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# Persistence of African-American/black signed language interpreters in the United States: the importance of culture and capital

Erica West Oyedele  
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Persistence of African-American/Black Signed Language Interpreters in the United

States:

The Importance of Culture and Capital

By

Erica West-Oyedele

A thesis submitted to

Western Oregon University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:

Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies

March 2015

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WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY HAVE EXAMINED THE ENCLOSED**

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- ☒ Thesis
- ☐ Field Study
- ☐ Professional Project

Titled:

Persistence of African American/Black Signed Language Interpreters in the U.S:  
The Importance of Culture and Capital

Graduate Student: Erica West Oyedele

Candidate for the degree of : Master of Arts, Interpreting Studies

*and hereby certify that in our opinion it is worthy of acceptance as partial fulfillment  
of the requirements of this master's degree.*

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## ABSTRACT

### **Persistence of African American/Black Signed Language Interpreters in the United States: The Importance of Culture and Capital**

by

**Erica V. West Oyedele  
Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies  
Western Oregon University  
March 2, 2015**

This study investigates cultural competence in the field of signed language interpreting and the persistence of African American/Black signed language interpreters in the field. To date, no research in the discipline of signed language interpreting studies has looked at how the cultural competence of practitioners impacts colleague dynamics, nor has there been identification of how cultural competence impacts interpreters' persistence in the field. Data for this study were collected over a period of several months utilizing ethnographic research methods. Face-to-face focus groups, a large-scale questionnaire, and follow up interviews were conducted. A search of the literature revealed that while a lack of cultural competence does impact colleague dynamics and the provision of services within the field, the larger issue may be the African American/Black interpreter's lack of social capital. This study found that African American/Black interpreters regularly experience subtle instances of racism directed toward them from consumers and colleagues. In large part, African American/Black interpreters view their White interpreting colleagues and educators to be lacking in cultural competence. This places an added psychological burden on the African American/Black interpreter that impacts their social capital and the effort they must expend in order to connect with their peers. The result may be burnout and the desire to

change careers. To increase the culturally competent provision of services and improve colleague dynamics within the field, African American/Black Deaf consumers and African American/Black interpreters alike desire recruitment of interpreters from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background

In 2004, I started working as an American Sign Language (ASL) – English interpreter, which is a term used to refer to a subset of the larger population of signed language interpreters who interpret between a signed language and a spoken language in the United States. Prior to graduating from my Interpreter Preparation Program (IPP), I had been approached by professional ASL – English interpreters and by Deaf consumers of interpreting services who made comments to me along the lines of “We need more Black interpreters!” or “There are not enough interpreters of color.” I clearly remember the day when I was approached by an interpreter who asked if I was a member of the National Alliance of Black Interpreters (NAOBI). Even though I was at the end of my professional training, I had never heard of such an organization. It seemed clear to me that there were not enough interpreters of color in our profession, and as a Black interpreter, I would be helping to fill some gap.

As a Black<sup>1</sup> interpreter, sometimes I resented the comments I received. It felt like people were rooting for me because I was Black and not for who I was outside of my race. I did not want my success in the field to be solely because I was Black. Yet, because I was needed, I had people rooting for my success and that felt good, too. As I began interpreting, I noticed that when a consumer wanted to ask me back to an assignment that I had previously covered, they would contact the agency I worked for. The agency, in

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term *Black* when I am referring to myself and how I self-identify or when referring to others who have used the term in their work.

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turn, contacted me and asked if I was familiar with a particular client. They said the client could not remember the interpreter's name but that she was *the* Black interpreter. I live in a metropolitan area and still, this narrowed down the options considerably; it was me. I was re-hired for the job. Though with less frequency, this has continued to happen over the years.

Over the course of my career, I have seen few professional interpreters and interpreter educators from diverse racial backgrounds. IPPs serve as the primary gateway to entry in the field of ASL-English interpreting; yet, as a Black interpreter, I have only seen small numbers of African American/Black<sup>2</sup> interpreting students enter IPPs, and anecdotes suggest that even fewer complete. Throughout my career, I have heard stories from African American/Black interpreting colleagues about why they have left or why they are considering leaving the field. Those who have stayed express concerns about how they are perceived and how they are accepted in the field.

### **Statement of the Problem**

For those in the field of education, vast amounts of literature points to disparate outcomes in higher education for learners who are from marginalized racial groups (Lohfink, 2005; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Walpole, 2008). In the United States, when educational outcomes are less than equitable for those from traditionally marginalized groups, we see correlated adverse impacts to the labor market outcomes for those populations. This is especially true for African American/Black learners when compared to other primary racial groups (Fairchild, 2009).

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term *African American/Black* when I refer to signed language interpreters and students who reside in the United States and who have African ancestry.

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Cultural competence, as defined by Cross, Bazron, Dennis, and Isaacs (1989), is “a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or amongst professionals and enables that system, agency or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations” (p. 13). In service professions such as health care, social work, counseling and education, practitioners interact with consumers from all walks of life. Research has shown that there is a paucity of practitioners in these fields from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. As a result, a lack of cultural competence among professionals leaves marginalized communities underserved both in terms of access and quality of care (Cohen, Gabriel, & Terrell, 2002; Sue & Sue, 1990). Although research exists for many of the service professions, the field of signed language interpreting in the United States has yet to look into the effects of having educators and practitioners who primarily identify as European-American/White (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc., 2013).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand the most likely reasons for the disparities that exist in the practice and education of African American/Black interpreters and interpreting students. I hypothesize that the causes for these disparities relate to the fact that 1) African American/Black interpreting students do not complete their IPPs because the programs do not effectively address issues of multiculturalism due to a lack of cultural competence by faculty and administration, and 2) when African American/Black students do achieve IPP completion they may lack the social capital within signed language interpreting communities that already makes entrance into the

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profession challenging for the novice interpreter due to concerns surrounding the potential for horizontal violence within the profession (Ott, 2012).

My hypotheses are based on the literature related to racial disparities that has been written in other service professions, as reviewed in the next chapter. Similar to other service professions, the majority of the educators and practitioners in the field of signed language interpreting are not persons from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. The experiences of the participants in this study are analyzed to see if their discourse identifies the lack of diversity within the signed language interpreting profession—as well as other reasons—for the disparities.

### **Theoretical Bases and Organization**

The theoretical basis for this research lies in the work done by other human service professions. Theories of cultural competence, social capital, and aversive racism will be explored throughout the review of the literature, as they pertain to the education and practice of signed language interpreters. My research questions whether African American/Black interpreters perceive cultural competence to be lacking in the field of signed language interpreting. If so, what effect does the lack of cultural competence among colleagues and educators have on the persistence of African American/Black interpreters in the field? Since other service professions have a more established research base regarding such issues, I decided to look into their findings to see what they could offer the field of signed language interpreting.

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there is little racial and ethnic diversity among signed language interpreting practitioners and educators. Presently, no research in the field of signed language interpreting has sought to identify the impact cultural competence has on African American/Black signed language interpreters and the field as a whole. Theories of cultural competence, social capital, and aversive racism as they have been applied to other human service professions are explored within this review of the literature.

#### **Recruitment and Retention of Culturally Diverse Faculty**

According to Bruce (1998), the National Multicultural Interpreter Project (NMIP) authored an article for the *Silent News* in 1996 that reported on the findings of the National Center for Health Statistics, which suggested approximately 1.2 million of the 20 million Deaf or Hard of Hearing population are African American/Black. Consumers of interpreting services come from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, yet the demographics of signed language interpreting practitioners and educators show little racial and ethnic diversity. The focus of this study is on the African American/Black interpreter population, which consists of a dismal 443 members of the 9,345 members of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (2013) who reported in the organization's 2013 annual report<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup>The 2013 RID annual report reflects a total membership number of 16,004. Not all members chose to report demographic data. It is possible that the percentage of African American/Black interpreters in the RID is even smaller.

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Numerous researchers outside the field of signed language interpreting have looked into how the hiring and retention of faculty from diverse backgrounds impacts the delivery of programs and services in educational institutions (Brooks et al., 2012; Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, & McLain, 2007; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Brooks et al. (2012) conducted case studies of three minority-serving institutions using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. In one case, they looked at Latino student and faculty representation in a particular school district. They found that 72.5% of the student population was Latino while only 27.2% of the faculty population was Latino. This study found that most instructors had little knowledge about Latino language and culture although this was the largest student demographic within the school.

In a second case, Brooks et al. (2012) looked at the Native American population at Sitting Bull College. They administered surveys to 32 undergraduates of a teacher education program and conducted 10 interviews with program graduates. They noted that minority group instructors may go beyond delivery of curriculum content to include linguistic and cultural experiences within their teaching. This may have something to do with the tendency of minority instructors to want to care for the needs of the whole student and not just for their academic success (Roseboro & Ross, 2009).

In their third case study, Brooks et al. (2012) looked at the pedagogical practices of African American science teachers in an ethnographic study of 17 participants. As in the previous case, they found that cultural experiences were infused into the teaching process. According to Brooks et al., improvements need to be made to the teacher education curriculum if such programs are going to produce multi-culturally competent teachers. They go on to recommend exchange programs between minority-serving



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institutions and predominantly White institutions (PWIs), which could have positive impacts on intercultural relationships. Currently, Bishop State Community College, located in Mobile, Alabama, is the only historically Black college that houses an IPP on their campus.

The presence of staff from culturally diverse backgrounds also positively correlates with the success and aspirations of students of color on campus. Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, and McLain (2007) utilized a mixed methods approach when looking into the effect of Latino faculty representation on campus and the impact on Latino students' academic success. They found that as the representational value of Latino faculty increased so did the aspirations and the success of Latino students on campus. These findings imply that relatedness to faculty on campus may have a significant impact on student persistence and success. Similar findings have been noted in studies of African American/Black student populations. African American/Black students at PWIs may view White faculty as culturally insensitive and therefore feel that the interactions that they have with faculty are not as valuable (Guiffrida, 2005). According to Guiffrida, African American/Black faculty are perceived as believing more in the capabilities of students of color and are perceived as willing to do more to aid in the students' success.

This caring for students by African American/Black faculty and its effects were included in the research of Roseboro and Ross (2009). They conducted a historical study of narratives from three African American/Black women educators and utilized comparative analysis from the works of seven different researchers spanning the years of 1993-2007. They looked into the ethic of care provided by African American/Black women educators and found high levels of burnout among those who spent large amounts

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of time caring for the whole student as opposed to just the students' academic needs. The ethic of care demonstrated by African American/Black professors may be why, as mentioned earlier, African American/Black faculty are perceived by African American/Black students as willing to do more than their White counterparts.

bell hooks (1994) too, in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, thoroughly covers this subject of care, love, and Black teachers. hooks (1994) recalled how the Black women educators she encountered “were committed to nurturing intellect so that we could become scholars, thinkers, and cultural workers – black folks who used our ‘minds’”: (p. 2). Roseboro and Ross (2009) argued that Black faculty become “tired from caring, tired from trying to prove themselves intellectually capable, and tired from trying to prove to White people that racism exists” (p. 36). Roseboro and Ross suggested that this is the reason Black faculty are on the decline and may be directly or indirectly the reason for so few students of color in teacher education programs. These accounts further demonstrate the necessity and benefits of hiring culturally diverse faculty.

Mawhinney (2012), through scholarly personal narrative and autoethnography, also substantiated the need for more faculty of color at PWIs. For minority students, the offices of faculty of color may be seen as safe spaces where the students' academic needs as well as social and emotional needs may be taken care of (Mawhinney, 2012). Students share their frustrations related to both their academic and personal lives, and “interestingly, the discussion usually revolves around race, as my students feel they can only discuss these issues with me as one of only a few Black faculty” (Mawhinney, 2012, p. 227). Mawhinney further suggested that the lack of culturally diverse faculty on

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campus places the burden on the few faculty of color who are present to address the needs of the large and increasing minority population.

Guiffida (2005) further explored the benefits of employing faculty from diverse cultural backgrounds. In a mixed methods study of 19 students who attended a PWI, Guiffida (2005) assessed the extent to which students felt that their instructors were student-centered. Of note, the results showed that the primary reason that African American/Black students sought support or mentoring from African American/Black faculty was because these faculty members were more student-centered in their pedagogical approaches when compared to White faculty. This does not mean that White faculty cannot be student-centered in their approaches. One student from this study referenced a White professor who was actively engaged in providing resources in helping her succeed. This active participation was viewed as student-centered and calls on the need for more research to ascertain the difference in pedagogical practices between White and African American/Black professors. If African American/Black faculty are more student-centered in their approaches to teaching, their employment provides an explanation for increases in the African American/Black student's aspirations and outcomes.

### **Benefits of Developing Cultural Competence in Service Professions**

In consideration of cultural competence and its effects on signed language interpreters of African American/Black heritage, it is important to note that the Guiffida (2005) study mentioned above suggested that White professors are capable of providing for the needs of a diverse student population. Addressing issues of cultural competence during one's educational phase results in a more culturally competent practitioner.

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Concurrently, addressing such issues among those already practicing will enhance the ability of practitioners to connect with both colleagues and consumers alike.

Within the field of social work, educators recognize the importance of cultural competence among practitioners and have begun infusing diversity standards throughout their curriculum (Guy-Walls, 2007). Guy-Walls conducted a study of 150 participants that included entry-level social work, senior-level social work, and senior-level non-social work students. The Multicultural Awareness-Knowledge-Skills Survey was administered to study participants as was a demographics questionnaire. Guy-Walls (2007) found that senior-level social work students displayed higher levels of cultural competence than their entry-level social work and senior non-social work peers. This study provides evidence that exposure to a multicultural curriculum leads to significant increases in awareness among social work graduates, which would result in a more culturally competent workforce.

Educators in the nursing profession have been equally concerned with the provision of culturally competent care for their patients. Harris, Purnell, Fletcher, and Lungren (2013) took a qualitative look at the DREAMWork program, a grant-funded nursing program aimed at increasing cultural awareness. They followed 16 program participants through the DREAMWork online summer program that included a six-hour orientation session and a four-week online course that concluded with personal reflection and course evaluation. The course was developed with six course objectives following the Campinha-Bacote cultural competence model. Positive feedback was given by all 16 of the course participants, and Harris et al. (2013) reported that instructors noted “a

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difference in students' ability to understand the importance of their own culture and how it intersects with the need to develop culturally competent nurses" (p. 138).

Delgado et al. (2013) found further confirmation that educational interventions can be effective at increasing cultural competence among nursing professionals. They conducted a study of 98 nursing staff who participated in a one-hour course on cultural competence. Staff were assessed on their knowledge prior to the course, again at three months, and six months after course completion using the Inventory for Assessing the Process of Cultural Competence Among Healthcare Professionals–Revised. Nursing staff had higher cultural competence scores after course completion (Delgado et al., 2013). Interestingly, from the three-month to six-month assessment, there was a statistically insignificant decrease in cultural competence scores noted. Delgado et al. suggested another study that assesses course participants at one year from exposure to course curriculum. If cultural competence scores continue to decrease, this suggests a need for regular, ongoing educational interventions.

### **Importance of Social Capital on Persistence in Education and the Workplace**

The differences in the education and practice of African American/Black students and practitioners in the field of signed language interpreting may also be related to a lack of social capital in both education and in the workplace. Social capital is defined by James (2000) as "the qualities that characterize the network of relationships one has with organizational peers, subordinates, and superiors" (p. 496). In the context of interpreting, social capital refers to the relationships one might have with fellow interpreting colleagues who are both experienced and novice within the field. Social capital would

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also include the relationships one has with educators, mentors, agencies, and consumers of interpreting services, as well as with interpreting focused organizations.

In the workplace, Murrell, Blake-Beard, Porter Jr., and Perkins-Williamson (2008) found that “gaining access to individuals who provide career-focused mentoring functions means that people of color are thrust into interracial dynamics embedded within the organization” (p. 277) more so than their White counterparts. Murrell et al. conducted a study where 30 African American/Black study participants were matched with senior-level African American/Black managers from different organizations for career mentoring. This study utilized interviews, surveys, and focus groups as a means to gather data and then conducted three follow ups with mentees and used the Ragins and McFarlin mentoring scale to analyze the results. They found that early on, mentoring was career focused. As the mentoring relationship progressed, relatedness and mutual trust allowed for discussions of interpersonal and psychosocial aspects in the work environment (often race related) to occur. Access to mentors of color in the same profession, however, is often difficult because of low numbers of people of color in upper levels of organizations. Murrell et al. (2008) noticed inter-organizational mentoring relationships turned out to be more unbiased in nature and were validating to the mentee’s experience. Also noted was the benefit of the interpersonal and psychosocial aspects of the relationship as “people of color may rely on the benefits of social capital to a greater extent than their white counterparts” (Murrell et al., 2008, p. 289).

In considering whether or not social capital can offer an explanation as to why disparities exist among African American/Black students and practitioners in the field of signed language interpreting, the research done by James (2000) on social capital and its

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effects on promotion and support can lend insight. James collected survey data from 127 managers of a Fortune 500 company of which 44 were Black and 83 were White. James found that strong relationships, referred to in the study as “tie strength” (p. 497), positively correlated with one’s perception of having psychosocial support. This study did not note a direct impact between social capital and opportunities for promotion. However, James did find that “it is reasonable to conclude that Blacks are closed out (intentionally or not) of opportunities to develop useful network ties” (pp. 503-504).

The importance of network ties, or social capital, can be seen in education as well. Fairchild (2009) looked at how social capital barriers in education can prevent minorities from being successful in the labor market. Fairchild studied data from Black respondents to the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series and from indices of public school segregation from the public school data project. Fairchild found that despite laws in public school education, Blacks are segregated from White students in the American education system. On average, Black students attend classes with less than two percent of Whites (Fairchild, 2009). The results of this study show that when Blacks and Whites grow up with exposure to each other in childhood they have more success in the labor market due to network ties and cross-race exposure. Interestingly, this study also found that lack of exposure results in fewer social ties, and, therefore, for African American/Black students, this lack of network ties follows them and is reinforced throughout their education.

The importance of social capital and having network ties is reinforced by the previously mentioned research of Hagedorn et al. (2007). They also found that critical mass had significant influence on student success. *Critical mass* refers to a level of

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representation that brings comfort or familiarity within the education environment, reducing experiences of marginalization, and promoting retention and persistence for minority students (Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, & McLain, 2007). When students had increased network ties, their aspirations increased. When Latino students had access to Latino professors, their ties to faculty on campus led to higher aspirations and success.

One explanation for the social capital barriers faced by African American/Black interpreting students may be found in the research that has been done on aversive racism. According to Dovidio et al. (2002), “In contrast to ‘old-fashioned’ racism, which is blatant, aversive racism represents a subtle, often unintentional form of bias that characterizes many White Americans who possess strong egalitarian values and who believe that they are nonprejudiced” (p. 90). Gaertner and Dovidio (2005) found that aversive racists are sympathetic towards injustices that have been acted out on Blacks in the past. They support ideas of racial equality, yet they unconsciously hold onto “negative feelings and beliefs about Blacks” (p. 618) that result in consequences that are just as significant as blatant forms of racism.

Interracial distrust is a consequence of aversive racism (Dovidio et al., 2002). They found that Whites were more likely to exhibit aversive racism when prejudice acts were less explicit. In other words, when society has clearly defined rules about what is and is not racist, Whites who believe they are nonracist are likely to behave in ways that fit with societal norms. When societal rules are not as clearly defined, Whites are more likely to show signs of aversive racism in their attitudes and behaviors, regardless of their explicit response.



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A disconnect in perception between Whites and African American/Blacks when working in partnerships exists as a result of aversive racism (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005). An analogous example may be created within the context of the field of signed language interpreting. Within the field of signed language interpreting, it is standard business practice for a team of two interpreters to work together for assignments that will last longer than one hour. Generally, one member of the team will actively interpret the incoming source message into the target language. The other team member is working in a support role to ensure accuracy of the message, and will switch into the active interpreting role after 20 minutes. When the interpreter who is actively interpreting misses part of the message, the supporting interpreter feeds the missed part of the message, and this feed is incorporated into the interpretation. It requires that the active interpreter pay attention to both the incoming source message, and to the feed they are receiving from their team.

In an interaction where a team of two certified interpreters are present the White team member may doubt the abilities of their African American/Black counterpart to interpret from ASL to English. They may make an assumption that the voicing of the African American/Black interpreter will sound “too” Black, or they may assume that the African American/Black interpreter does not have a range of vocabulary to fit in with academic or formal setting that they are in. To compensate for this perceived lack, the White team member may feed their team interpreter excessively. The African American/Black partner in this situation may pick up on the subtle less-explicit cues that point to distrust. Their ability to process the incoming ASL source message may be interrupted due to the excessive feeds they have received, and may lead to more errors in

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the interpretation and a need for the White team to continue feeding, or maybe just take on the interpretation by stepping into the role of the active interpreter. Though the White team member may be verbally friendly towards their African American/Black counterpart, because of the conflicting messages the African American/Black interpreter has received, trust is lost in the White team member. Overall, the result ends up negatively affecting the performance of the partnership, which may reinforce the negative stereotypes held by the White partner.

The lack of cultural competence in the above example is characteristic of the broader work environment that privileges whiteness. The example given shows what the manifestation of aversive racism may look like for the African American/Black interpreter, and it shows how distrust may enter into the relationship, when the African American/Black interpreter believes their professional worth is devalued. This devaluing of one's professional worth leads us to consider the impact of horizontal violence in the profession of signed language interpreting.

Horizontal violence may be an issue in some communities, and may foster more opportunities for aversive racism to affect the outcomes of African American/Black interpreters. Horizontal violence is defined by Ott (2012) as “persistent behaviors such as gossip, diminishing comments, rudeness, devaluing others’ professional worth, and criticism, perpetrated by members of a group toward one another, whether consistently or inconsistently, that cause harm, anxiety, and stress in the receiver” (p. 15). If these behaviors are already deemed as acceptable, it becomes easy for White practitioners in the interpreting profession to fit into the trope of deflecting racist claims. They may assert other, nonracist reasons for behaviors or statements that are perceived to be racist, and

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dismiss the impact of the additional biases that African American/Black interpreters experience as “just part of the profession.”

### **Scholarly Contribution**

If what other service professions have found to be true applies also to African American/Black students and practitioners in the profession of signed language interpreting, this leads to several possible conclusions. Critical mass has a significant impact on student success. If IPP teacher demographics do not match the diverse student population, it is likely that students of color experience feelings of isolation and marginalization in IPPs. These students may very well have lower persistence and aspirations than White students due to a lack of access to faculty of color, which may also be a contributing factor to why few students of color enter IPPs and why even fewer graduate.

IPPs located on PWIs may see reduced student success for students of color. For African American/Black students in IPPs, intergroup relations—or lack thereof—may have longstanding effects on the students’ social capital, and it seems the benefits of social capital may be more important for the African American/Black students’ success than that of their White counterparts. This could result in the African American/Black students’ need to connect with faculty of color for both career and psychosocial benefits, which emphasizes the need for a critical mass to be present on campus.

African American/Black students in IPPs will likely see the offices of African American/Black faculty as safe spaces for discussing academic and personal issues due to the ethic of care that is found to be common among African American/Black women educators. African American/Black students in IPPs could benefit from being connected

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to extended networks of interpreters, where African American/Black mentor/mentee relationships are developed, which tend to address career and psychosocial functions. The development of these networks may increase the social capital of students and may release some of the burden from the African American/Black faculty in IPPs.

