the opportunity to understand Deaf QTPOC.”

Additionally, Ayotunde and the other participants emphasized the importance of training culturally competent interpreters. IEPs serve as the foundation for many interpreters’ careers; as such, it is critical that these formative programs provide students with diverse and culturally literate experiences to prepare them for working with diverse Deaf communities, including QTDPOC individuals.

Accountability. For experienced interpreters who have already been working in the field for many years, interpreting for the QTDPOC community still requires accountability. If an interpreter accepts an interpreting assignment, being continually open-minded and aware of what is happening in the world is crucial. According to Maria, fostering the understanding that intersectionality is always present, and making culturally minded decisions made while working always have greater consequences.

I know this is becoming a buzzword but... be aware of the reality of intersectional identities when interpreting for the Deaf QTPOC community. Especially with issues related to POC identities. Students should learn that there are layers and layers of nuance and corresponding consequences not only within the Deaf or Queer communities but also in the POC communities which affect their other identities. For instance, too often Asians are treated as a monolith (all SAME-SAME) but the differences within the Asian communities have great impact on the kind of interpreting needed.

This comment dovetails with Disability Justice Principle #1: Intersectionality “We know that each person has multiple identities and that each identity can be a site of privilege or oppression” (Berne et al., 2018, p. 227). Interpreters must be aware of the contributions of everyone in the interpreting team – including the Deaf participant if they

are to be intentional and accountable with their collaboration. It is imperative that experienced interpreters realize the impact of their decisions when self-selecting work. Ongoing self-analysis, recognizing unconscious bias, continuing one's inner work and maintaining contemplative practices - including group discussions of intercultural awareness – are crucial for interpreters to truly understand the impact that they have in LGBTQI spaces (Petty, 2017). Bee shares similar sentiments as expressed by Petty:

So, it's like being intentional to put the right person in the right space - that someone who has more knowledge in the community. Know your fucking place and check your ego. If you are eager to accept an assignment but you know someone who may be more qualified, don't fucking do it. Step back and recommend the more qualified interpreter instead. They [Interpreters] need to be honest at what they can do and remember this is not about themselves, but about ensuring quality communication access for the Deaf consumer.

Bee, a Deaf interpreter coordinator, also offered ideas for those who are interested in interpreting in these settings: “If you can't do it or if you have some doubt, I would like you to communicate that to me so I can pair you with a stronger team or create a team of three with a balance of strengths.”

Creating the trust as a collaborative team of Deaf persons and interpreters and being open about any uncertainty is paramount to navigating these spaces as a new or seasoned interpreter.

One statement by Felipe encapsulates the participants' lessons:

[It] Doesn't matter who you are, hearing or Deaf: Attend events. Listen to learn. Secondly, be aware of what's happening in the world. Doing that will allow you to prepare yourself to interpret conferences and events that addresses various issues that matter [sic]. Be open, be aware of yourself, and be open to develop professionally. You can do that by going to events, reading, asking questions, of course only when they are appreciated and appropriate. Do the work and don't solely allow all that learning to come from the Deaf Community. You are responsible for your own learning process, and Deaf people aren't going to save you nor looking for you to save them.

Interpreters should not only acknowledge their skills but actively seek to accurately self-appraise their skills and solicit feedback on these skills as well.

Conclusion

This analysis brings forward QTDPOC experiences in order to further understand how cultural gaps can ostracize, as well as prevent marginalized communities from receiving critical support and resources. In turn, emerging interpreters and IEP faculty can recognize and take steps to remedy the dearth of culturally competent curriculums and standards to effectively educate interpreters about working in LGBTQI settings. The findings and evidence are not meant to suggest that non-QTPOCs are not suited or are incapable of interpreting for QTDPOC or in LGBTQI settings. Rather, this paper aims to encourage interpreters, students, and the interpreting field as a whole to increase efforts to acknowledge, be intentional, and hold themselves and others accountable in and beyond their scope of work. Disability Justice Principles offers new opportunities for the Interpreting communities to unpack and explore where it has fallen short and how we can improve services for QTDPOC. This call to action is not only directed to the interpreting communities, but to conference and community organizers, scholars, researchers, organizers, activists, and educators. It is critical that that this process is a collaborative one and is in solidarity with QTDPOC communities to provide more meaningful access. We must address these concerns, grow our cultural competency, and improve existing advocacy skills towards the inclusion of QTDPOC and QTPOCI individuals and the intersections of their identities. Until then, QTDPOC will continue to be sidelined and given inadequate interpreter services, further hindering their ability to connect with peers, educators, and resources. Considerations for future research

include a study on QTIOC and QTDPOC professionals' experiences working in various specializations within the interpreting field, focusing on both their adversities and triumphs. Provided more time and financial resources, conducting group interviews would assist with gaining deeper insight into their lived experiences while working with interpreters. While this study has limitations, it seeks to provide insight to this resilient yet overlooked community. In the future, I hope to see more research about, for and by QTDPOC individuals.

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