Since research in the field of signed language interpreting does not exist to address the disparities experienced by African American/Black signed language interpreters, this review of the literature has focused on other service professions to see what the larger body of literature has to offer. A comprehensive study of African American/Black practitioners in the field of signed language interpreting is needed to gather more insight into the causes and effects of disparities that exist among this population and the population of interpreter practitioners and educators as a whole.

### **Chapter 3**

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Focus and Framework**

I conducted an exploratory, critical ethnographic study utilizing both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Berg and Lune (2012) explained that researchers have defined the concept of ethnography in many different ways, but central is the idea that researchers are placed “in the midst of whatever it is they study” (p. 197). Ethnographic research is done with the intent of explaining a cultural phenomenon. Researchers place themselves within the cultural setting either as members of the cultural group, or they gain access to the cultural setting through guides who may vouch for their presence (Berg & Lune, 2012).

As a Black ASL-English interpreter, in this study, I am a member of the cultural group that I am seeking to describe. Therefore, I already have access to the group and its members. As mentioned in the opening chapter of this study, over the years I have heard that there is a need for more African American/Black signed language interpreters. Yet, I have seen no research to explain why so few African American/Black interpreters practice in the field.

As with the field of interpreting, most researchers agree that a stance of neutrality is impossible to maintain (Berg & Lune, 2012; Henderson, 1998; Hesse-Biber, Leavy, & Yaiser, 2004). The researcher carries some bias, and this bias informs his or her understanding of the data and, of course, how the data will be presented. With that in mind, a crucial aspect of this research is that I, the researcher, come to this work as a

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member of the community being researched. As such, I made the decision to apply the framework of critical ethnography.

Critical ethnographies differ from traditional ethnographies in that the researcher seeks to balance some social injustice. In critical ethnographies, the researcher goes beyond just identifying the problem to advocating toward a change in behavior, thinking, or both in order to move toward greater social justice. As Berg and Lune (2012) described, “critical ethnography *is* conventional ethnography, but with a clear purpose, and which intentionally seeks positive change and empowerment for participants” (p. 207).

The focus of this study was to determine if African American/Black interpreters perceive cultural competence to be lacking within the field of signed language interpreting. If there was evidence that such a phenomenon exists, then the next step was to examine the impact the perceived lack of cultural competence has on African American/Black signed language interpreters and their persistence in the field. This study took part in three phases. The first phase consisted of focus groups followed by a large-scale survey; the final phase consisted of three one-on-one interviews. Each phase of the research informed the collection of data in the subsequent phase.

### **Design**

Data for this study were collected over a period of three months from August through December of 2014. The initial phase of the project included three focus groups. Two of the three focus groups were conducted face-to-face, while the third focus group was conducted online utilizing video conferencing software. The purpose of the focus groups was to help draw out and obtain a fuller understanding of the shared experiences

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of African American/Black interpreters who are currently in the profession or who have left the profession.

Since this is an exploratory study, focus group data were used to inform the design of the survey instrument disseminated during the second phase of data collection. Morgan (2001) explained that this practice has become widely accepted among academic researchers who recognize that including focus groups at the first stage of the research process helps to uncover qualitative data on new topics, which can then be applied to survey instrument design. The result of the focus groups in the first phase of data collection was a large-scale questionnaire that was designed to collect a range of fact and attitudinal-based data in order to obtain a better understanding of the experiences of African American/Black interpreters residing in the United States. The wide distribution of this questionnaire allowed me to further triangulate and generalize the data obtained during the three focus groups meetings.

The final phase of data collection included semi-structured interviews. The interviews supplemented my understanding of the collected survey data. Two of the interviews were outside of the target population for this study and allowed me to ascertain what experiences other marginalized communities might face. Each of these interviews was conducted one-on-one and took place online using FUZE, an online video conferencing program.

### **Population**

**Focus groups.** The first focus group consisted of 13 Deaf consumers of interpreting services who identify as African American/Black. Seven of the participants identified as male, six as female. All participants were over the age of 20 but under the

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age of 70. Using the regional divisions established by the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), each of the participants resided within the Pacific division of the United States at the time of the focus group. Though this study is focused on the perceptions of African American/Black signed language interpreters and their persistence within the field of signed language interpreting, I felt it was important to understand how African American/Black Deaf consumers are impacted by the current provision of interpreting services they receive, and what relationship, if any, this has to the racial and ethnic background of their service providers. This session helped to frame the research being done by allowing me to gain a better understanding of the experiences of African American/Black Deaf consumers with respect to interpreting services.

The second focus group consisted of seven signed language interpreters who were between the ages of 20 and 60. All of the participants identified as African American/Black. One of the participants identified as male; the other participants identified as female. Five of the participants attended formal IPPs. Two have family members and close friends who are Deaf; they grew up among the Deaf community, and their training was primarily community based. At the time of the focus group, three of the participants resided in the Pacific division, two lived in the South Atlantic division, and one each resided in the West South Central division and New England division of the United States.

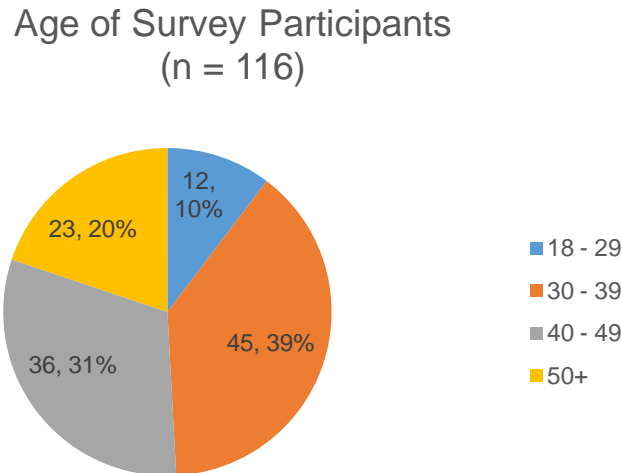
The final focus group consisted of five signed language interpreters who were between 20 and 60 years of age. All of the participants identified as African American/Black. One of the participants identified as male; the remaining four were female. All of the participants attended IPPs. At the time of the focus group, each of the



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participants resided within the Pacific division of the United States. In this final focus group, three of the participants were recent IPP graduates with less than two years of experience working in the field. Participants in these last two focus groups were asked the same questions, although in this final group the majority of the narrative was centered on the participants' IPP experiences.

**Survey.** During the second phase, a large-scale questionnaire was disseminated online utilizing a variety of professional networks (e.g., mailing lists and Facebook pages of the National Alliance of Black Interpreters, Interpreters and Transliterators of Color, and various RID affiliate chapters). The target population for this questionnaire was professional signed language interpreters age 18 and over who identify as African American/Black and reside within the United States. There were 120 responses to the survey. Four of the responses came from individuals who did not identify as African American/Black when responding to the demographic questions in the survey; these responses were discarded. Data from the remaining 116 participants in the survey were collected and analyzed. Of the 116 participants, 101 (86%) identified as female; the remaining 15 (13%) identified as male. Eighty-six respondents (74%) attended IPPs. Most of the survey respondents were between the ages of 30 and 49 as shown in Figure 1.



*Figure 1.* Age of Survey Participants

Survey participants were asked to identify their status within the interpreting community. Often status is determined by attitude, linguistic fluency, and the overall relationships one has within the Deaf community (Baker-Shenk & Cokely, 1981; Napier, 2002). Respondents were given four options: Deaf, Hearing, Coda (Children of Deaf adults), and Deaf of Deaf (Deaf children of Deaf adults). They were also given the option of writing in their response. Since the respondent's status may intersect across different categories, each was allowed to select all of the options they felt were applicable. The majority of survey participants (107) were hearing interpreters, five were Deaf interpreters and four selected Coda only. Of the 107 hearing interpreters, four also identified as children of Deaf adults, two had Deaf family members, and one was both a child of Deaf adults, who indicated that their significant other was also Deaf. None of the participants selected the Deaf of Deaf category (See Figure 2).

Status in the Interpreting Community

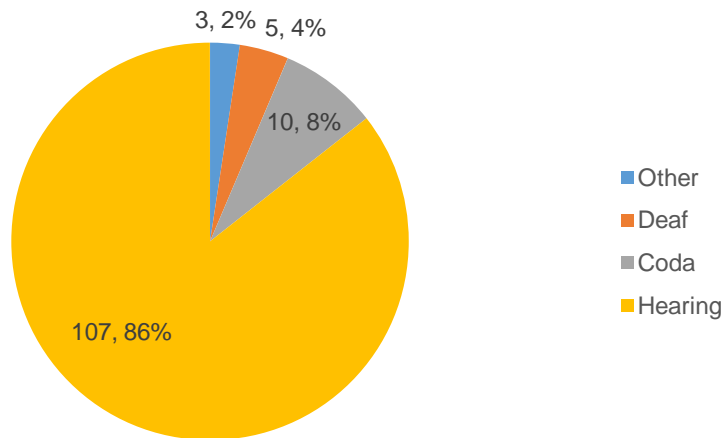


Figure 2. Status in the Interpreting Community

Most survey participants (32%) were located in the South Atlantic division of the United States. Puerto Rico was the least-represented division (1%). Each regional division identified by the U.S. Census was represented in the survey (Figure 3).

U.S. Regional Divisions Represented in the Survey

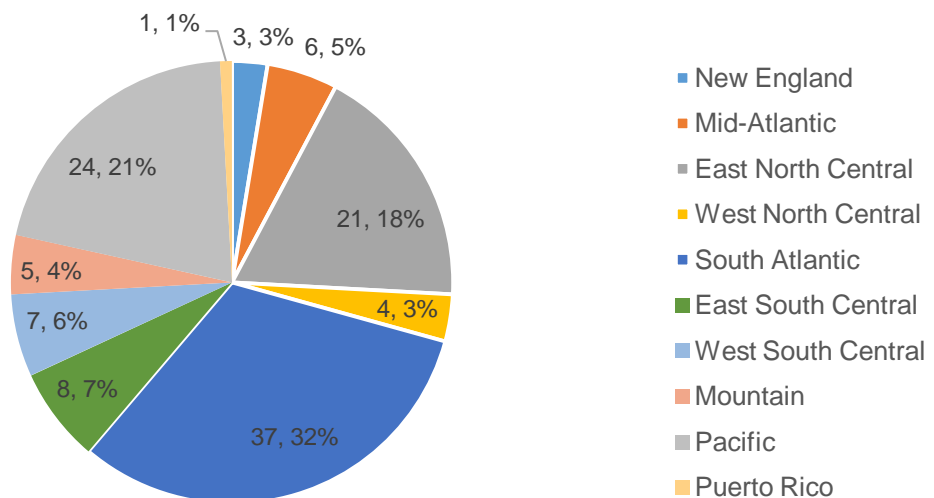


Figure 3. U.S. Regional Divisions Represented in the Survey

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**Interviews.** The final phase of data collection included three interviews.

Interview one was with an interpreter who identifies as African American/Black, is in her fifties, and, at the time of the interview, resided in the East North Central division of the United States. This interview helped to further inform the interpretation of the survey in phase two. Interview two was with an interpreter who identifies as Okinawan American/Asian American, is in her thirties, and at the time of the interview resided in the Pacific division of the United States. Interview three was with an interpreter who identifies as Latina/Mexican American, is in her thirties, and at the time of the interview resided in the West South Central division of the United States. These final two interviews allowed me to explore whether interpreters from other traditionally marginalized backgrounds also had similar experiences to those of African American/Black interpreters.

### **Data Collection**

**Focus groups.** Focus group one was conducted face-to-face in a college classroom setting on August 30, 2014. This group consisted of African American/Black Deaf consumers of interpreting services, and therefore, it was reasonable to conduct this session in ASL. Participants were recruited through a combination of snowball sampling and convenience sampling based on location. For this focus group, an ASL version of the call for participants was signed by an ASL-fluent Deaf person. The call went out through email and online forums, such as the Facebook page of the Bay Area Black Deaf Advocates and to the email list of one northern California interpreter referral agency. Focus group participants signed consent forms prior to data collection. To assist in the

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accurate preservation of data, the focus group session was video recorded, and an ASL-fluent Deaf person was present who assisted in taking notes and aided in the analysis and translation of the transcript.

Focus group two consisted of African American/Black signed language interpreters. All participants in this session were hearing and so the session was conducted in English. One participant was unable to connect their microphone and their responses were given in ASL and translated into English for the transcript. The group was hosted online using FUZE, a video conferencing and online meeting platform, on September 27, 2014. The online platform allowed for data collection from a more regionally diverse sample. The call for focus group participants went out through various email lists and online forums, such as the Facebook page of the National Alliance of Black Interpreters, Inc. and the Interpreters and Translators of Color email list. The focus group session was recorded and all focus group participants signed consent forms prior to data collection.

Focus group three consisted of African American/Black signed language interpreters. All the participants in this focus group were hearing and the session was conducted in English. The group met face-to-face in a college classroom setting on October 11, 2014. Participants were recruited through a combination of snowball sampling and convenience sampling based on location. The call for focus group participants went out through various online forums, such as the Facebook pages of the Sacramento Valley Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf and the Northern California Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. The session was video recorded and all focus group

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participants signed consent forms prior to data collection. (The consent forms and focus group questions are found in Appendix A.)

**Survey.** Following the focus group sessions, a large-scale survey was disseminated online for three weeks between October 11, 2014 and November 2, 2014 (see Appendix B for survey questions). Survey participants were recruited using a snowball sampling technique. The survey was administered using Google Forms and distributed through various professional networks' email lists and Facebook groups. The survey collected demographic data in addition to attitudinal-based data regarding the respondents' experience during their IPPs and in the field as a working signed language interpreter. Because not all interpreters' entry into the field comes by way of an interpreter preparation program, participants were asked if they attended an interpreter preparation program. Twenty-six percent of survey respondents did not attend a formal interpreter preparation program. They were routed to the next applicable set of questions based on their response.

**Interviews.** Three one-on-one interviews were conducted. All interviewees were hearing. Two of the interviews were conducted in English. One interview was conducted in ASL and translated into English. One interviewee was selected at random from those who volunteered their contact information for follow up during the second phase of data collection. The remaining two interviewees were outside of the target population for this research; they were acquaintances of mine. Because of my previous acquaintance with these two participants, I found that our shared experiences allowed them to trust and feel comfortable with the interview process, even though I do not share their same racial or ethnic backgrounds. The selection of acquaintances may seem uncommon but, in fact, "in

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ethnographic studies, where the researcher is a member of the community she or he is studying, respondents may even be a part of the interviewer's own social circle" (Warren, 2001, p. 88). These final two interviewees were selected to investigate what potential commonalities exist in the experiences of interpreters from other marginalized groups.

### **Data Analysis**

Focus group and interview data were analyzed by first creating a transcript of each of the sessions. When necessary, focus group data were translated from ASL to English with the help of study participants and an ASL fluent Deaf person. As Poland (2001) described, "Making data available in textual form for subsequent coding and analysis is widespread in qualitative research" (p. 629). Upon completion, focus group and interview transcripts were uploaded into NVivo, a software program for qualitative data analysis that expedites coding and categorization based on theme. Survey data from Google Forms were downloaded into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and the resulting dataset was also uploaded into NVivo.

For each transcript, and within the dataset, a systematic analysis took place whereby I went through a process of open coding, followed by axial coding. The generated codes were categorized into themes. The number of entries in each category were counted and descriptive statistics were used to demonstrate the magnitude across themes. Patterns were identified and linked back to the relevant literature with the hope of offering an explanation for the findings. This overall process is aligned with the Stage Model of Qualitative Content Analysis offered by Berg and Lune (2012).

As mentioned previously, a comprehensive study was necessary to help contextualize the situation of African American/Black signed language interpreters

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working in the United States. Acknowledging that this community does not operate in a vacuum but is constantly in contact and interaction with other communities means this study would be incomplete if I were to isolate the community's experience without looking at, and including, the perspectives of other communities. Data from the first focus group and from the two interviews outside of the target population were extracted and assessed, separate from the remaining focus groups, survey, and interview. The extracted data is not of the African American/Black signed language interpreter community, but of peripheral communities that interact with one another and may provide additional insight into the experiences of African American/Black interpreters.

### **Limitations**

The primary limitation of this research was of course, my inability to isolate the experiences study participants had from other intersecting parts of their identity. I cannot say with certainty that the experiences that one might have encountered were solely due to the social constructions of race. For this study, it was important that participants have a space where they could share freely without being challenged to find ways to rationalize away their experience. Likewise, the responses from study participants can help us understand how African American/Black interpreters perceive of cultural competence and how they perceive of the impact cultural competence has had within the field of signed language interpreting. However, to fully assess the impact the lack of cultural competence has had within the field, we would also need to know what the presence of cultural competence within the field looks like.

Another limitation of the study has to do with my recruitment methods and the population of the study participants. Anecdotes from colleagues who had considered



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leaving the field of signed language interpreting were one of the reasons I was interested in this study. The methods used to disseminate and recruit participants for this study however, primarily took advantage of professional organizations and their network of members, making the focus of this study those who are still in the field. Data collection revealed that 25% of survey respondents knew of other African American/Black interpreters who have left the field. Further study could utilize these connections to increase our understanding of their perceptions of the field. To account for this limitation, I hope that the nature of the questions asked and the data collected about the experiences of current African American/Black interpreters in the field will inform our understanding of why others may have chosen not to persist in the field of signed language interpreting, as well as what barriers prevent those considering entering the field from doing so.

### **Contribution**

This research adds to the current body of literature in signed language interpreting studies. Readers of this research will gain a better understanding of the perspectives of African American/Black signed language interpreters. The findings of this research may be useful for IPPs interested in the recruitment and retention of African American/Black signed language interpreters. The implications of this research will also be helpful to practitioners when considering cross-cultural colleague dynamics.

This research also adds to efforts to increase the cultural competence of those who practice in service professions outside of the field of signed language interpreting. Practitioners and educators of those who will be entering service professions may find the implications of this research helpful in informing the educational and professional development practices in their fields. The findings of this research will be of particular

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interest to those in service professions in which, the services provided impact the wellbeing of the client/consumer of services.

## **Chapter 4**

### **FINDINGS**

In this study, I investigate the experiences and perspectives of African American/Black signed language interpreters working in the United States. To provide the reader of this research with a more complete understanding, a brief investigation of the perspectives from peripheral communities has also taken place. In this chapter, first the findings from the African American/Black Deaf consumer focus group will be shared to help establish the need for this study. Next, I will share my findings from the African American/Black signed language interpreters who participated in this study. Subsequently, I will share the findings from two interviews that were conducted with interpreters from other traditionally marginalized groups. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the results of this study, which addresses the ability of IPPs to perform and addresses colleague dynamics within the professional practice of signed language interpreters. Throughout this study, I assigned pseudonyms to the research participants in order to protect their confidentiality.

#### **Presentation of Results: Consumers**

The first focus group, which consisted of African American/Black Deaf consumers of interpreting services, was designed to provide a better understanding of the experiences of African American/Black Deaf consumers with respect to interpreting services. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the first step in analyzing the transcript data was to code the responses from the focus group participants. After analyzing responses, 26 codes were identified during the open coding process. (Refer to Appendix

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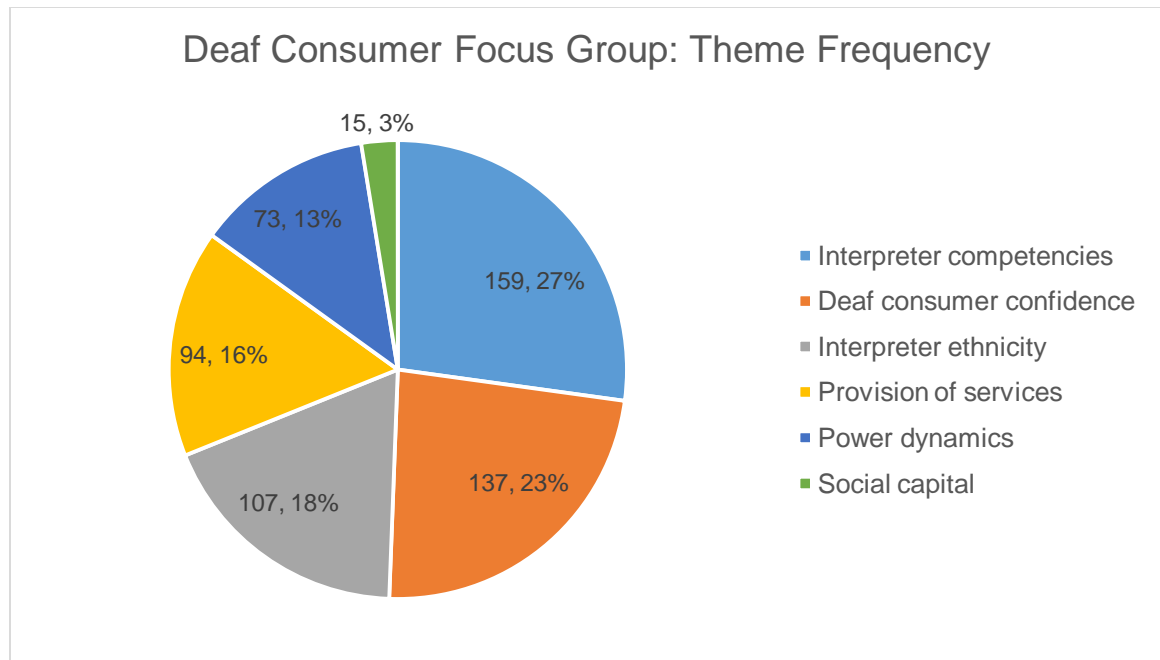
D for the full list of codes and their associated criteria.) Themes began to emerge from the coded data.

Table 1

### *African American/Black Deaf Consumer Focus Group: Themes and Codes*

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Deaf Consumer Confidence</u>	<u>Interpreter Competencies</u>	<u>Interpreter Race</u>	<u>Power Dynamics</u>	<u>Provision of Services</u>	<u>Social Capital</u>
Codes	Consumer Match	Access to Training	Access to Training	Deaf Consumer Lack of Power	Provision of Services Negative	Community Support
	Consumer Non-Match	Cultural Competence	Race Different	Deaf Consumer Power	Provision of Services Positive	Interpreter Isolation
	Deaf Consumer Confidence	Culture Over Skill	Race Same	Hearing Consumer Power		Supply Low
	Deaf Consumer Lack of Confidence	Lack of Cultural Competence	Request Race Same	Interpreter Power		
	Interpreter Initiative	Lack of Linguistic Competence	Witness Distrust	Witness Distrust		
	Interpreter Non-Initiative	Linguistic Competence				

Note that some of the coded data could be categorized under multiple themes. The themes and their relative frequencies are identified below, as shown in Figure 4.



*Figure 4.* Deaf consumer focus group: Theme frequency

It is important to remember, at this point, that this research is focused on African American/Black interpreters. The point of the data collected during the first focus group was to establish the need for this study. In other words, “why do we care about the race and ethnicity of the interpreter, and what impact does this have on the consumer?” I wanted a holistic view that would enable me to know whether the disparate numbers of available African American/Black signed language interpreters in the field had any impact on the African American/Black Deaf community. I ran a matrix coding query within NVivo that allowed me to see how interpreter race played a role when cross-tabulated at different points across the data.

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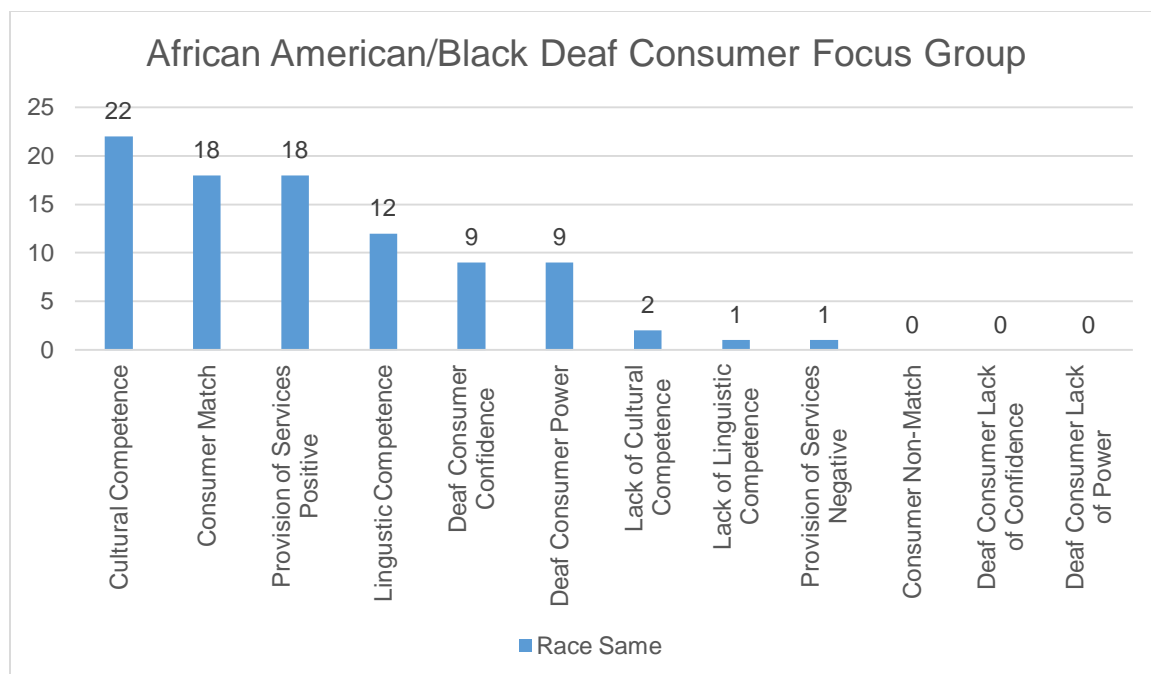


Figure 5. Cross-tabulation of codes intersecting with participant comments regarding interpreters of the same race.

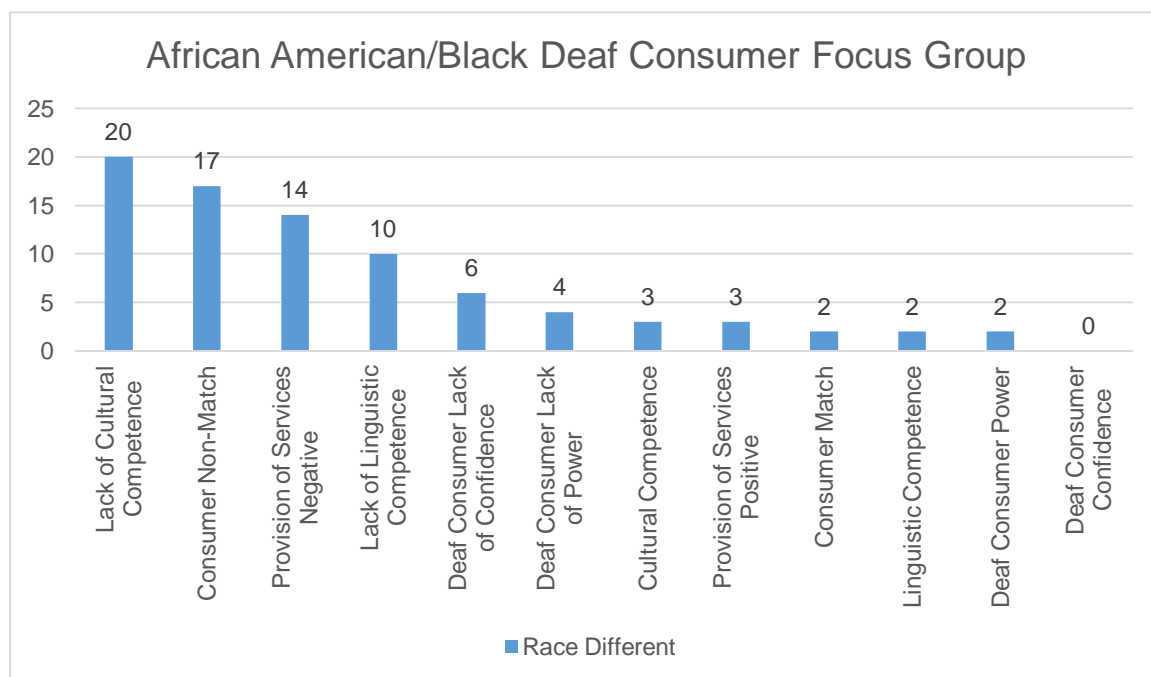


Figure 6. Cross-tabulation of codes intersecting with participant comments regarding interpreters of a different race.

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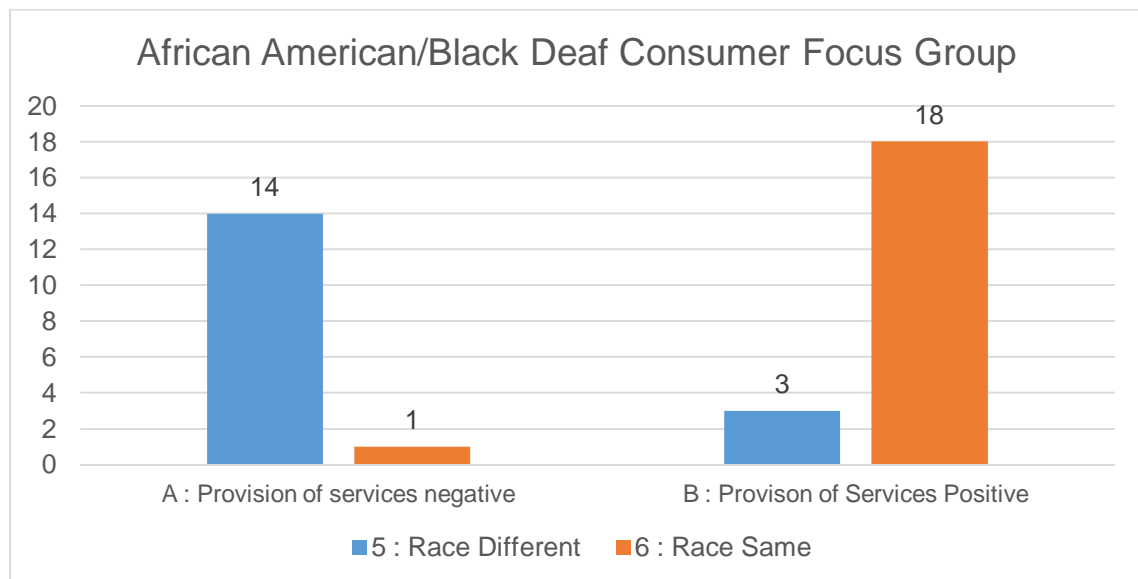
Note Figure 5 shows that when consumers had access to an interpreter who shared their same racial background, they frequently reported feeling as though the interpreter was culturally competent and linguistically competent, resulting in the interpreter being an overall match for the consumer. There was no mention of there being a non-match between consumer and interpreter when the consumer and interpreter shared a similar racial background. Additionally, there was no mention of feeling a lack of confidence or a lack of power when the interpreter shared the same race as the consumer. On the other hand, Figure 6 shows that when the consumer and interpreter did not share the same racial identity, the consumer perceived the interpreter to be lacking in cultural competence and was more likely to feel as though the interpreter was not a match. There was no mention of confidence on the part of the consumers when the interpreter did not share a similar racial background.

Of course, interpreters—regardless of their racial background—can be a match for consumers who are African American/Black. Likewise, interpreters of any racial background can introduce feelings of confidence and power, or a lack thereof. During this focus group session, as indicated in Figure 5 and Figure 6 above, there were no generalizations made by focus group participants expressing that they felt a lack of confidence or power when they had an interpreter of a similar racial background. For example, when probed by another focus group participant who asked if the choice had to be made between an African American/Black interpreter who has marginal linguistic skills and a White interpreter who is linguistically proficient, Billy mentioned, “I’m not saying the Black interpreter will always be better, I’m saying most likely they are better

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prepared for that situation because of their experience and knowing how to navigate within that environment... Typically.”

I further explored how African American/Black consumers perceive the overall provision of services when they have an interpreter who shares their same racial identity. As shown in Figure 5 and Figure 6 respectively, there was a relationship noted between interpreter race and either the positive or negative provision of services. This was most evident when participants responded to questions asking if the qualities and characteristics mentioned as important for interpreters related at all to the interpreter’s background and whether or not they, as an African American/Black Deaf person, felt well represented by the interpreters with whom they worked. (Questions three and five respectively; see Appendix A.)



*Figure 7.* Snapshot of correlation between race and perception of provision of services.

The responses from the participants in the first focus group suggest that the small number of available African American/Black signed language interpreters in the field does have an impact on the African American/Black Deaf community. If we accept that



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signing Deaf community members are part of a linguistic minority (Charrow & Wilbur, 1975; Jones & Pullen, 1992; Lane, 1995) and African American/Blacks are part of a racial minority, it stands to reason that African American/Black Deaf community members experience further marginalization. This is true even in situations where they are supposedly being accommodated, because the interpreter rarely shares their same background and has likely not been trained in a way that strengthens cultural competence or the ability to adapt to the consumer's cultural communication needs.

Though interpreting takes place in a diverse cultural context, the majority of service providers are of White-European descent. Based on the above findings, this means that African American/Black Deaf consumers of interpreting services frequently encounter interpreters who they believe are lacking in terms of cultural and linguistic competence, and they often do not view the interpreters they receive as a good fit. This means that African American/Black Deaf consumers of interpreting services have to spend a lot of time adapting to interpreters unless they are lucky enough to be in situations they perceive to be a good fit. African American/Black Deaf consumers overwhelmingly felt that interpreters who were African American/Black were more culturally competent as practitioners and a better fit. This leads to the need for research that explores the effects of cultural competence in the signed language interpreting profession, and the persistence of African American/Black signed language interpreters in the field, leading to my initial research questions:

1. Do African American/Black interpreters perceive cultural competence to be lacking in the field of signed language interpreting?

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2. If so, what effect does the lack of cultural competence among colleagues and educators have on African American/Black interpreters' persistence in the field of signed language interpreting?

### **Presentation of Results: African American/Black Interpreters**

My appraisal of the coded data collected from the African American/Black interpreters who participated in this study resulted in more than 40 codes being generated across four themes. Twenty-nine percent of the coded data fell under the category of *social capital* (1276 references); 26% was placed into the category of *cultural competence* (1165 references); 23% of the data were categorized under *systems of oppression* (1010 references); and the final 22% of data fell into the category of *critical mass*, a subset of social capital, that was large enough (1004 references) to warrant its own category.

I was expecting that one of the themes would be aversive racism, based on the literature review. Rather, during the focus group sessions, multiple participants commented on experiences of overt racism directed towards themselves or colleagues. Questions regarding overt racism were added to the survey and included during the one-on-one interviews. Aversive racism has more to do with subtle instances of racism, which are often unintentional. This constituted a portion of the collected data; however, instances of overt racism and other forms of perceived discrimination, attitudes, and behaviors that could be linked at a broader level with systems of oppression were sorted together. The final selection of themes and their criteria is included in Table 2 below.

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Table 2

### *African American/Black Interpreters: Themes and Criteria*

<u>Categories (Themes)</u>	<u>Criteria</u>
Social capital (1276 references, 29%)	Data were sorted into this category when the subject referred to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationships with colleagues, consumers, agency owners, educators, and others, which had either a positive or negative impact on their network ties.</li> </ul>
Cultural competence (1165 references, 26%)	Data were sorted into this category when the subject referred to colleagues, consumers, and others' ability/inability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognize that they work in multi-cultural settings, <i>not</i> bi-cultural (Deaf/hearing) settings.</li> <li>Successfully navigate cross-cultural situations.</li> </ul>
Systems of oppression (1010 references, 23%)	Data were sorted into this category when the subject referred to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Subtle or overt instances of racism at individual or institutional levels.</li> <li>Feelings of inferiority, or overcoming feelings of inferiority.</li> <li>Power, or a lack of power associated with dissonance between beliefs/values, and actions due to the dominant culture's expectations.</li> <li>Access, or a lack of access to professional development opportunities, social groups or services based on race.</li> </ul>
Critical mass (1004 references, 22%)	Data were sorted into this category when the subject referred to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access, or a lack of access to African American/Black colleagues, consumers, agency owners, educators, and others, within their social circles.</li> </ul>

In the initial coding of data, I did not label responses from research participants using the themes shown in Table 2. Instead, each response was analyzed for its content, and codes were identified. The complete list of codes and their associated criteria are included in Appendix E. Once data collection was complete, I used the literature review as a guide to complete the axial coding process.

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Although research participants most frequently referred to *social capital*, followed by *cultural competence*, and then *critical mass* and *systems of oppression*, in almost every instance the coded data could be categorized under multiple themes. This is not surprising considering the relatedness between these ideas as shown in the literature review. The themes and their relative frequencies are listed below in Figure 7.

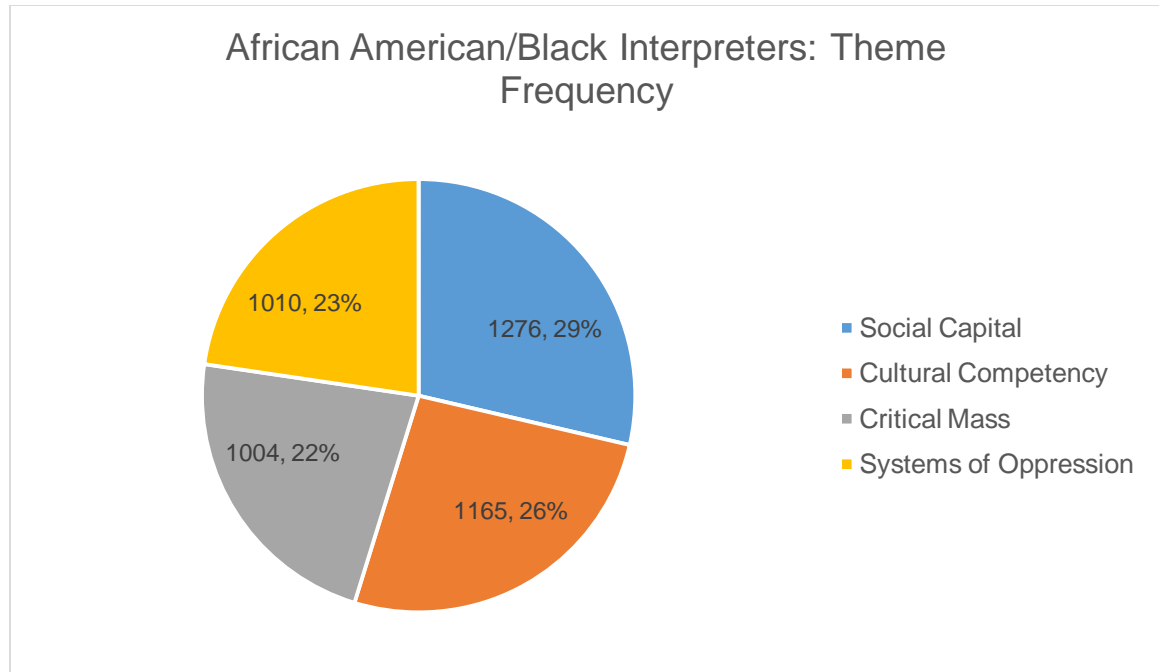


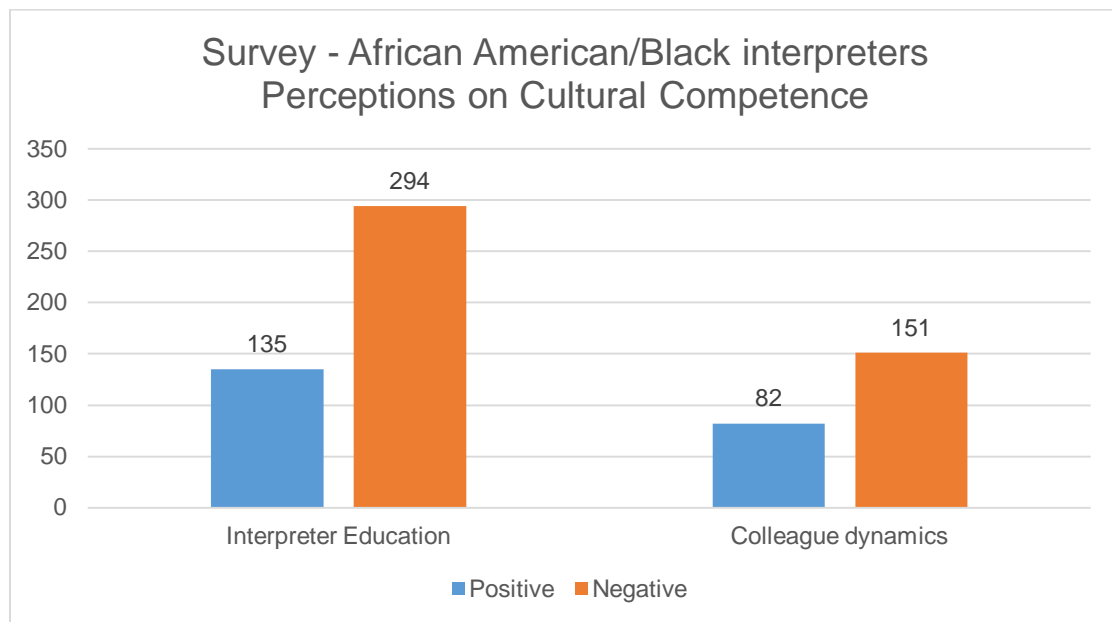
Figure 8. African American/Black Interpreters: Theme Frequency

### Research Question #1

To understand whether African American/Black interpreters perceive cultural competence to be lacking among practitioners in the field, data that were categorized under this theme were then analyzed for either positive or negative responses from research participants. Of the 1165 references to cultural competence, 662 came from survey respondents. When respondents selected “A great deal,” “A lot,” “A moderate amount,” “Extremely effective,” “Quite effective,” or “Moderately effective” in response

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to survey questions addressing time spent discussing issues of multiculturalism or cultural competence, or in response to survey questions addressing the effectiveness of educators when broaching such topics, those responses were labeled as positive. When respondents selected “A little,” “None at all,” “Slightly effective,” “Not at all effective,” or “N/A” in response to survey questions addressing time spent discussing issues of multiculturalism or cultural competence, or in response to survey questions addressing the effectiveness of educators when broaching such topics, those responses were labeled as negative. In total, 445 responses indicated African American/Black interpreters felt cultural competence was lacking in their IPPs and among colleagues. There were 217 responses that indicated respondents had positive experiences during their interpreter training and during their interactions with colleagues.

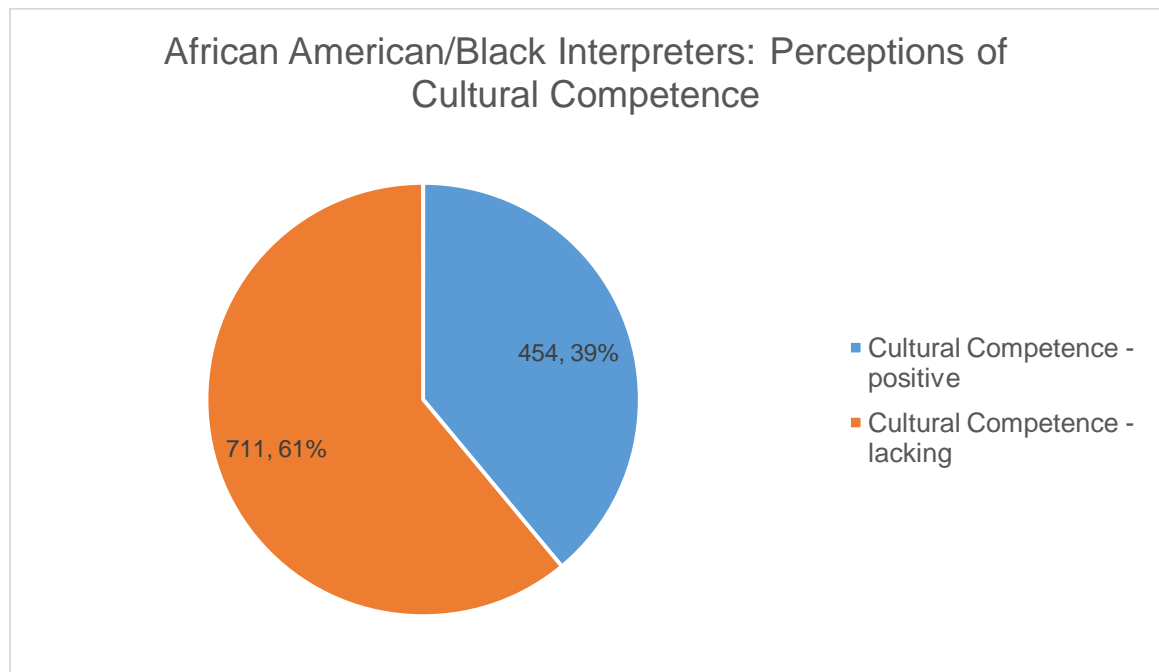


*Figure 9.* Survey - African American/Black interpreters Perceptions on Cultural Competence

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Of the 1165 references to cultural competence, 503 came from focus group and interview participants who corroborated the findings from the survey. There were a total of 266 responses indicating focus group and interview participants had negative views on the cultural competence of interpreters in the field. Of these, 155 related to the lack of cultural competence in IPPs, and 111 related to interactions with colleagues who did not demonstrate culturally competent behaviors or attitudes. The remaining 237 responses indicated favorable views on cultural competence in the field. There were 100 positive experiences related to cultural competence for African American/Black interpreters in their IPPs and 137 related to favorable interactions with colleagues who demonstrated culturally competent behavior while in the field (Figure 8).

Note that in each of the above instances, the majority of responses (711 in total) indicate a perceived lack of cultural competence. The majority of those (449 in total) were related to experiences with faculty and students during one's interpreter training.



*Figure 10.* African American/Black Interpreters: Perceptions of Cultural Competence

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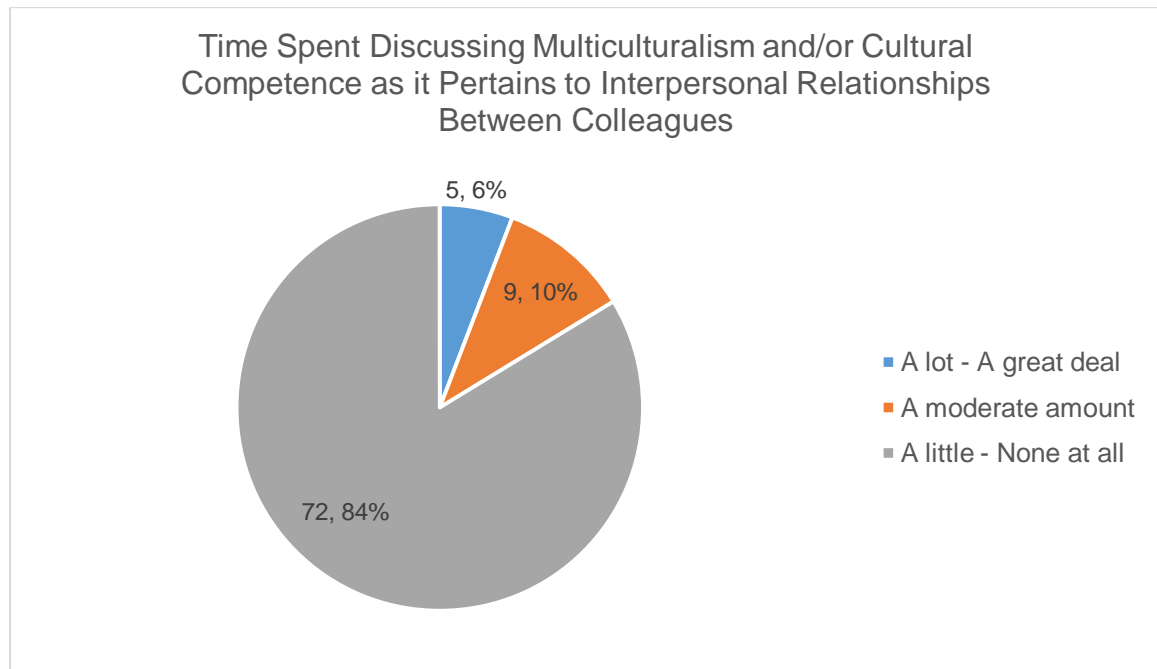
Figure 9 above shows a 61/39 percent split, which does show that African American/Black interpreters perceive cultural competence to be lacking in the field overall, yet these numbers alone do not capture the experiences that were shared by research participants. Since the majority of comments relating to cultural competence had to do with research participants' experiences when going through their IPPs, I decided to explore this more closely.

With the professionalization of the field of signed language interpreting (Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2004), many interpreters now enter the field by way of training programs. As evidenced by Guy-Walls (2007), it stands to reason that if training programs broach subjects of multiculturalism, they will likely produce more culturally competent practitioners. Yet, 12 of the 13 focus group and interview participants reported having little to no discussion in their IPPs about multiculturalism and/or cultural competence. Participants reported that their programs made broad generalizations about their cultures, expected them to be the experts on their cultures, and stated that their programs looked superficially at racial issues and no other historical contexts. Overwhelmingly, though, the vast majority of participants shared that their programs did not broach these subjects at all.

The 86 survey respondents who attended IPPs confirmed these sentiments. One respondent mentioned, "My program was excellent in the education of interpreters portion, but lousy with multicultural issues." Another respondent helped to contextualize the data by explaining, "We always talked about multiculturalism/cultural competence in regards to working with the Deaf community. We discussed the idea of colleague

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relationships very little if at all, so diving into that aspect of multiculturalism was never really an option.”

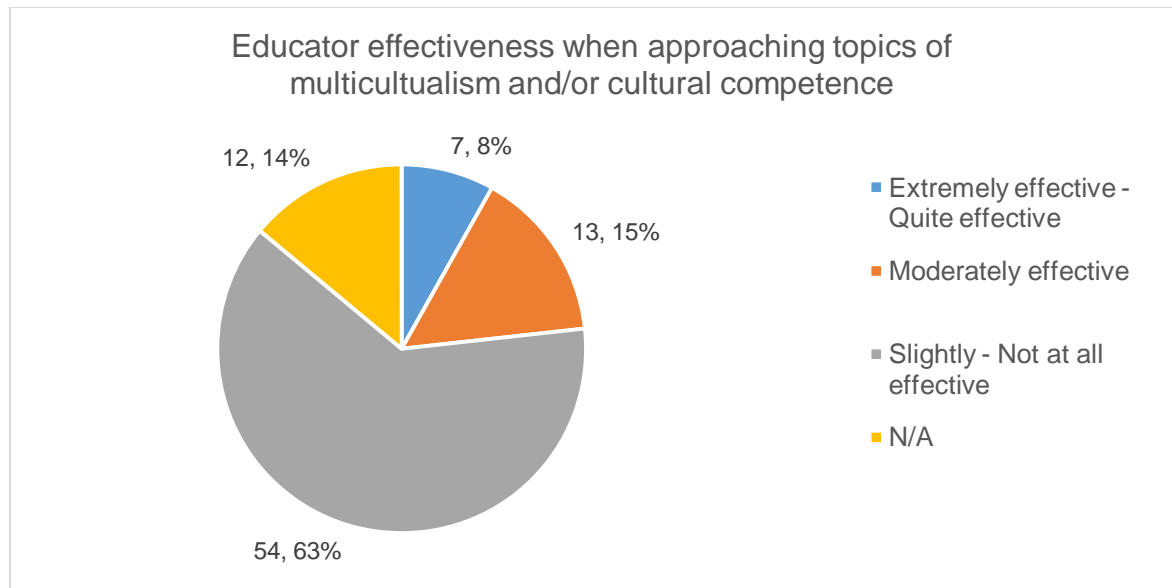


*Figure 11.* IEP discussions of cultural competence

As one survey respondent stated, “Instructors’ presentation of information dealt only with DEAFNESS as a cultural dynamic and NO OTHER ETHNICITY. All courses were taught from a Caucasian, Deaf-educated perspective and Euro-centric perspective.” This aligns with survey participants’ feelings of effectiveness towards their educators when approaching topics of multiculturalism and cultural competence. Twelve participants felt they could not judge the effectiveness of their educators because these topics were not broached, while the majority (63%) stated that their educators were slightly to not at all effective in this area.



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*Figure 12.* Educator effectiveness when approaching topics of multiculturalism and/or cultural competence

In the focus group, in the interview, and in response to open-ended survey questions, when a lack of cultural competence was mentioned, participants often held negative feelings towards their colleagues. Specifically, there was a relationship noted between the lack of cultural competence in the field and interpreters who come from the dominant culture. In these instances, African American/Black interpreters were more likely to experience aversive racism from their colleagues. Jeffrey provided one example of the subtle actions that are experienced from colleagues and how these experiences can lead to negative colleague dynamics.

Similar to what Vanessa was saying, often times it is race that pops up with our colleagues. There's been a couple of instances where I was teamed at an agency to work with some consumers and so I go in and a colleague of mine who is Caucasian, she comes in and she says to me, "Jeffrey, I don't think that you

should go in and interpret.” So, I ask her, “Why? Tell me why, because you are making that estimation that I shouldn’t go in, if you let me know why then I can decide whether or not it is a good move.” So she says, “Well I can’t tell you.” So I say, “Then why did you bring it up? If you can’t tell me why I’m not a good fit for this consumer, then what are you bringing it up for?” Step out of the way! So, I kindly ask her to step out of the way and I walk out into the room.

The consumer is Deaf and Blind, and when I walked over and sat down, the first word out of her mouth was, “Oh, you’re a nigger?” And, so my response is, “Well, do you want this nigger to interpret for you?” And she said, “Uh...ok, sure.” So I ended up interpreting for her and then afterwards I say, “So, is the nigger interpreting good? To your satisfaction?” She says, “Yes, you are a very good interpreter. Thank you very much.” I said, “Ok, have a nice day.”

So that situation... it bothered me that my colleague didn’t have the decency to tell me why she felt I wasn’t appropriate, and she could have told me why. And, not trusting that I am professional enough, and that I know how to handle myself in any given situation going in, and respecting me enough as a colleague... that I know what to do.

In Jeffrey’s situation above, not only did he experience overtly racist comments from the consumer with whom he was working, but he also experienced a more subtle instance of racism from his colleague that was likely unintentional, but nevertheless had a significant impact. The colleagues’ failure to share this information made her complicit in the racist behaviors of the consumer. Jeffrey felt that a more appropriate response in this situation would have been for the interpreter to share why she felt he should not go into

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this situation. By not telling him, she denied him information that would allow him to make a decision about whether or not to stay on the assignment, and he felt as though she did not respect him enough to engage in such a dialogue.

Jeffrey was one of the more confident focus group members of those who participated in this research project. He often confronted issues of racism that he experienced in ways that were in line with his values. In other situations, research participants expressed feelings of dissonance between their actual actions and how they would respond if they were not “on the job.” For example, Vanessa shared this with the group:

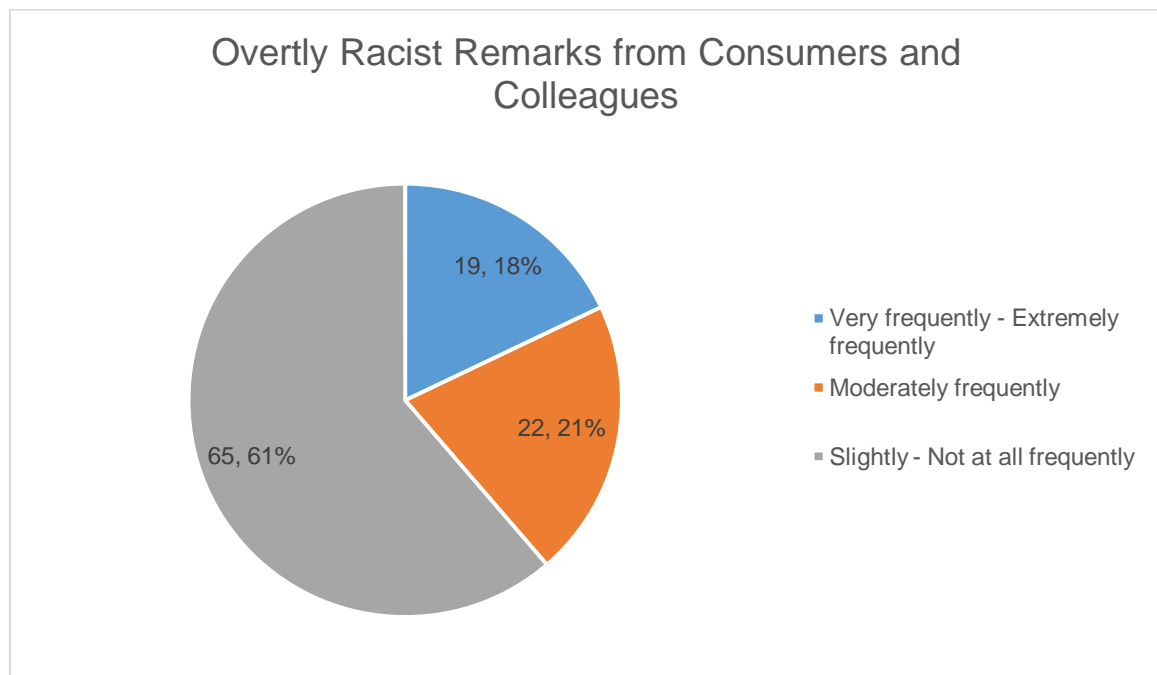
The most challenging thing for me is when I have to deal with issues of discrimination. When I go into a setting... there was one situation where I was interpreting for this client and they asked me if I was the ‘n’ word and I said, “No, I’m your interpreter.” And they kept telling me, “No, you’re Black.” And I was like, “I am your interpreter,” and they go, “Did you know that Black people never take baths, that’s why your hair is curly.” I was trying to be as professional as I could so instead of getting angry and saying, “You know what...!” I was trying to stay within my role. Then one of the family members came in, and then went out, and told them to get rid of me. So, when you walk away from a situation like that it makes me feel...it made me feel, sad. And then I started to wonder if I was good enough and then I had to do some self-talk. I usually do that.

Nine of the 13 (69%) focus group and interview participants shared at least one example of having to deal with overtly racist remarks from consumers and colleagues.

All 13 (100%) shared experiences that they felt could be associated with discriminatory

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behaviors and practices from consumers and colleagues. Survey respondents corroborated these findings. Sixty-one percent felt that they had experienced overt instances of racism directed towards them while on the job slightly to not at all frequently. Twenty-one percent of participants felt they had experienced overt instances of racism moderately frequently, and 18% stated they experienced overt racism very to extremely frequently while on the job.



*Figure 13. Overtly Racist Remarks from Consumers and Colleagues*

Some participants also shared that they had witnessed racist remarks directed towards colleagues while on the job. More often, though, participants noted experiences that were subtle in nature. One survey respondent captured this by stating, “Nothing is ever overt, people are too smart for that...or too ‘fair’ to be blatantly racist/prejudice ... it’s the microaggressions and the covert actions that I see/experience.” Microaggressions and covert actions describe aversive racism. Another survey respondent shared this:

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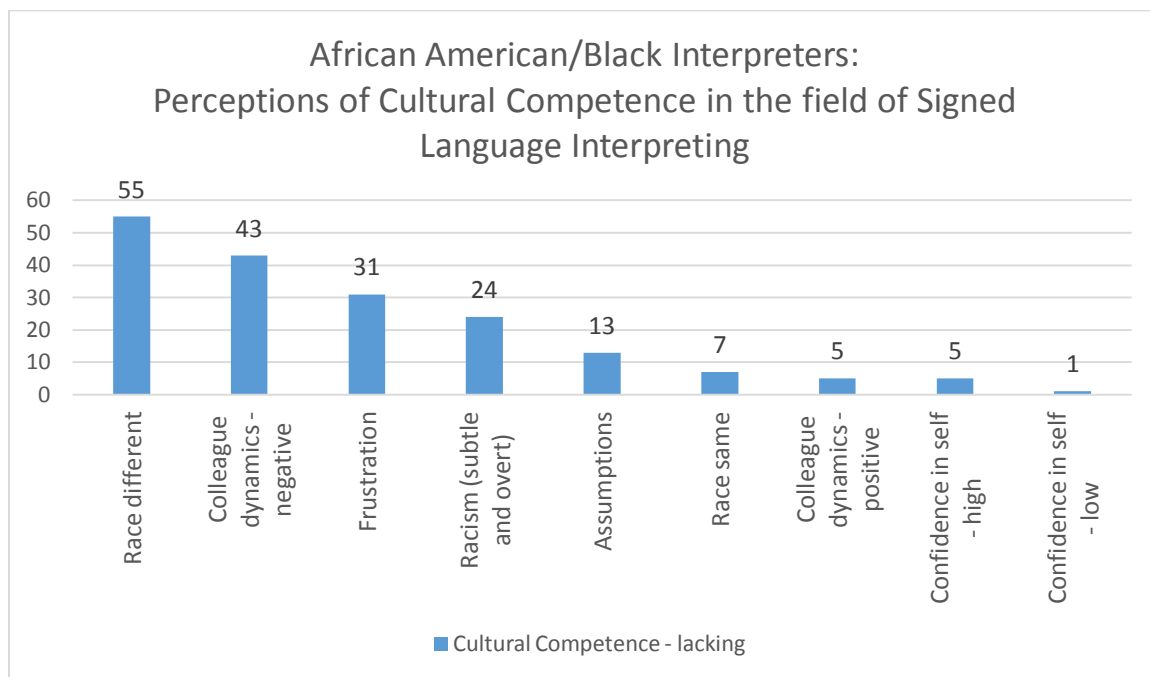
African American/Black interpreters all have a unique struggle (my opinion), the biggest issue is that non-African American/Black peers don't understand their cultural biases and seem afraid to address the issue. Ignorance, avoidance, or because it doesn't concern them...whatever the reason, the African American/Black interpreter is either angry (because they address the elephant in the room), or they are emotionally frustrated (because they constantly have to look the other way). Remember, we work in a field that requires you to be included in the collective...so more times than I'd like to admit, I turn the other cheek.

Not only does the above response address cultural competence, but it also addresses aversive racism and colleague dynamics, which have an impact on the interpreters' social capital in the field. Based on the above response from this survey respondent, cultural competence, then, means being willing to engage in potentially uncomfortable dialogues that address issues of race and begin to unpack one's cultural biases. Demonstrating cultural competence also means acknowledging and validating the anger or emotional frustration the African American/Black interpreter might have because of the uniqueness of their struggle, instead of further stigmatizing them for it.

Other participants shared that they confronted assumptions about "speaking Black," were commended for their work when interpreting a "so-called Black show by Deaf people and interpreters alike, then never ever called to interpret anything that wasn't a Black show," and that "much of the discrimination is evidenced in the practice of agencies and the types/levels of jobs we are chosen to fill, despite credentials and demonstrated levels of competence." African American/Black interpreters are often

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confronted with assumptions associated with their race. These assumptions about how they speak, how they behave, or the depth of their knowledge as it pertains to African American/Black culture and history often circumscribe the types of jobs they are passed over for and the jobs that they are asked to do.



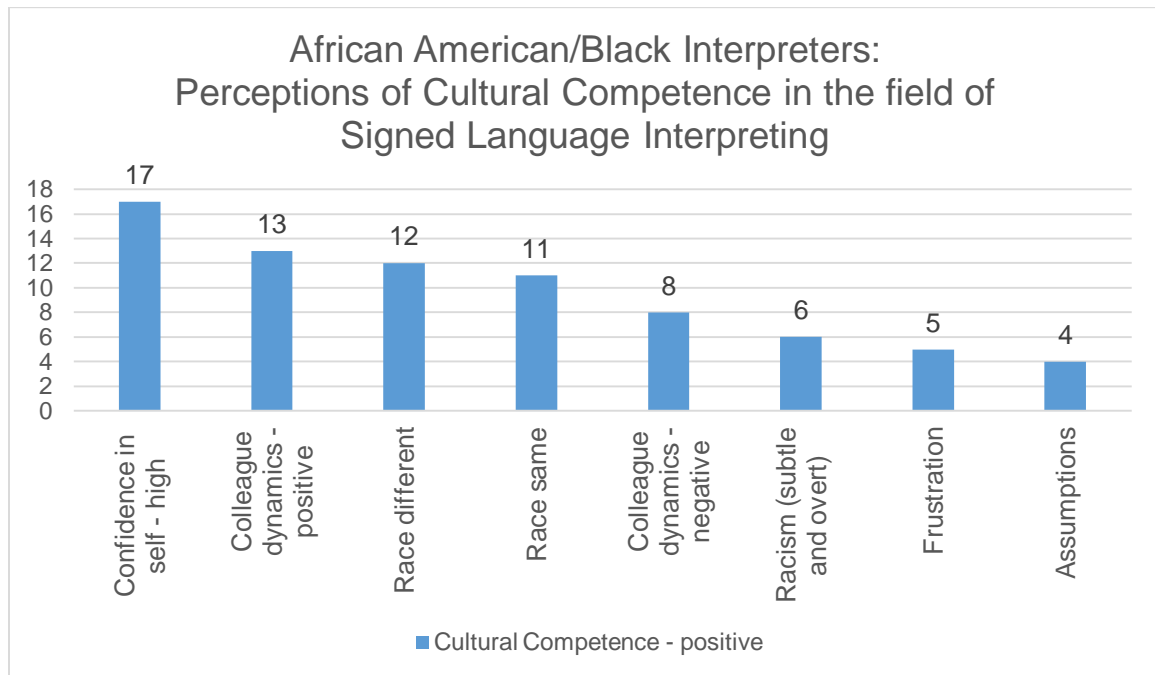
*Figure 14.* African American/Black Interpreters: Perceptions of Cultural Competence in the field of Signed Language Interpreting

Overall, research participants reported frequently having to confront assumptions about their skill or behavior, which in turn led to frustration. Remarks indicating high levels of self-confidence were reported when working among culturally competent practitioners regardless of their race or ethnicity. In contrast, there was only one mention of low self-confidence, which could be seen in the earlier statement from Vanessa, who mentioned questioning herself. Low self-confidence was not reported, and confronting

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assumptions was reported less, when working among culturally competent practitioners.

Low self-confidence and frustration were linked to comments of systems of oppression.



*Figure 15.* African American/Black Interpreters: Perceptions of Cultural Competence in the field of Signed Language Interpreting

When participants felt as though their colleagues were culturally competent practitioners, they reported more positive feelings. They emphasized that a lack of cultural competence was more likely when interpreters were from the dominant majority culture. Research participants made a few comments that suggested that having colleagues who were also African American/Black increased the likelihood that the provision of services would be carried out in a more culturally competent manner, an inference to critical mass. Working alongside African American/Black interpreters has the potential to help other practitioners to become more culturally competent as well. Working in close proximity to interpreters from diverse backgrounds means that

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interpreters are likely to have their assumptions about the behaviors associated with that racial or ethnic group challenged. Working regularly in proximity with interpreters from diverse backgrounds grants interpreters more opportunities to learn from and learn about people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

One example of this, which also shows how cultural competence is related to systems of oppression, was noted during the second focus group when Leslie shared this experience with the group:

I think as people of color we have an understanding about community and a respect and shared experience. I believe we are placed into situations that may be difficult to handle but as people of color we have always had to figure out how to adjust to and accommodate the settings that we go into, and I think we bring that with us as interpreters in the job. We have heart, we have a community, we have an understanding, and some people might say that there are people who are White who have grown up in poverty and in bad situations, and I agree that this is true. But, what we have is unique because we have a different kind of shared experience and shared struggle that has been passed down, and that experience and society's perspective of who we are as being less than...I believe that as interpreters, all of this influences us and how we behave.

So for example I went to a conference and I was with another interpreter who was a Black male. We were standing at a table, it was a formal gathering, and a woman came over and approached him and said that they had run out of food and needed more. I was awe struck, but he responded very nicely and said, "Oh well if that is the case you should probably go get someone to bring you



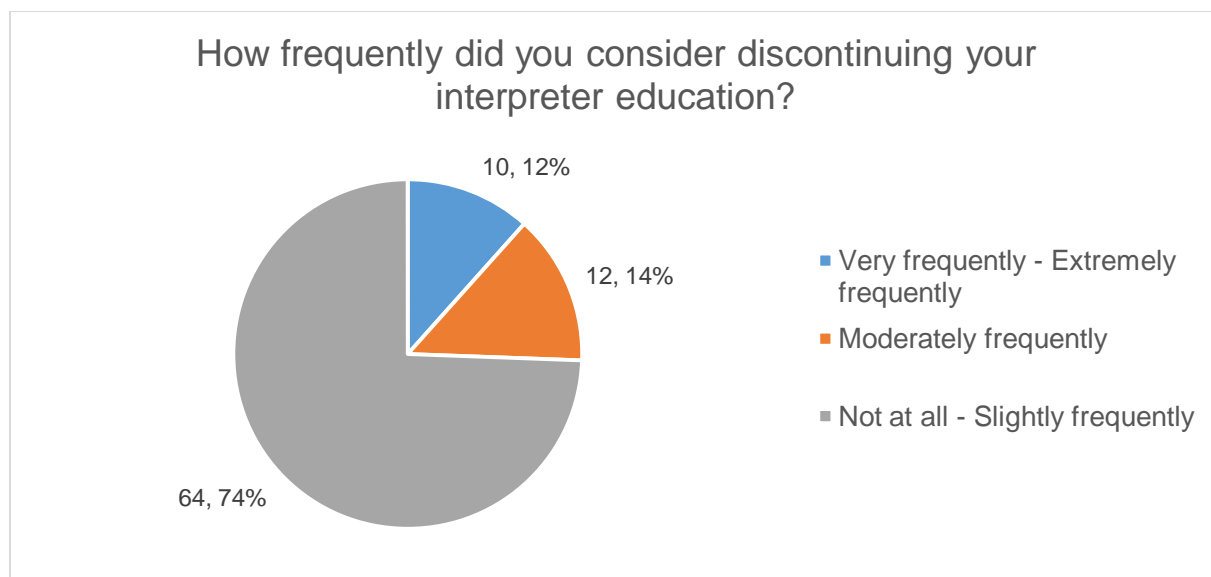
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some more food.” She responded and said, “Okay”, but she didn’t catch on that he didn’t work there. I thought he handled that so well, but he had been in that situation so many times that he knew how to handle it as a Black male interpreter. I believe that as Black interpreters we have these lived experiences and so going into these situations we’ve learned from our own experiences how to deal with them and be professional at the same time.

Overall, these responses indicate that African American/Black interpreters begin dealing with issues ranging from overt racism to a lack of cultural competence from the time that they enter their interpreter training programs, and if they continue on to graduation, these issues remain present once they enter into the field of interpreting.

### **Research Question #2**

It is clear that the African American/Black interpreters who participated in this study perceive cultural competence to be lacking within the field of signed language interpreting. This prompts the second research question: What effect does the lack of cultural competence among colleagues and educators have on African American/Black interpreter’s persistence in the field of signed language interpreting? As mentioned previously, one of the limitations of this study was my inability to follow up with interpreters who have since left the field. Recognizing the challenges this presents, I decided to ask the survey respondents who did attend IPPs how frequently they considered discontinuing their own interpreter education.



*Figure 16.* How frequently did you consider discontinuing your interpreter education?

Of the 13 focus group and interview participants, 10 attended IPPs. They were not directly asked how frequently they considered discontinuing their education. However, Sharon did share in detail her experiences during her IPP and mentioned that she did frequently consider leaving her program. Two others mentioned they had thoughts of leaving, but frequency was not determined. It is reasonable that the majority of the interpreters in this study did not frequently consider discontinuing their interpreter education since they all continue to practice in the field. Bearing in mind the literature review, I decided to see if any commonalities in experience existed between the interpreters in this study in terms of social capital.

Of the references to social capital, 636 of the 1276 were from survey respondents. Survey participants were asked how easily they developed close relationships with classmates and colleagues, how well those relationships were maintained, and if they held any positions of leadership such as being mentors or educators in the field. To understand the impact of social capital on African American/Black interpreters, when respondents

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selected “Extremely easy,” “Quite easy,” or “Moderately easy,” or if they indicated that they held positions of leadership, their responses were sorted under the sub-category of *social capital – wealth*. When respondents selected “Slightly easy,” “Not at all easy,” or if they indicated that they did not hold positions of leadership, their responses were sorted under the sub-category of *social capital – lacking*. Just over half (56%) of the responses from survey participants indicated that respondents had a wealth of social capital.

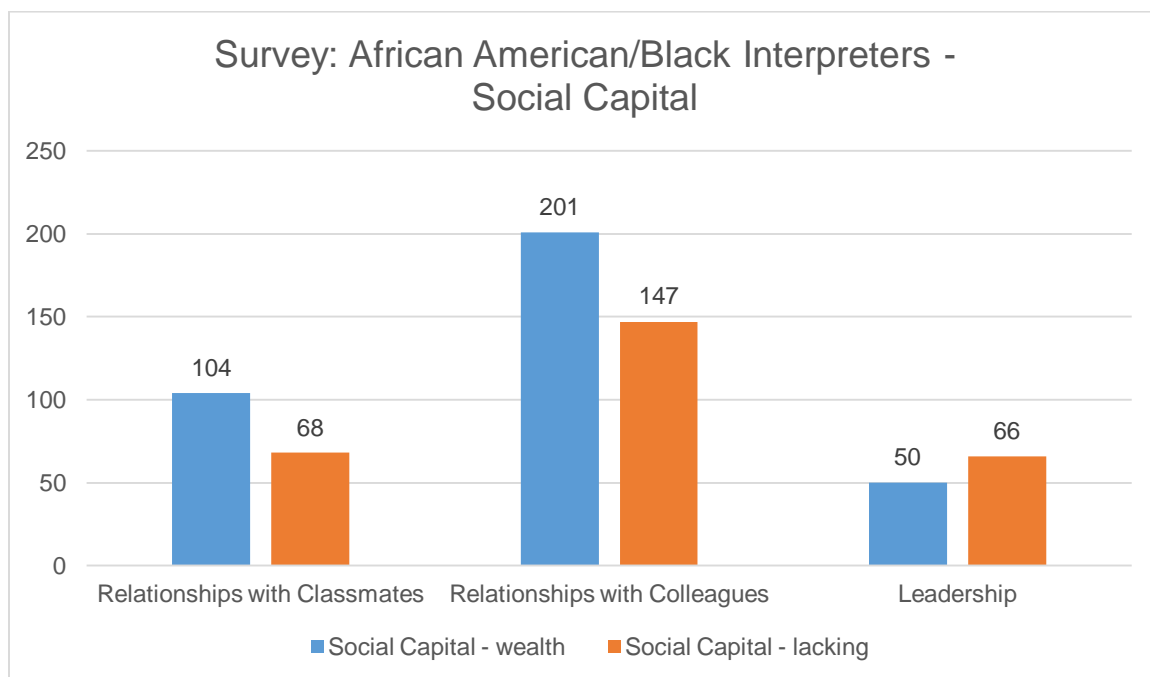
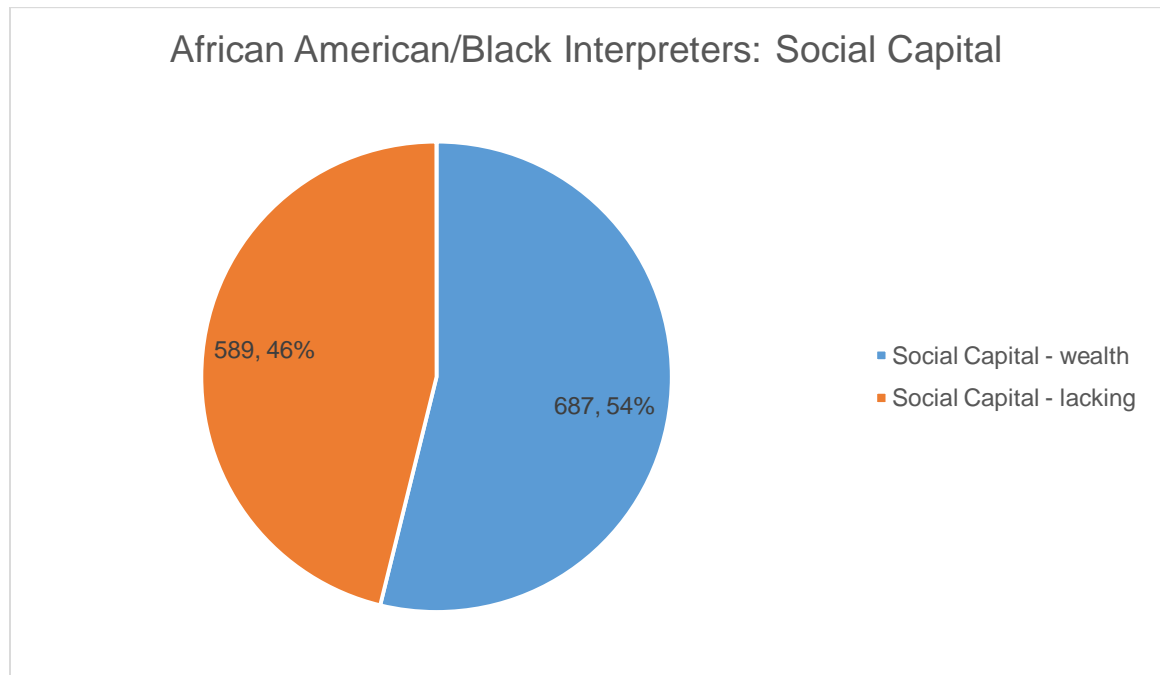


Figure 17. African American/Black Interpreters - Social Capital

The remaining 640 references to social capital came from focus group and interview participants. In addition to relationships with classmates and colleagues, organizational support, community based training, access to role models, consumer confidence, and working in trilingual and religious settings were additional criteria that impacted one’s social capital. Again, just over half (52%) of the responses recorded that research participants did in fact have a wealth of social capital. In total 687 responses

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(54%) indicated a wealth of social capital, while 589 responses (46%) indicated a lack of social capital.



*Figure 18.* African American/Black Interpreters: Social Capital

It seems that the participants in this study, all of whom remain in the field, have a wealth of social capital. Although given how close the numbers are in these results, the findings are not clear. To further understand these findings, I took a closer look at the data and found that feeling as though one was connected to others within their community was the factor that impacted African American/Black interpreters' social capital the most.

Study participants mentioned feeling welcomed among Black Deaf communities, and creating spaces with other African American/Black interpreters in the form of task forces or other social groups that allowed them to connect and be themselves. Having access to organizations such as the National Black Deaf Advocates and the National

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Alliance of Black Interpreters were mentioned as a way to connect and as a way to grow professionally among peers. For a couple of the participants in this study who were trilingual, Mano a Mano was also recognized for creating that sense of community among colleagues. When these organizations come together for their biennial conferences, they bring a critical mass of interpreters from marginalized racial groups together. Often, the connections made during these conferences are maintained once the interpreters return back home. During the focus groups, I found it interesting that several participants who indicated having a wealth of social capital did not have a huge network of interpreters close to home, but they did have access to a network of interpreters, even if they were scattered across the country.

These findings lead us to another aspect of social capital: critical mass. As mentioned earlier, the 2007 study done by Hagedorn et al. emphasizes that increased aspirations exist when a critical mass is present. I decided to see how frequently interpreters in this study worked with colleagues who also identify as African American/Black.

A majority of the references to critical mass (662 of the 1004 references) came from survey respondents. I looked at critical mass during the interpreters' education and once they were inducted into the field. At the time of this study, I did not know the class size for the research participants, so finding out the ratio of African American/Black classmates to other students was not possible. If respondents indicated the presence of four or more African American/Black classmates, or if they indicated having any educators, guest presenters, or mentors who were African American/Black, their responses were labeled as *critical mass - wealth*. When respondents indicated the

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presence of three or fewer African American/Black classmates, or if they indicated having no educators, guest presenters, or mentors who were African American/Black, their responses were labeled as *critical mass – lacking*. Smaller class sizes would change the significance of these numbers.

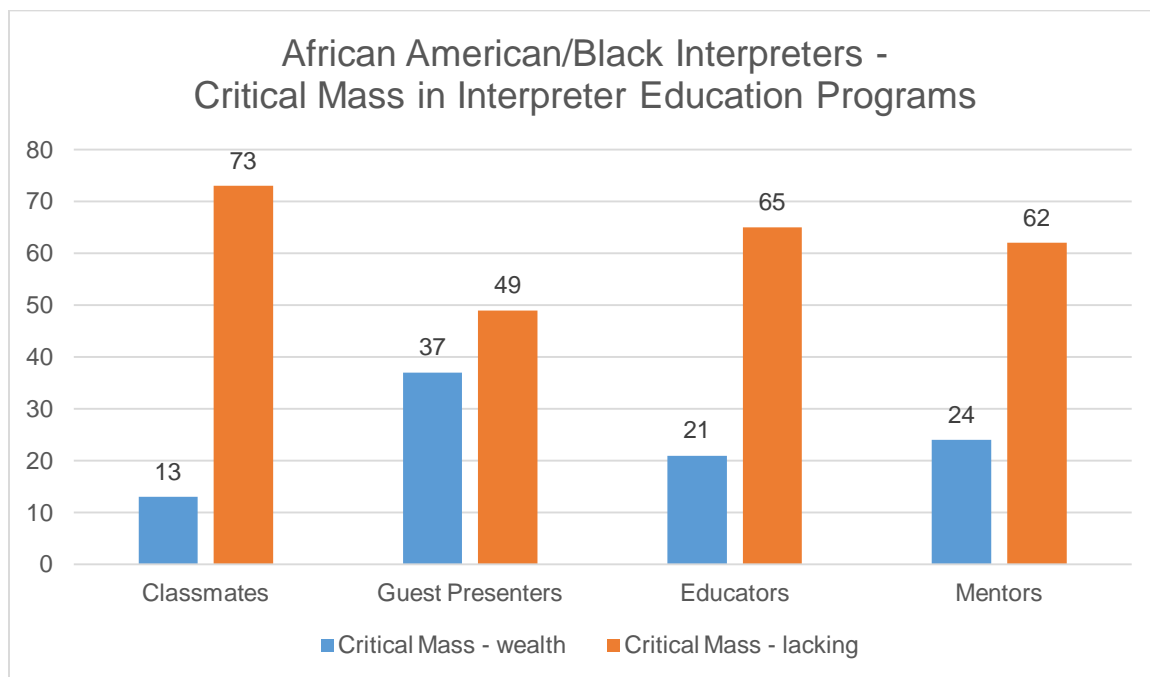


Figure 19. African American/Black Interpreters - Critical Mass in Interpreter Education Programs

As shown in Figure 17 above, 85% of survey respondents were in classrooms with three or fewer African American/Black classmates. Many (57%) had no guest presenters who were African American/Black come into their programs or their programs did not have guest presenters at all. Most (76%) had no access to African American/Black educators in their interpreting programs, and 72% had no access to mentors while in their interpreting programs or their programs did not offer mentoring at all.

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These numbers suggest a lack of critical mass for African American/Black interpreters who are matriculating through IPPs. To better understand of how critical mass affects the induction of African American/Black interpreters into the field, I decided to ask survey respondents if their African American/Black classmates had graduated and were currently working in the field. A “yes” response was labeled as *persistence – yes*, indicating persistence in the field, while a “no” or “I don’t know” response was labeled as *persistence – no*, indicating a lack of persistence in the field. “N/A” was applied when respondents indicated they had no other African American/Black classmates. This number was taken into consideration for the purposes of critical mass; however, it was not entered into any calculations of persistence.

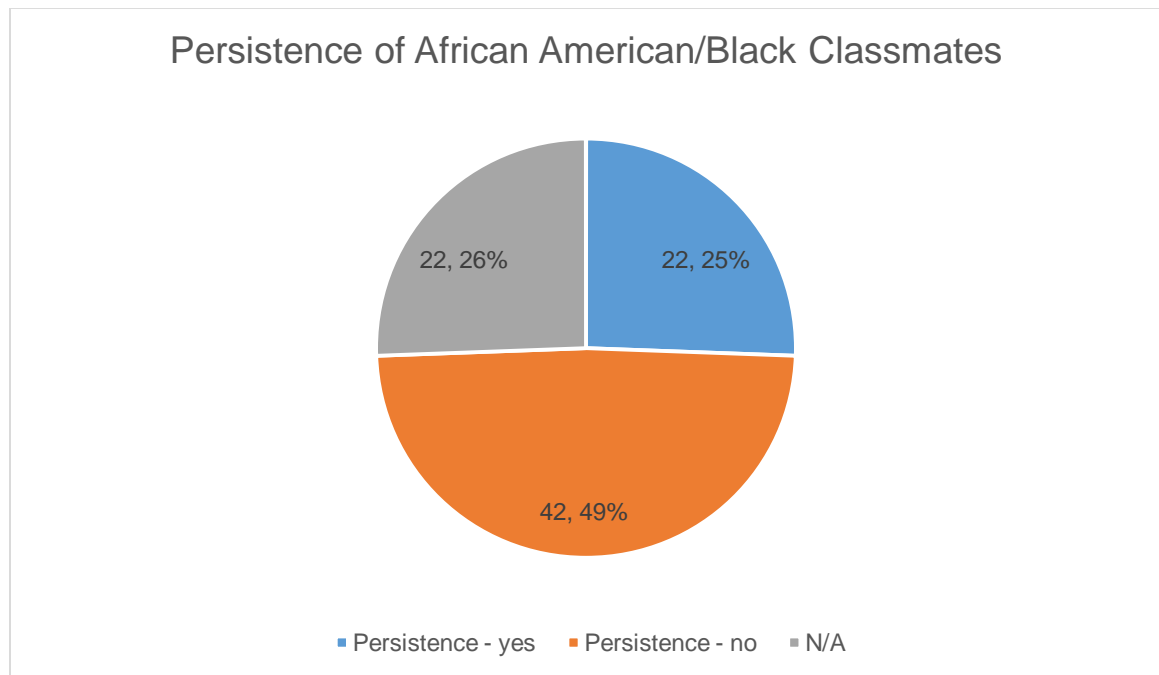


Figure 20. Persistence of African American/Black Classmates

Interestingly, the majority of survey respondents reported a lack of critical mass in their IPPs. Of those who did have African American/Black classmates (64 of the 86 respondents), 66% reported that their African American/Black classmates did not persist,

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or they had lost touch and were unsure of their persistence in the field. To understand how this plays out once in the field, I asked survey respondents how often they worked with other African American/Black interpreters and if they had access to any mentors who were African American/Black. When survey respondents stated that they worked “Moderately often” to “Extremely often” with other African American/Black interpreters, or if they indicated they did have access to African American/Black mentors, their responses were labeled as *critical mass – wealth*. When survey respondents stated that they worked “Slightly often” to “Not at all often” with other African American/Black interpreters, or if they indicated they had no access to African American/Black mentors, their responses were labeled as *critical mass – lacking*.

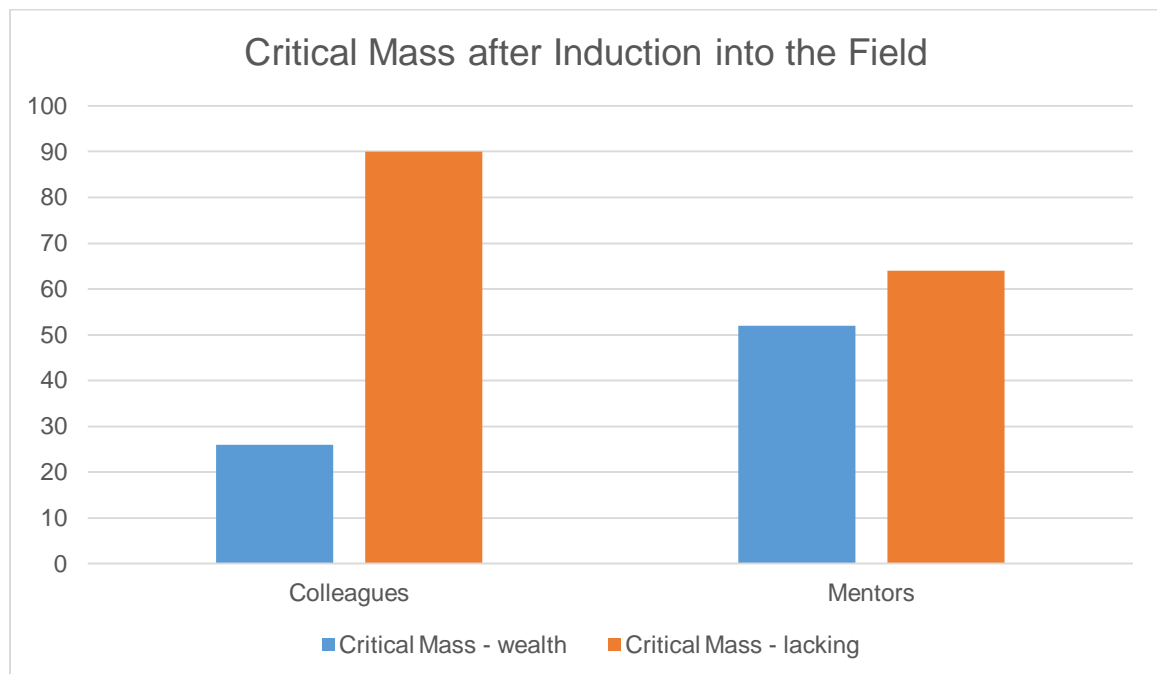


Figure 21. Critical Mass after Induction into the Field

Based on survey responses it appears that a lack of critical mass is present for African American/Black interpreters throughout one’s interpreter education, and



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continues once they are inducted into the field. It is not clear if critical mass impacts whether or not African American/Black interpreters persist in the field, however, there is a correlation present between the lack of critical mass in IPPs and African American/Black interpreters' persistence in the field.

The results from the survey uphold the findings from the focus group and interview sessions. Of the 1004 references to critical mass, 342 came from focus group participants. This also included 92 comments indicating that African American/Black interpreters did have access to African American/Black classmates, colleagues, consumers, agency owners, educators, and others within their social circles. These comments were placed in the category of *critical mass - wealth*. There were 250 comments indicating that African American/Black interpreters had a lack of access to African American/Black colleagues, consumers, agency owners, educators, and others, within their social circles were placed in the category of *critical mass – lacking*.

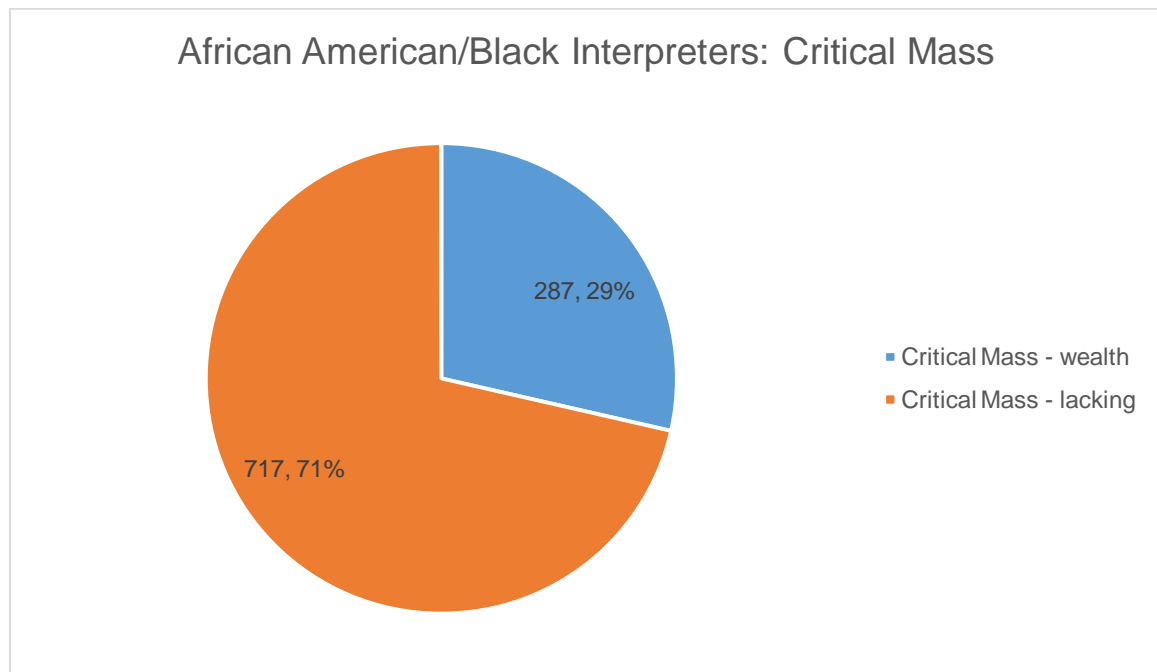


Figure 22. African American/Black Interpreters: Critical Mass

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In total, 71% of the comments made indicated that African American/Black interpreters do not have regular access to peers who share their background. Several focus group participants helped to place these numbers into perspective. When asked if they work with other interpreters who also identify as African American/Black, one focus group participant shared this:

Really, in my area there was only one but outside of my area as I started to meet and network, I met some wonderful people. And now, I have a whole network who I can go to for mentoring, for help which isn't necessarily about sign production, rather, it might be to talk about a situation that related to me as Black interpreter and maybe I didn't think I handled it well, so I can go to one of my mentors and ask for their advice.

It was common for participants to share that often relationships with other African American/Black interpreters in their network are from outside of their community. The importance of critical mass came up frequently among study participants who attended IPPs. When asked if there was anything else that participants wanted to share about their IPPs, Vanessa shared "in my program I felt like I was just invisible. Because, when I would go to my instructor or ask for help or support it was almost like it was superficial."

One focus group participant in particular, Sharon, repeated a semester in her IPP. In the first semester, she was the only African American/Black student in her class. When she repeated the courses, she was in a class with four other African American/Black students. Sharon shared this:

Throughout the class each time I raised my hand I was never called on. After class, my classmates would even tell me they felt bad about it. They don't know

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why the professor doesn't call on my name when my hand is up. Often, the students would have to tell them that my hand was up for the professor to even call on me not that they couldn't see me. So anyway, that experience was like absolutely awful and as a result I didn't go forward very well in my other classes.

Sharon continued on to say:

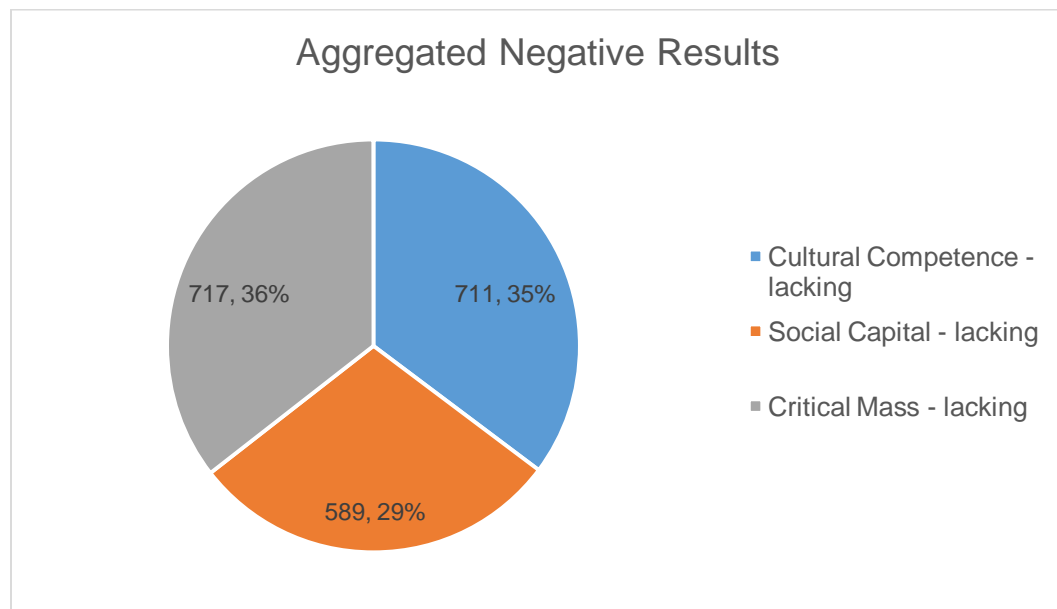
And then later I joined the class with Rhonda and I think two other African Americans and I felt so much more comfortable, so much more safe because I took the class again from that professor. But I knew that they would never, ever, ever, do that again. And so, that really, really, affected my training so...

Sharon is referring to an experience in class where her instructor used a derogatory term for African American/Black individuals while telling a story about an interpreted event. As the only African American/Black student in the class, Sharon, who had previously shared concerns with the instructor about discriminatory practices felt not only uncomfortable but also attacked at the insistence that this story be shared. The instructor, based on Sharon's telling of the events, felt this story had to be told to show the situations that interpreters are placed into, however, Sharon felt as though there was a huge lack of cultural competence among those in the classroom and that this action only reinforced the difference and separation that existed between her and her classmates. In her opinion, a more culturally competent approach would have recognized that due to her prior concerns, another story emphasizing the situations that interpreters find themselves in could have been told.

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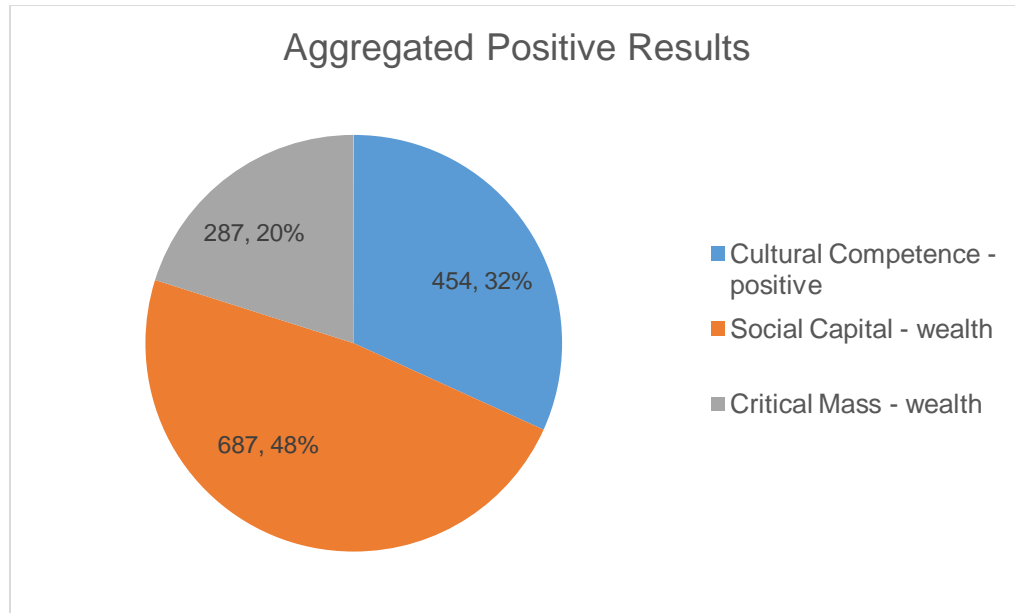
Sharon expressed feeling that there was a lack of cultural competence among the professors and students in her program; she believed she experienced both overt and subtle instances of racism and felt, as a result, this led to her having weak relationships with her classmates during the first semester. When she returned and was placed in a class with three other African American/Black classmates, she felt issues of cultural competence remained but having more African American/Black students led to a safer environment. Sharon admitted that she frequently considered discontinuing her education that first semester.

The answer to the first research question seems clear: African American/Black interpreters do perceive cultural competence to be lacking in the field of signed language interpreting.



*Figure 23. Aggregated Negative Results*

It is unclear to what extent this lack of cultural competence impacts African American/Black interpreters' persistence in the field. In this study, interpreters were more likely to experience a lack of critical mass.



*Figure 24. Aggregated Positive Results*

The participants in this study, who continue to be practitioners, appear to have a wealth of social capital despite having little access to African American/Black interpreters in their home networks. It seems the interpreters in this study were able to overcome barriers to employment and persistence by having extended networks. They connected with individuals and organizations who they perceived to be culturally competent. They found ways to connect with individuals who could relate to their experiences, and they maintained those relationships even at long distances. The presence of social capital may be a contributing factor to why the participants in this study persisted. Likewise, the absence of a critical mass of African American/Black interpreters and regularly being confronted with systems of oppression may help to explain why the numbers of African American/Black interpreters in the field are so low.

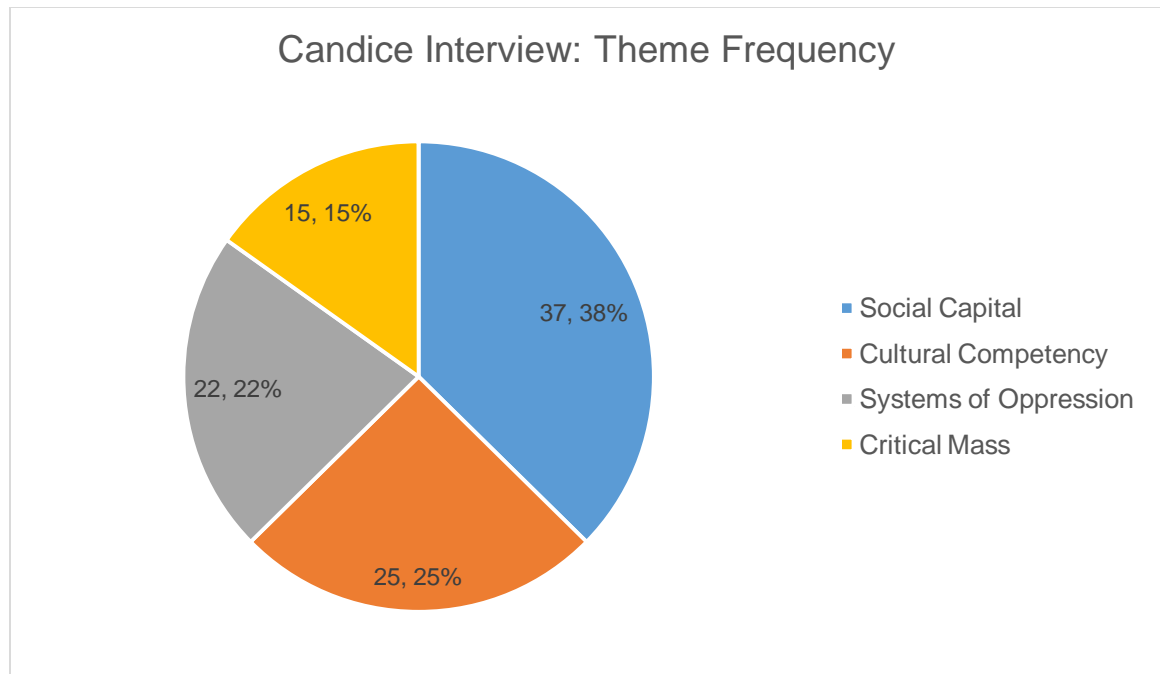
## **Presentation of Results: One-on-one with Candice**

If the work of a critical ethnography is to call for action in the direction of positive change towards some social injustice, it would be a disservice to not begin a

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dialogue that seeks to examine the experiences of members in other marginalized interpreting communities. I conducted two final interviews, one with an interpreter who identifies as Okinawan American/Asian American and one with an interpreter who identifies as Latina/Mexican American. Where African American/Black interpreters only represent 4.7% of the current RID membership, even fewer Asian American/Pacific Islander and Hispanic/Latino(a) interpreters are represented, at just 171 (1.82%) and 374 (4%) respectively (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc., 2013). I wanted to see how these two interpreters view *cultural competence* in the field of signed language interpreting and understand how they perceive the other themes of *social capital*, *critical mass*, and *systems of oppression* that had previously been identified.

Candice identifies as Okinawan American. She does not know of any other signed language interpreters who hold this identity, so she usually refers to herself using the more vague language of Asian American. During the interview, Candice voiced that her primary concern was cultural competence within the field, although during our one-on-one interview, 37 of the 99 references made were categorized under the theme of *social capital*. Several (25) references were made to *cultural competence*; 22 references were to *systems of oppression*; and 15 references were to *critical mass*. The majority of the coded data fell across multiple themes as it did in the findings from the African American/Black interpreters who participated in this research. So while Candice was aware of a lack of cultural competence in the field, many of her remarks also reflected her thoughts on social capital as well.



*Figure 25. Candice Interview: Theme Frequency*

Candice shared that there was a lack of cultural competence among her classmates and educators while she was attending her IPP. She recalled:

If something was said about Asian culture or celebrations, or something like that, the teacher looked directly at me, or would look at everyone but me. It was an either or situation, where they looked directly at me, or they were uncomfortable and they couldn't make eye contact.

This is similar to the feelings of the African American/Black interpreters who participated in the study who felt they were completely overlooked or expected to be experts on their culture.

Candice was also concerned with systems of oppression in the field of signed language interpreting. She did not have any overt experiences with racist remarks being directed towards her or other Asian American colleagues, however, she did frequently

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confront assumptions about what it means to be an Asian American. After Candice shared that her educators, mentors and colleagues rarely, if ever, shared her same background, I asked her to explain what that feels like for her. She responded by stating:

I feel like that is the norm for me, and in my area. I grew up always seeing White people, and I learned how to navigate and survive in their world. I know that I can get by fine without any problem, and at the same time when a situation arises or there is a need to debrief after an assignment, I wish there was someone who really understood me, but typically I don't have access to that.

I asked Candice to explain what "survival" means in her previous comment and she continued by saying:

For me it means that if someone makes like a racially charged comment, and they just think they are being innocent, I don't want to have to be the person who always internalizes it, or confronts them and says that those types of comments are not ok. I don't want to be that person. So sometimes I just have to accept that it is their perspective. So that feels like survival...and then later I find an opportunity to vent to my husband or somebody who gets it, and I tell them what happened. It really means in my day-to-day work I take on the responsibility of having to assimilate, and understand their perspectives and their culture.

Candice's comments reflect the shared sentiments that African American/Black interpreters had throughout this research. Her comments also spotlight what cultural competence would look like for dominant culture interpreters: understanding and having the ability to assimilate to the perspectives of colleagues and consumers who do not share your same background. The comments above are also an example of how the themes of



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systems of oppression, cultural competence, social capital, and critical mass continue to intersect throughout this research. Most participants in the study felt they were able to navigate well within mainstream culture. Several comments were made by study participants expressing that they felt they could easily navigate within the dominant culture because they had been doing so their entire lives. These comments help to uncover some of the challenges that interpreters might face when trying to develop social capital within the field. If an interpreter has not learned to successfully navigate within the dominant culture--in other words perform whiteness—then their ability to create, develop, and maintain relationships is limited. This again emphasizes that the burden to assimilate is frequently placed on the interpreter of color and not on interpreters of the majority culture. Participants in this study expressed a desire to have more people who share their racial and ethnic background in the field of interpreting. Having access to someone who “gets it” was shared by every focus group and interview participant. In practice, for interpreters of color this means reducing the burden of assimilation; this could contribute to whether or not African American/Black interpreters persist in the field.

I went on to ask Candice if she felt anything was missing from her training, and if so, what she wishes was incorporated into her interpreter education. She stated:

Yes, I wish there would have been so many things. I wish there would have been more Deaf, and also more diversity, more discussions of cultural awareness and participation in cultural events. If there was a Day of the Dead celebration, I wish we would have been required to attend, you know, to participate in a variety of different cultural celebrations. I went to some, but I wish some were required.

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And also to have more people as mentors. They were always White, and always women. I wish I would have seen more teachers, and mentors from diverse backgrounds, and with diverse cultural perspectives instead of just the one which was always white and always from women.

Candice was asked the same question again, but this time in reference to the training she wishes her colleagues would receive once they have already been inducted into the field. She shared:

Yes, I wish there was more diversity training, and more awareness about various cultures. Especially here in the Bay Area where the interpreters are mostly white but really we need Asian, Black, Latino interpreters, and more dialogue from diverse groups, and to come together and discuss what does all of this mean? How do we interact with consumers from different cultural backgrounds, and how does that vary from one culture to the next? And I wish we would have learned more about intersectionality because I'm not just an interpreter, I'm not just a wife, I am many things. And how does that influence my work? And consumers are not just Deaf, or just women, or just a label. So I wish there was more training on how to negotiate all those identities as we work in the field.

The desire for more training in regards to cultural competence was consistently repeated throughout this research.

### **Presentation of Results: One-on-one with Alana**

My final interview was with Alana, an interpreter who identifies as Latina/Mexican American. Alana's situation was unique in that she works as a trilingual interpreter. Specifically, she works between the languages of ASL, English, and Spanish.

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In trilingual settings, she is regularly with other interpreters who share her background. Of course, not all of Alana's work is as a trilingual interpreter. She stated that she works with Latino consumers about 35% of the time and "that a lot of Latino consumers will request me because I am Latina...and not necessarily for trilingual work, but for just anything."

In our one-on-one interview, 68 of the 152 references Alana made were related to *social capital*, 37 were references to *cultural competence*, 25 references were to *critical mass*, and 22 references were to *systems of oppression*. Again, the coded data did not fit discretely into one singular category but fit into multiple themes.

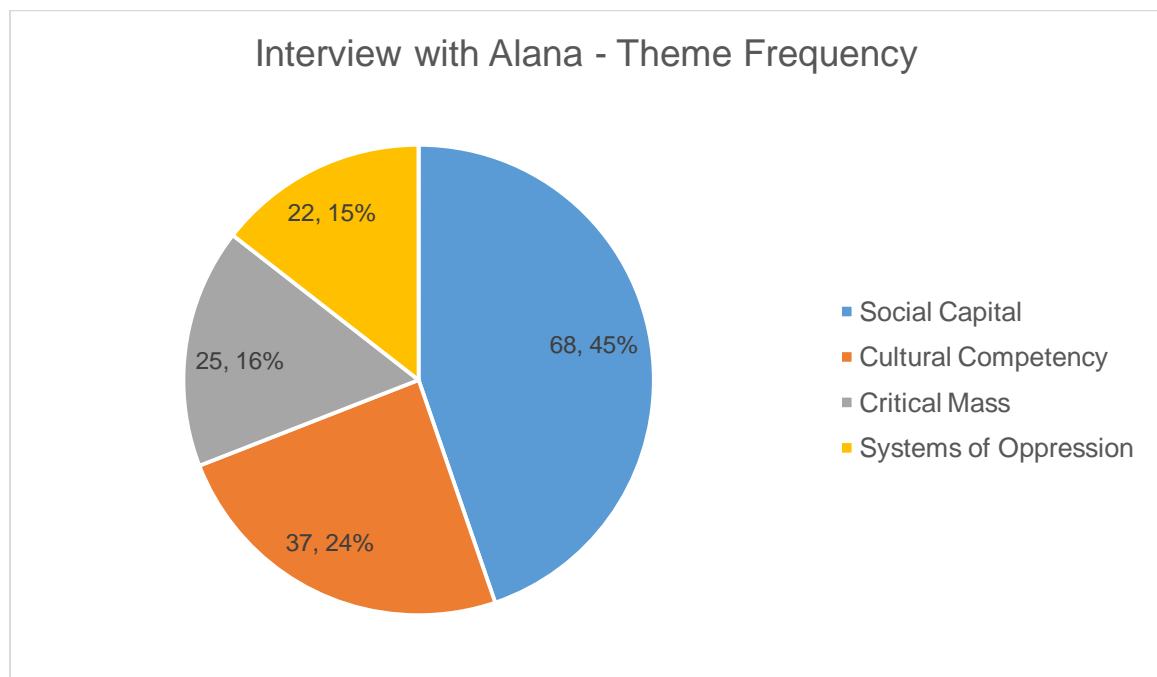


Figure 26. Interview with Alana - Theme Frequency

Alana's comments echoed that of the African American/Black interpreters in this research who felt that interpreters who were not from the dominant culture were more culturally competent practitioners and that there was some significance in being able to work with interpreters who share a similar racial or ethnic background. She shared:

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I think there's certain things that you get, with someone who is of the same ethnic identity where you feel like there's no explanation needed. You can just say, "This happened to me," and then they're like, "Oh, I know what you mean." There's no explaining.

Alana went on to add a comment similar to what was shared by some of the African American/Black interpreters in this research who felt like they did not have to be an African American/Black interpreter to be culturally competent. She stated about her White mentors:

I think that they're different than other White interpreters in the sense that they're very culturally aware. Like if I were to say something they would be like, "Oh, I can totally see that." They're very much able to see things from different perspectives. I think that's part of the reason why I felt that I could have a relationship with them like that, because I could bring up things and discuss them if I felt like I had to. But there is always an explanation piece. You have to be like, "This is what happened and this is why this is difficult." They may get it or they may not, whereas a mentor who shares your same ethnic identity...there's nothing that can replace that "Oh yeah I got it."

Like the majority of the participants in this research, Alana was mostly concerned with the lack of cultural competence she sees in the field. She shared:

There are so many people out there who are like innocent little deer walking through the forest, not seeing how they're like trampling all of the little animals under their feet. And I think there's also some people out there that are not only innocent and clueless, but if you bring it up to them, they get very defensive. So

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that has happened to me a lot... if I try to talk to certain people about things. They get really upset, and defensive, and like, "I don't want to talk about this." Like people have told me, "I don't want to talk about this because this is not my area. This is your area of expertise. This is not my area of expertise."

The comment above, while seemingly innocent, is also an example of aversive racism. It shows how when practitioners are apathetic or defensive towards such issues, the problem continues to persist. Reinforcing the status quo, in other words, is reinforcing disparate outcomes for interpreters of color. This also creates a distance between colleagues, which has an impact on one's social capital within the field. Alana articulated the following:

I feel like if I've approached somebody, and they're very resistant like that, then I'm taking a step back, and I say there's only so much that I can share with this person. There's only so far I can go with this person. I'm not going to be able to be discuss certain things with them. Unfortunately, that mean sometimes that the work is going to suffer because I can't get them to see what the issue is. If I try to inform them and discuss it with them...you know, how much, how often are you going to beat your head against a wall with them?

In reference to social capital, Alana shared that she was often put off by colleagues who would make "you're not like them" comments in reference to Latino/a consumers they were working with. She did not share any overt instances of racism, but she did frequently experience more subtle comments from colleagues that were "embedded with race and class." She shared another example:

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People can easily be like, "Oh no, no, no, we are talking about these poor people who are mooching off the government and whatever, and these illegals who are coming in and getting welfare. I'm like "Well?" Then there is some discussion here, and I find out that they don't actually know anybody who is not a citizen. They've never met anybody, they can't speak to these people; where I have people in my surrounding family who might fit some of those qualifications that I know personally.

These more subtle comments would also be examples of aversive racism.

With respect to social capital and critical mass, Alana, who has been in the field for more than 15 years, stated:

I think something that really stands out for me at least, and I don't know if it's just my personality, but I often feel like – it's weird to say - but I feel like the field of interpreting isn't my field or that I don't-- you know, this thing that we call interpreting, that's over there, but it is not really mine, like I can't lay claim to it, the history of interpreting. I don't feel that connection. I remember last summer, I took a History of Interpreting class, and I got so excited. I was crying and jumping up and down when I saw the books because of the talk about all of the interpreters in Meso-America and Pre-Columbian America. I was so excited that we were going to talk about this and how this relates, because I finally felt that it was going to be my interpreting, and we discussed nothing about that.

Indeed, most accounts of the history of the field of interpreting are told from a White-centric perspective. Even the most recent publication of *Legacies and Legends* (Ball, 2014) has little to no account of the contributions of interpreters from diverse

backgrounds<sup>4</sup> and fails to mention the beginnings of organizations such as the National Alliance of Black Interpreters, Mano a Mano, or the National Asian Deaf Congress. Each of these organizations has shaped the field for interpreters of color by providing a critical network for interpreters. For interpreters of color, these organizations provide a forum where there has traditionally been none, allowing communities of color to come together for professional development and the exchange of ideas. As Lauren stated, “NAOBI, Inc. gave us a platform, where we could learn to become presenters, mentors, and other things.” The stories told in books such as *Legacies and Legends* (Ball, 2014) are important ones, but they are not extensive when they don’t include the stories and historical contexts of interpreters of color.

Alana’s frustration with the lack of cultural competence in the field extended to the language that is used by practitioners and academics who often refer to the bilingual/bicultural field of interpreting. Alana feels strongly that more recognition should be given to the fact that we are a multicultural and multilingual field. Indeed, interpreters should—at a bare minimum—be bilingual and bicultural. Though many of us may work primarily between two languages, it is rare for our interpersonal interactions to be limited between just two cultures. Trilingual interpreters, in particular, work with more than just English, and many interpreters, whether they are Codas or interpreters who are from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, bring a third culture with them to the job, which creates a multicultural and multilingual community.

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<sup>4</sup> The listing of the Conference of Interpreter Trainers’ board members does include interpreters of color.

### **Discussion**

The presentation of results from the African American/Black Deaf consumer group showed that participants in this focus group expressed feeling like their interpreter was a better match when they shared the same race as their interpreter. They perceived African American/Black interpreters not only to be more culturally competent, but they were perceived as being more linguistically competent, which also related to the interpreter being a “match” for the Deaf consumer. Generally, African American/Black Deaf consumers felt more confident and more empowered when they had access to an interpreter who shared their same race. This falls in line with findings of Hagedorn et al. (2007), who noticed increased aspirations among students when a critical mass was present.

Billy’s comment, shared earlier, shows how the interpreter’s experience as an African American/Black person has an impact on consumer confidence. Research participants in the consumer focus group expressed a desire for more interpreters of African American/Black heritage. These sentiments were often expressed when linked to feelings of confidence, power, and community. During the focus group session, Steve made a comment that captured this sentiment well:

I think the problem is that when a Black person graduates, who do they have a connection to? They are hoping that the Black community will create that connection with them and say, “We want you.”... I think we deaf need to find a way to be supportive and say we want them, and maybe that is where we are weak. How do we do that?

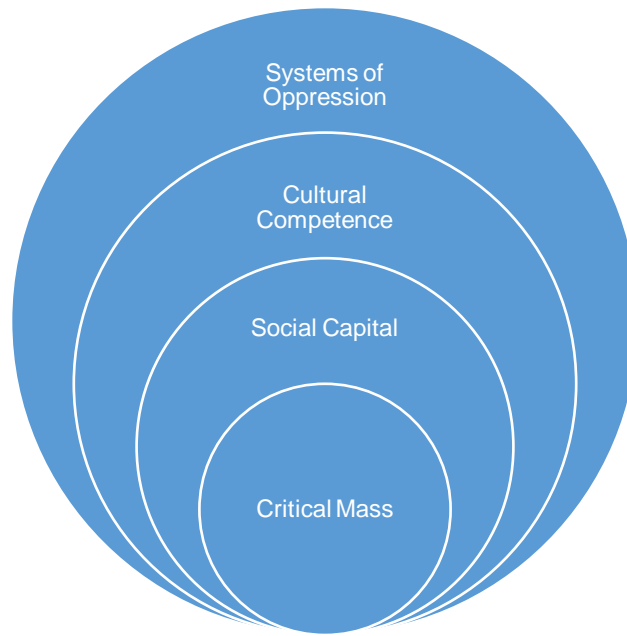


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If African American/Black Deaf consumers of interpreting services perceive African American/Black interpreters to be more culturally competent as practitioners, then there is a need to understand why disparate numbers exist for African American/Black interpreters. The alternative is the status quo, which continuously underserves an already marginalized population.

This research study, which focused primarily on African American/Black signed language interpreters in the United States, validated the findings from the review of the literature and has provided further insight. The themes identified in this study were found to apply not only to African American/Black interpreters but also to colleagues from other marginalized groups. Instead of identifying distinct categories for the coded data, relationships across the categories were noted. This is reasonable, since systems of oppression are not distinct; rather, they are interdependent and interlocking (Brah & Phoenix, 2013; Collins, 1986; Weber, 1998).

Discriminatory remarks, regardless of how subtle, are byproducts of systems of oppression in America. They have both direct and indirect impacts on the perception of one's peers and colleagues as it pertains to cultural competence. In turn, cultural competence contributed to perceptions of social capital, which were heavily influenced by the presence (or lack thereof) of other African American/Black individuals in an interpreter's network, in other words, critical mass. The four interrelated themes and their relationships can be seen in Figure 25.



*Figure 27. Interrelated themes*

When a critical mass of practitioners is present in the field, interpreters, in turn, have access to colleagues who can relate to their experiences. The presence of a critical mass also increases the likelihood that an interpreter will have access to mentors who share a similar racial or ethnic background. Mentors within the field who share the interpreter's background, especially for interpreters of marginalized groups, means that the ethic of care in mentoring relationships will apply to the skill of interpreting, as well as care for the psychosocial needs of the individual. When IPPs are housed on campuses that are PWIs, access to a critical mass also increases the likelihood that students of signed language interpreting programs will graduate. Access to a critical mass in the workforce and in educational programs increases one's social capital overall. Furthermore, the presence of diverse educational institutions and a more diverse workforce has been shown to increase the cultural competence of practitioners, classmates, and educators in the field. This, in turn helps to make those who operate

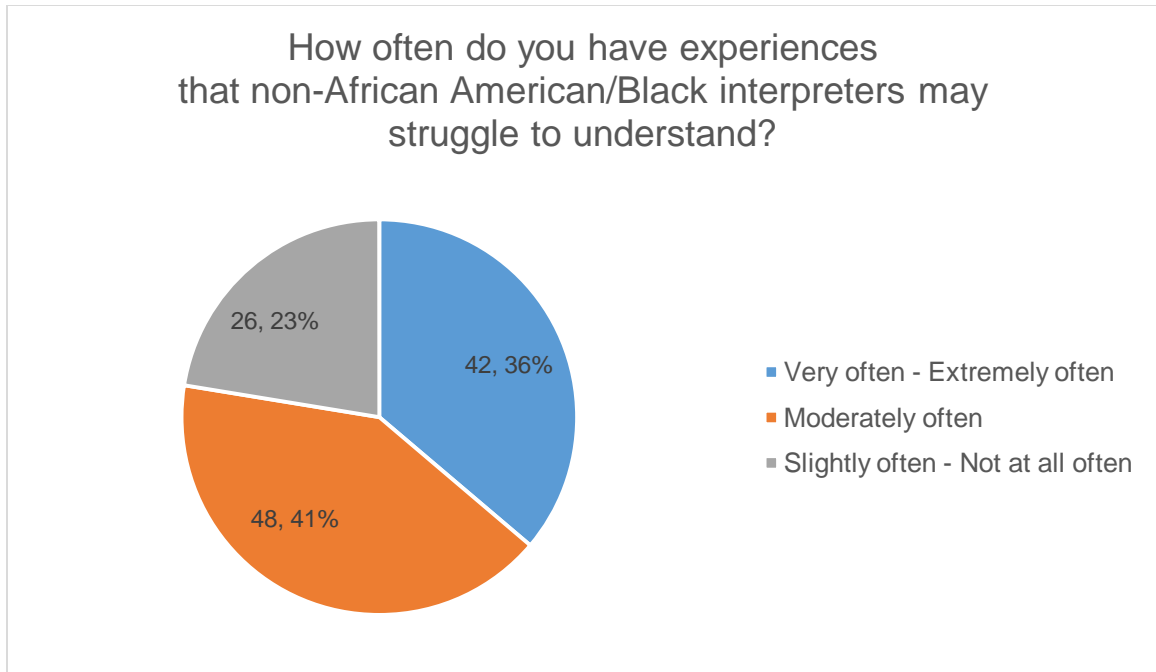
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within the workforce and within educational systems more aware of systems of oppression, and it hopefully encourages them to work towards minimizing the impact of such systems.

Throughout this study, focus group and interview participants all acknowledged having access to interpreters, educators, and mentors who they believed to be culturally competent. In most instances, participants felt there was a lack of awareness among their colleagues in general, but they also indicated having close relationships with a few individuals who do “get it,” which provided them an outlet for having dialogue around issues present in the field of interpreting that do not pertain to linguistic competence. The importance of having colleagues who “get it” was captured well by one survey respondent who stated:

I don't necessarily believe a mentor has to be a certain race or culture to learn from them. It would however, have been nice to have someone from my own culture to look up to, and draw from their own personal experience in our field. The reality is as an African American, we walk through life a bit differently. It's similar to a Deaf person and their life journey, you may have compassion, but you will never truly understand.

All research participants recognized that their experiences as African American/Black interpreters or interpreters from other marginalized groups mean that they have not only a different worldview, but they have unique experiences from their colleagues who are from the majority culture. The majority of survey respondents (76%) felt that they had, with at least moderate frequency, experiences that their non-African American/Black colleagues may struggle to understand.



*Figure 28.* Experiences that non-African American/Black interpreters may struggle to understand

Focus group and interview participants corroborated this by sharing what it means to be an African American/Black interpreter. All of the participants recognized that they confronted additional challenges as African American/Black interpreters, but they also reported a sense of pride and collective appreciation as though a part of something special. Melanie's comment captured this idea well.

I am still getting those callers who say, "Oh, first black interpreter." Or, "Pah, Black interpreter." So that...that is the rewarding thing. So when I do get those, it's like oh...well we are going to make sure that you get a good experience. We are going to make sure that we match everything. Or, the rewarding things are getting that "ahhhh," because you know how grandma talks, you know how grandfather talks. So you know exactly your word choice and how you'll say

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“What girl?” or “Child, stop!” Even in not only our signs but our expression, that’s rewarding. When I see that and the caller just says, “Wow, love you!” and those are the times you just say “love you too!” So positives and negatives, but the good thing is, that the good days outweigh the bad days.

Study participants agreed that an increase in African American/Black interpreters would result in practitioners and educators who are more culturally competent. During each focus group session, the idea of recruitment was mentioned by study participants, as was stepping into positions of leadership. Several of the interpreters in this study were working on their graduate degrees, with the goal of becoming instructors and administrators, and they stated specifically that their increased aspirations were part of a responsibility that they felt towards increasing the numbers of African American/Black interpreters in the field.

In addition to recruitment, study participants also agreed that being from the dominant culture did not necessarily prevent one from practicing as a culturally competent interpreter. They felt that there was a need for training for educators and interpreters who are currently practicing in the field. Some of the current practices that take place in IPPs with the intent of being culturally competent seem to fail at implementation likely because educators from the dominant culture who teach these courses do not have the lived experiences to relate to the teachings. One example shared by Rhonda had to do with showing an episode of Oprah in an elective course on multicultural communication.

It was the episode when it was the White family and they put the Black makeup on and then they went and experienced the world as Black people, and I was just

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like meh...I was not very into it. Like, I knew of the episode, but this, the video is supposed to be teaching us how we accept other cultures, but this is my culture and I don't really agree with how they (the family on Oprah) are trying to represent it.

This is an example of how educators may be culturally sensitive and recognize the need for these discussions to take place. Yet, without the lived experience, it becomes challenging to integrate these teachings into the classroom in effective ways. One of the problems with the representation above is that it makes it seem as though any person could dress up and then understand the experiences of what it means to be Black. This representation fails to recognize the historical context in which African American/Black individuals live and the associated psychological burdens. Focus group participants mentioned frequently feeling as though the same surface was scratched on topics of cultural competence and that the conversation never went any deeper.

## **Chapter 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

It is clear that African American/Black interpreters perceive their colleagues from the dominant majority culture to be lacking in cultural competence. From the time they enter their IPPs and after induction into the field, African American/Black interpreters continuously confront systems of oppression on top of the other demands that are present when entering the field. When interpreters from the dominant majority culture lacked cultural competence, their relationships with African American/Black interpreters were negatively impacted. The review of the literature suggests that this may result in a smaller social circle for African American/Black signed language interpreters. The impact this has on the African American/Black interpreter's social capital was unclear.

As previously mentioned in the literature review, social capital may be one of the strongest indicators of whether or not professionals will persist in their field. If social capital is harder to obtain for African American/Black interpreters, this could help to explain why the numbers of African American/Black interpreters in the field are so low. Other studies have found that when a critical mass is present during one's educational experiences, that individual is likely to have more positive outcomes. For this reason, it may be even more important for African American/Black students to have access to a critical mass throughout their formative educational years.

African American/Black interpreters noticeably lack a critical mass within their IPPs. This disparity continues once they are inducted into the interpreting field. Throughout their careers, African American/Black interpreters face additional obstacles as they encounter systems of oppression from consumers and colleagues. Having access

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to mentors who share their same background provides the African American/Black interpreter the opportunity to seek supervision on issues that affect them at a psychosocial level. When mentors who do not share the interpreter's background are unavailable, a two-pronged approach may be the next best option. Having access to culturally competent practitioners who can serve as mentors within the interpreting field becomes a crucial element for African American/Black interpreters that ultimately impacts their social capital in the field. Likewise, establishing connections with African American/Black professionals who have successfully navigated their way through other fields may care for the African American/Black interpreter's psychosocial needs, leading to their persistence in the field.

The findings also suggest that overt racism is still a significant factor in the lives of African American/Black interpreters and that White interpreters maintain these systems of oppression in both subtle and obvious ways. The implications of aversive racism are also important to consider in terms of the signed language interpreting profession where much of one's growth in the field happens as a result of mentoring or where signed language interpreters are often teamed with each other and rely on each other for support. When educators perceive themselves as relating positively to African American/Black students but hold negative stereotypes about their ability to succeed, those feelings may be noticed by the African American/Black student and thus impact that student's academic success and likelihood of persistence. Aversive racism may also provide an explanation for the lack of cultural competence in the field when the education and training of students and practitioners is done primarily by White women, through their perceptions of what it means to be culturally competent and fair.



### **Recommendations**

Based on these findings, I recommend active recruitment of interpreters from marginalized communities. When diverse faculty and staff are present on college campuses, there is a likelihood that programs and services will be delivered in a way that is considered to be culturally competent. As discussed in the literature review, increased diversity among educators and educational interventions for practitioners are effective strategies for increasing cultural competence (Delgado et al., 2013; Guy-Walls, 2007; Harris et al., 2013). Bruce (1998) provided a list of 16 suggestions for the recruitment of African American/Black students in IPPs, along with 13 suggestions for the retention of African American/Black students in IPPs. For the successful implementation of these recruitment and retention strategies, faculty and administrators alike need to commit their time and efforts towards supporting increased diversity in IPPs.

The extent to which multicultural curriculum is infused in IPPs as students matriculate will likely impact students' multicultural awareness. It is unknown exactly how many African American/Black faculty are instructing in IPPs. Given the small pool of African American/Black interpreters, it is safe to assume there are not that many. The literature review findings, however, suggest that faculty of color are likely to embed discussions of cultural competence into their teachings. If what Roseboro and Ross (2009) found holds true for African American/Black instructors in the field of signed language interpreting, then African American/Black faculty may experience burnout before White faculty, due to care-sickness that occurs with the burden of being one of a few faculty of color on campus at PWIs. Therefore, recruitment of faculty from diverse backgrounds is also highly recommended.

## PERSISTENCE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN/BLACK INTERPRETERS

Often, faculty of color are called upon outside of the classroom to serve on diversity councils, they are the ones bringing attention to the needs of students of color, and they are the ones doing the recruitment for students of color. In the classroom, faculty of color are supplementing the chosen curriculum with resources that highlight a wide range of people of color, and they make a point of finding models who do not just reinforce the stereotypical labels that people of color are often faced with. Inside and outside of the classroom faculty of color regularly face microaggressions from students and other faculty members. On a regular basis, I can expect that students will make comments such as “You don’t sound Black at all when you teach” or “I took this class because you are Black, and so I thought you would be more laid back.” I can also expect that I will be asked if I need assistance when I enter the adjunct faculty office, instead of it being assumed that I am faculty and that I belong there.

With this in mind, White faculty should consider ways that they can support faculty of color, primarily by paying attention to their concerns, recognizing those concerns as valid, and identifying ways that they, too, can be resources for students of color. When designing courses, White faculty can review their resources to see who is represented in the instructional tools they use within IPPs. White faculty can ask themselves who are the authors of the textbooks they use, and do they, the authors, and the instructors apply an intersectional approach to their pedagogical practices, or is the focus limited to the Deaf-hearing binary that has been present throughout many IPPs. White faculty can also support students of color by pointing them in the direction of organizations that will help them build their extended networks and increase their social capital.

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White faculty can reduce the burden for faculty of color by taking part in various initiatives when the faculty of color specifically make a request for help. A response such as “I don’t think I should do it because I am White” or “I think a person of color should be the face of this” may be well intentioned, but it also misses the mark when it comes to showing solidarity. If there are only a few faculty of color on campus, responses such as these increase the burden and likelihood of burnout for faculty of color, show an overall lack of cultural competence, and reinforce systems of oppression for the faculty and among the student population.

African American mentor/mentee relationship matches outside of the IPP that address both career and psychosocial functions could prove to benefit African American/Black students and reduce the burden African American/Black faculty experience at PWIs. These mentoring relationships can continue beyond one’s academic career, and these matches may also help to reduce the burnout that African American/Black faculty experience when their offices become the primary havens for African American/Black students. Doing this gives African American/Black students the opportunity to gain access to more mentors who they can relate with, to discuss navigating systems and fields that are predominantly White. Instructors may be burdened initially with helping to establish these connections because they may have to look beyond their local communities. However, if this is done at the program level, the burden to create these matches does not need to rest only on the African American/Black instructors within IPPs. Some studies have suggested that such relationships can occur at the inter-organizational level, which would provide more mentors for African American/Black interpreters instead of drawing from a shallow pool.

## PERSISTENCE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN/BLACK INTERPRETERS

Instead of searching for mentor/mentee relationship matches from the available pool of African American/Black interpreters, extending these relationships so that successful African American mentors come from fields outside of the profession of interpreting may prove to be beneficial, especially if those mentors are pulled from other human service professions. Although these relationships would not address the mentee's linguistic competence, the mentee would benefit from having an African American/Black role model who has successfully navigated their field. This relatedness, as mentioned by Roseboro and Ross (2009), may provide opportunities for the psychosocial needs of the mentee to be met. The development of such mentoring relationships will require educators and practitioners in the interpreting field to think more broadly about the benefits of mentoring beyond the hard skills of linguistic and interpreting development. White faculty and colleagues alike can be advocates for African American/Black interpreters by familiarizing themselves with organizations and other opportunities that exist; this may connect African American/Black interpreters with a critical mass that will extend their networks and increase their social capital in the field. If successful, the outcome of these relationships could potentially mean an increase in the number of African American/Black interpreters available to provide mentoring in the future.

The field of signed language interpreting has long recognized the significance of ethical decision-making. Ethics courses are taught in IPPs and across the country through various workshops and seminars for the purposes of professional development. The work of Dean and Pollard (2013), and their application of the demand-control schema, has become widely recognized within the field of interpreting in recent years. In brief, their work provides a framework for ethical decision-making. They use the term "demands" to

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describe factors that will impact decision-making that will occur in the interpreters work.

The term “controls” is used “to refer to the resources the interpreter has at her or his disposal” (p. 15) in order to respond to the demands of the assignment. The lack of culturally competent behavior among colleagues and consumers is clearly an additional demand for African American/Black interpreters and for interpreters from other marginalized groups. For any interpreter, becoming a more culturally competent practitioner, then, means having more resources at their disposal and, likewise, having more control options available to apply to the constellation of demands that may be present in any interpreted interaction.

Where many programs do not broach the topic of cultural competence at all or where some only offer courses as part of an elective in their IPPs, I argue that ethical decision-making can only occur when the level of care among practitioners takes into consideration multiculturalism and the impact the social construction of race has on interpersonal dynamics for both consumers and colleagues. Regular and ongoing trainings related to cultural competence need to be provided to instructors and to those already practicing in the field. It is vital for practitioners to realize how their worldview has an impact on how they deliver services and how they create social ties among their colleagues.

I recommend that IPP faculty and administrators give the same level of care to issues of cultural competence that they have given to the discussion of ethical decision-making. IPP faculty and administrators should consider the implementation of a semester or quarter-long course in order to begin to address issues of cultural competence from a variety of perspectives. This will provide an opportunity for more depth of thought and

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discussion in the classroom and will allow for the time necessary to create a safe space to discuss these issues. Once students have such a foundation, discussions of cultural competence should go beyond the course and should be infused throughout the program. The National Multicultural Interpreter Project (NMIP) has developed curriculum organized into 11 modules. The modules are grouped into the domains of multicultural knowledge, sensitivity, and multicultural interpreting skills (Mooney & Lawrence, 2000). Outlines, lecture notes, suggested activities, and a video library of stimulus materials are all available online. The materials are free and are ready for utilization. The National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (2014) has also created a free module on the topic of social justice available online along with other resources that can be used as stimuli for infusion into IPPs. The social justice infusion module also includes teacher resource pages, lesson plans, and suggested activities for inside and outside of the classroom environment. The National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (NCIEC) social justice module and the work of the NMIP both address the needs of interpreters and consumers from various intersecting backgrounds.

Finally, the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, the primary certifying body in the United States currently requires interpreters to complete 80 hours (8.0 CEUs) of training in a four-year cycle. Requiring that a portion of those hours be earned by completing trainings that relate to cultural competence would be one way of improving negative colleague dynamics and may contribute to greater social capital for interpreters in the field. Such a practice would not only improve relations among colleagues, but would ultimately impact the provision of services for consumers.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

As is true with students of all professions, it is a given that not every student who enters their interpreter training will complete it, and some who do complete the initial training will not persist in the field. Whether African American/Black interpreters are impacted more so than their White counterparts is unknown. Future research asking interpreters, in general, and African American/Black interpreters, specifically, what they know about why their interpreting classmates and professional colleagues have left the field may provide additional insight. A snowball sampling process could be utilized to identify those who have left the field, so that firsthand narratives can be shared through an interview process. Furthermore, a longitudinal study exploring the persistence of students from a variety of diverse backgrounds, including those from the majority culture, over the course of several years would be one way to gain a more complete understanding of what impacts African American/Black interpreters' persistence in the field.

In this study, the perspectives of African American/Black Deaf consumers were explored in order to provide the foundation for this research. Enough data were collected from the Deaf consumer focus group alone to warrant a separate and focused study that further examines the experiences of multiply marginalized<sup>5</sup> Deaf communities. Furthermore, focus should be given to other multicultural Deaf communities to understand how they are impacted by receiving interpreting services from practitioners who primarily identify as White or European American.

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<sup>5</sup> The term 'multiply marginalized' has been used in the literature of feminist and race scholars to refer to communities that have multiple subordinate-group identities.

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This research found similarities between the African American/Black study participants and the interpreters from other racial and ethnic backgrounds. Future research investigating the perceptions of interpreters from these groups may prove useful in increasing the numbers of practitioners from other marginalized communities. Further research might also include an investigation of how often interpreters of all races witness racism and how they handle it (or wish they had handled it). It is plausible that more in-depth research could lead to the positive provision of services for multiply marginalized Deaf communities.

Lastly, Obasi (2013) conducted a study of Black signed language interpreters in the U. K. which applied Dean and Pollard's (2013) demand-control theory. Stress factors were identified that impacted these Black signed language interpreters. A thorough investigation of the increased demands for African American/Black interpreters practicing in the United States could also provide significant insights that might lead to a better understanding of what impacts the persistence of African American/Black interpreters in the field.

### **Closing Thoughts**

I believe it is time for practitioners in the field of signed language interpreting to invest more time in making sure that they are culturally competent beyond the Deaf-hearing binary that has long been prevalent within our field. The data collected and analyzed for this research study supports that belief. Educators and administrators in IPPs need to implement changes in instruction that show they value the multitude of people and perspectives that interpreters encounter. Practitioners in the field of signed language interpreting can no longer view issues of cultural competence and multiculturalism as



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“not their issue.” Given the impact that a lack of cultural competence among White interpreters has on colleagues and consumers from marginalized cultures, ethical conduct means cultural competence is an issue for us all.

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APPENDIX A: Focus Groups

**Focus Group 1**  
**Participant Information Page and Consent Form**  
**English Version ([For ASL Version Click Here](#))**

Dear Colleague,

I am a master's degree student at Western Oregon University in the College of Education under the supervision of Dr. Elisa Maroney. I am conducting a research study seeking to understand the experiences of African American/Black ASL-English interpreters in the U.S. and I am requesting your participation in the data collection process.

**Invitation to Participate in a Research Study Leading to a Graduate Thesis**

I would like to invite you to take part in this research study on African American/Black interpreters' experiences. As an African American/Black Deaf consumer your perspective on the current state of interpreting services is crucial. Your input could lead to a better understanding of whether or not there is a need for more African American/Black interpreters.

**What will you be asked to do?**

If you decide to take part in this study you will be asked to join a focus group that will last no more than 2 hours and will be conveniently located between the Sacramento and San Francisco Bay Areas.

**Who is eligible to participate?**

Deaf consumers of interpreting services who identify as African American/Black, reside within the U.S. and are age 18 or over.

**Why is this research being done?**

The study is looking to identify what shared experiences if any exist among African American/Black interpreters as they enter the field of interpreting and to what extent those experiences impact their persistence in the field.

**Benefits**

Identifying reasons why African American/Black interpreters do not persist in the field of ASL-English interpreting will help to identify knowledge gaps in interpreter education and among interpreting colleagues. Study participants will benefit from knowing that their shared stories helped to further research and, possibly, lead to an increase in the number of African American/Black interpreters in the field.

**Discomforts and Risks**

This project will require participants to answer questions about their professional experiences. The researcher acknowledges that in small communities confidentiality may



## PERSISTENCE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN/BLACK INTERPRETERS

be difficult to maintain. Your name, location and/or any identifying information will not be used in the final thesis. There will be no physical risk of any kind.

### **Who will see the information about me?**

The primary investigator will see your responses, and the data will be shared in a graduate thesis with no identifying information – specific locations & names will not be discussed.

### **Confidentiality**

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely on a password protected computer and only the researcher will have access to the records. If you provide identifying information, be assured that the write-up of data will use pseudonyms, and situations will be modified to make it impossible to identify individuals.

### **May I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. Even if you begin, you may discontinue your participation at any time without fear of retaliation.

### **Who can I contact for questions?**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact Erica West Oyedele, Principal Investigator at [eoyedele13@wou.edu](mailto:eoyedele13@wou.edu) or 916-501-8681 or Dr. Elisa Maroney, Thesis Committee Chair, at [maronee@wou.edu](mailto:maronee@wou.edu) or 503-838-8735. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the WOU Institutional Review Board at any time regarding the study at 503-838-8589.

Thank you for your participation!

### **About the Researcher:**

Erica West Oyedele is a nationally certified Black ASL-English interpreter with 10 years of experience working primarily in Northern California.

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### **Consent**

You have been given a copy of this consent form to keep. By signing below you indicate your willingness to participate in this study.

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Participant's Name (*please print*)

---

Date

---

Participant's Signature

---

Date

**Experiences of African American/Black ASL-English Interpreters in the U.S.**  
**Focus Group 1 – Questions (English Version)**  
[\(Click here for ASL Version\)](#)

***Questions for consumers of interpreting services***

1. How often do you utilize interpreting services?
2. What qualities or characteristics are important for you in an interpreter?
3. Do any of the qualities and characteristics mentioned relate to the interpreter's background?
4. How often are the interpreters you work with African American/Black?
5. As an African American/Black Deaf person, do you feel well represented by the interpreters you work with?
6. How important is it to you to work with interpreters who identify as African American/Black?
7. What additional thoughts do you have about your experience as an African American/Black Deaf person and the interpreting services you receive?

***Potential follow-up questions:***

1. Please tell me more about that.
2. Why do you think that is?
3. How effective is that?
4. How does that make you feel?
5. What difference(s) did you notice?
6. Please share specific examples.

**Experiences of African American/Black ASL-English Interpreters in the U.S.**

**Focus Group 2  
Participant Information Page and Consent Form**

Dear Colleague,

I am a master's degree student at Western Oregon University in the College of Education under the supervision of Dr. Elisa Maroney. I am conducting a research study seeking to understand the experiences of African American/Black sign language interpreters in the U.S and am requesting your participation in the data collection process.

**Invitation to Participate in a Research Study Leading to a Graduate Thesis**

I would like to invite you to take part in this research study on African American/Black interpreters' experiences in interpreter education and within the field of ASL-English interpreting.

**What will you be asked to do?**

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to join a focus group that will last approximately 2 hours and will be conveniently located in or around the San Francisco Bay Area.

**Who is eligible to participate?**

Professional and post-professional ASL-English Interpreters age 18 and over who identify as African American/Black and reside within the U.S.

**Why is this research being done?**

The study is looking to identify what shared experiences if any exist among African American/Black interpreters as they enter the field of interpreting and to what extent those experiences impact their persistence in the field.

**Benefits**

The findings from this study will help identify gaps in knowledge that may exist within interpreter education and among ASL-English interpreting colleagues. These findings could aid in future research and changes to best practices that will enhance the number of African American/Black ASL-English interpreters within our profession.

**Discomforts and Risks**

This project will require you to answer questions about your professional experiences. The researcher acknowledges that in small communities confidentiality may be difficult to maintain. Your name, location and/or any identifying information will not be used in the final thesis. There will be no physical risk of any kind.

**Who will see the information about me?**

## PERSISTENCE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN/BLACK INTERPRETERS

The primary investigator will see your responses, and the data will be shared in a graduate thesis with no identifying information – specific locations & names will not be discussed.

### **Confidentiality**

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely on a password protected computer and only the researcher will have access to the records. If you provide identifying information, be assured that the write-up of data will use pseudonyms, and situations will be tweaked to make it impossible to identify individuals.

### **Can I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. Even if you begin, you may discontinue your participation at any time without fear of retaliation.

### **Consent**

By participating in the focus group your consent to participate is implied.

### **Who can I contact for questions?**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact Erica West Oyedele, Principal Investigator at [eoyedele13@wou.edu](mailto:eoyedele13@wou.edu) or 916-501-8681.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the WOU Institutional Review Board at any time regarding the study at 503-838-8589 or Dr. Elisa Maroney, Thesis Committee Chair at 503-838-8735.

Thank you for your participation!

### **About the Researcher:**

Erica West Oyedele is a nationally certified Black ASL-English interpreter with 10 years of experience working primarily in Northern California.

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Western Oregon University  
Masters student, College of Education

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### **Consent**

You have been given a copy of this consent form to keep. By signing below you indicate your willingness to participate in this study.

---

Participant's Name (*please print*)

---

Date

---

Participant's Signature

---

Date

**Experiences of African American/Black ASL-English Interpreters in the U.S.**

**Focus Group 3  
Participant Information Page and Consent Form**

Dear Colleague,

I am a master's degree student at Western Oregon University in the College of Education under the supervision of Dr. Elisa Maroney. I am conducting a research study seeking to understand the experiences of African American/Black sign language interpreters in the U.S and am requesting your participation in the data collection process.

**Invitation to Participate in a Research Study Leading to a Graduate Thesis**

I would like to invite you to take part in this research study on African American/Black interpreters' experiences in interpreter education and within the field of ASL-English interpreting.

**What will you be asked to do?**

If you decide to take part in this study you will be asked to join a focus group that will last no more than 2 hours and will be conducted online via Adobe Connect or other web conferencing software. You will need a high speed internet connection and a webcam to access the online session.

**Who is eligible to participate?**

Professional, and post-professional ASL-English Interpreters age 18 and over who identify as African American/Black and reside within the U.S.

**Why is this research being done?**

The study is looking to identify what shared experiences if any exist among African American/Black interpreters as they enter the field of interpreting and to what extent those experiences impact their persistence in the field.

**Benefits**

The findings from this study will help identify gaps in knowledge that may exist within interpreter education and among ASL-English interpreting colleagues. These findings could aid in future research and changes to best practices that will enhance the number of African American/Black ASL-English interpreters within our profession.

**Discomforts and Risks**

This project will require you to answer questions about your professional experiences. The researcher acknowledges that in small communities confidentiality may be difficult to maintain. Your name, location and/or any identifying information will not be used in the final thesis. There will be no physical risk of any kind.

**Who will see the information about me?**

## PERSISTENCE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN/BLACK INTERPRETERS

The primary investigator will see your responses, and the data will be shared in a graduate thesis with no identifying information – specific locations & names will not be discussed.

### **Confidentiality**

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely on a password protected computer and only the researcher will have access to the records. If you provide identifying information, be assured that the write-up of data will use pseudo names, and situations will be tweaked to make it impossible to identify individuals.

### **Can I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. Even if you begin, you may discontinue your participation at any time without fear of retaliation.

### **Consent**

By participating in the focus group your consent to participate is implied.

### **Who can I contact for questions?**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact Erica West Oyedele, Principal Investigator at [eoyedele13@wou.edu](mailto:eoyedele13@wou.edu) or 916-501-8681.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the WOU Institutional Review Board at any time regarding the study at 503-838-8589 or Dr. Elisa Maroney, Thesis Committee Chair at 503-838-8735.

Thank you for your participation!

### **About the Researcher:**

Erica West Oyedele is a nationally certified Black ASL-English interpreter with 10 years of experience working primarily in Northern California.

Erica West Oyedele, NIC  
[eoyedele13@wou.edu](mailto:eoyedele13@wou.edu) | 916-501-8681  
Western Oregon University  
Masters student, College of Education

---

### **Consent**

You have been given a copy of this consent form to keep. By signing below you indicate your willingness to participate in this study.

---

Participant's Name (*please print*)

---

Date

---

Participant's Signature

---

Date

**Experiences of African American/Black ASL-English Interpreters in the U.S.  
Focus Groups 2 & 3 – Questions**

***Interpreter education related questions:***

1. Tell me about your pathway to the field of interpreting, did you undergo training?
2. Did your training include discussions of diversity, multiculturalism or cultural competency?
3. Were any of your instructors African American/Black?
4. If you had classmates who also identified as African American/Black, did they all graduate?
5. Did/do you have any mentors who identify as African American/Black?
6. Did you have exposure or access to successful African American/Black professionals during your training?
7. Looking back on your experience as an African American/Black student do you believe you received adequate supports during your interpreter education?

***Interpreter practitioner related questions:***

1. How often do you work with other African American/Black interpreters?
2. Are you currently mentoring or teaching?
3. As an African American/Black interpreter do you believe you receive adequate supports from colleagues and professional interpreting organizations?
4. To what extent do you believe that your experience as a Black/African American interpreter is unique to the experience that other interpreting colleagues might have?
5. What do you consider to be the most challenging part of being an African American/Black interpreter?
6. What do you consider to be the most rewarding part of being an African American/Black interpreter?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share about your formative educational experiences as an African American/Black interpreter?
8. Is there anything else about your experience as an African American/Black interpreter that you would like to share?

***Potential follow-up questions:***

1. Can you please tell me more about that?
2. Why do you think that is?
3. Do you believe that to be effective?
4. How does that make you feel?
5. Did you notice any difference?
6. Do you have any specific examples you'd like to share?

## **APPENDIX B: Survey**

### **Experiences of African American/Black ASL-English Interpreters in the U. S.**

Dear Colleague,

I am a master's degree student at Western Oregon University in the College of Education under the supervision of Dr. Elisa Maroney. I am conducting a research study seeking to understand African American/Black interpreters' experiences in interpreter education and within the field of ASL-English interpreting in the U.S. I am requesting your participation in this survey, it will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

#### **Who is eligible to participate?**

Professional, and post-professional ASL-English interpreters age 18 and over who identify as African American/Black and reside within the U.S.

#### **Why is this research being done?**

The study is looking to identify what shared experiences if any exist among African American/Black interpreters as they enter the field of interpreting and to what extent those experiences impact their persistence in the field.

#### **Benefits**

The findings from this study will help identify gaps in knowledge that may exist within interpreter education and among ASL-English interpreting colleagues. These findings could aid in future research and changes to best practices that will enhance the number of African American/Black ASL-English interpreters within our profession.

#### **Discomforts and Risks**

This project will require you to answer questions about your professional experiences. There will be no physical risk of any kind.

#### **Who will see the information about me?**

The survey instrument will not collect any identifying data. The primary investigator will see your responses, and the data will be shared in a graduate thesis with no identifying information.

#### **Confidentiality**

If you provide identifying information, be assured that the write-up of data will use pseudo names, and situations will be tweaked to make it impossible to identify individuals.

#### **May I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. Even if you begin, you may discontinue your participation at any time by closing your browser. Any information related to responses will be discarded.

#### **Consent**

By participating in the survey your consent to participate is implied.



## PERSISTENCE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN/BLACK INTERPRETERS

### Who can I contact for questions?

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact Erica West Oyedele, Principal Investigator at [eoyedele13@wou.edu](mailto:eoyedele13@wou.edu) or 916-501-8681.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the WOU Institutional Review Board at any time regarding the study at 503-838-8589 or Dr. Elisa Maroney, Thesis Committee Chair at 503-838-8735. Thank you for your participation!  
About the Researcher:

Erica West Oyedele is a nationally certified Black ASL-English interpreter with 10 years of experience working primarily in Northern California.

Erica West Oyedele, NIC  
[eoyedele13@wou.edu](mailto:eoyedele13@wou.edu) |  
916-501-8681 Western Oregon  
University  
Masters student, College of Education

\* Required

### Survey Intro

A video thumbnail for a survey introduction. It features a woman, Erica West Oyedele, speaking. To her left, there is text describing the study's purpose, participants, and details. The text is as follows:

About the Study

- Purpose:  
To understand the experiences of African American/Black interpreters in the U.S.
- Survey Participants:  
African American/Black interpreters Over the age of 18 Living in the U.S.
- Survey Details:  
Less than 40 questions  
Approximately 10 minutes of your time

<http://youtube.com/watch?v=POa-rsfM928>

### Demographic information

1. Please indicate your age \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 18-20
- ☐ 21-29
- ☐ 30-39
- ☐ 40-49
- ☐ 50-59
- ☐ 60 or older

## PERSISTENCE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN/BLACK INTERPRETERS

2. Please indicate your gender \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Prefer not to answer
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is your ethnicity (Please select all that apply) \* Check all that apply.

- ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ☐ Asian, Hawaiian Native or Pacific Islander
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Chicano, Latino or Hispanic
- ☐ White or Caucasian
- ☐ Prefer not to answer
- ☐ Unknown
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

4. In which region of the U.S. do you live \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ New England: CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT
- ☐ Mid- Atlantic: NJ, NY, PA
- ☐ East North Central: IN, IL, MI, OH, WI
- ☐ West North Central: IA, KS, MN, MO, NE, ND, SD
- ☐ South Atlantic: DE, DC, FL, GA, MD, NC, SC, VA, WV
- ☐ East South Central: AL, KY, MS, TN
- ☐ West South Central: AR, LA, OK, TX
- ☐ Mountain: AZ, CO, ID, NM, MT, UT, NV, WY
- ☐ Pacific: AK, CA, HI, OR, WA
- ☐ Other: Puerto Rico

5. Please indicate your professional status as it pertains to ASL-English interpreting \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Professional interpreter (currently working as an interpreter)
- ☐ Post-professional interpreter (no longer engaged in interpreting)

6. Which of the following categories describe your status in the interpreting community (select all that apply)? \* Check all that apply.

- ☐ Hearing
- ☐ Deaf
- ☐ Coda
- ☐ Deaf of Deaf
- ☐ Other:

7. Did you attend a formal interpreter education program? \*IEP, IPP, ITP. Mark only one oval.

## PERSISTENCE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN/BLACK INTERPRETERS

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (You will automatically continue at question 26.) .

### **IEP/IPP/ITP Specific Questions**

These questions relate to the formal interpreter training that you received.

8. What degree(s) did you receive from your interpreter education program (select all that apply)? \* Note: Please respond only as it pertains to your interpreter education, and not for other disciplines. Check all that apply.

- ☐ Associate degree
- ☐ Bachelor degree
- ☐ Graduate degree
- ☐ Certificate of completion
- ☐ No degree received (I did not complete my interpreter education program)
- ☐ Other:

9. During your interpreter education how easily did you establish close relationships with your classmates? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Extremely easy
- ☐ Quite easy
- ☐ Moderately easy
- ☐ Slightly easy
- ☐ Not at all easy

10. To what extent have you maintained close relationships with your classmates? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Extremely well maintained
- ☐ Quite well maintained
- ☐ Moderately well maintained
- ☐ Slightly well maintained
- ☐ Not at all well maintained

11. Other than yourself, how many of your classmates also identified as African American/Black? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ More than 10
- ☐ 7-9
- ☐ 4-6
- ☐ 1-3
- ☐ None

12. During your education how much time was spent discussing multiculturalism and/or cultural competency as it pertains to interpersonal relationships between colleagues?

\* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ A great deal

## PERSISTENCE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN/BLACK INTERPRETERS

- ☐ A lot
- ☐ A moderate amount
- ☐ A little
- ☐ None at all

13. How effective were your educators when approaching topics of multiculturalism and/or cultural competency? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Extremely effective
- ☐ Quite effective
- ☐ Moderately effective
- ☐ Slightly effective
- ☐ Not at all effective
- ☐ N/A

14. How effective were your educators at being able to incorporate multiple cultural perspectives into their teaching? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Extremely effective
- ☐ Quite effective
- ☐ Moderately effective
- ☐ Slightly effective
- ☐ Not at all effective

15. How self-aware would you say your educators were in being able to recognize their own cultural biases and their impact on your training? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Extremely self-aware
- ☐ Very self-aware
- ☐ Moderately self-aware
- ☐ Slightly self-aware
- ☐ Not at all self-aware

16. How comfortable were you during discussions of multiculturalism and/or cultural competency? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Extremely comfortable
- ☐ Quite comfortable
- ☐ Moderately comfortable
- ☐ Slightly comfortable
- ☐ Not at all comfortable
- ☐ N/A

17. How many of the guest speakers that came to present in your program were African American/Black? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ More than 5
- ☐ 3-4

## PERSISTENCE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN/BLACK INTERPRETERS

- ☐ 1-2
- ☐ None
- ☐ My program did not have guest speakers

18. Of your classmates who identified as African American/Black, are they all working as interpreters now? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes, I believe so
- ☐ No, some left the profession
- ☐ I don't know

19. How many of your educators were African American/Black? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ More than 5
- ☐ 3-4
- ☐ 1-2
- ☐ None

20. If your training program included formal mentoring, how many of the mentors were African American/Black? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ More than 5
- ☐ 3-4
- ☐ 1-2
- ☐ None
- ☐ My program did not have formal mentoring

21. How frequently did you consider discontinuing your interpreter education? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Extremely frequently
- ☐ Very frequently
- ☐ Moderately frequently
- ☐ Slightly frequently
- ☐ Not at all frequently

22. How well do you feel your interpreter education program prepared you for the work you do as an interpreter? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Extremely well
- ☐ Very well
- ☐ Moderately well
- ☐ Slightly well
- ☐ Not at all well

23. How frequently did you experience overt instances of racism directed towards you within your interpreter education program? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Extremely frequently

## PERSISTENCE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN/BLACK INTERPRETERS

- ☐ Very frequently
- ☐ Moderately frequently
- ☐ Slightly frequently
- ☐ Not at all frequently

24. How frequently did you witness overt instances of racism directed towards other African American/Black students within your interpreter education program? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Extremely frequently
- ☐ Very frequently
- ☐ Moderately frequently
- ☐ Slightly frequently
- ☐ Not at all frequently

25. Is there anything else you would like to share about your formative educational experiences as an African American/Black interpreter?

### **Interpreter practitioner related questions**

The following questions will be used to help understand the experiences of working African American/Black interpreters in the U.S.

26. I currently hold the following interpreter related credentials (select all that apply): \*  
Check all that apply.

- ☐ CSC
- ☐ CI
- ☐ CT
- ☐ NIC
- ☐ NIC: Advanced
- ☐ NIC: Master
- ☐ EIPA
- ☐ Ed: K-12
- ☐ SC:L
- ☐ CDI
- ☐ RSC
- ☐ OTC
- ☐ BEI Basic
- ☐ BEI Advanced
- ☐ BEI Master
- ☐ NAD III
- ☐ NAD IV
- ☐ NAD V

## PERSISTENCE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN/BLACK INTERPRETERS

- ☐ None
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

27. How long have you practiced as an interpreter? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Over 20 years
- ☐ 16-20 years
- ☐ 11-15 years
- ☐ 6-10 years
- ☐ Less than 5 years

28. How easy is it for you to establish close relationships with your colleagues? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Extremely easy
- ☐ Quite easy
- ☐ Moderately easy
- ☐ Slightly easy
- ☐ Not at all easy

29. How easy is it for you to maintain close relationships with your colleagues? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Extremely easy
- ☐ Quite easy
- ☐ Moderately easy
- ☐ Slightly easy
- ☐ Not at all easy

30. How often do you work with other African American/Black interpreters? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Extremely often
- ☐ Quite often
- ☐ Moderately often
- ☐ Slightly often
- ☐ Not at all often

31. Do you currently work with a mentor? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

32. Do you currently, or have you ever had mentors who are African American/Black?  
\* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

## PERSISTENCE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN/BLACK INTERPRETERS

33. Do you believe that you have unique experiences on the basis of being an African American/Black interpreter? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

34. How often do you have experiences as an African American/Black interpreter that non-African American/Black interpreters may struggle to understand? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Extremely often
- ☐ Very often
- ☐ Moderately often
- ☐ Slightly often
- ☐ Not at all often

35. How effective would you say your colleagues are at discussing issues of multiculturalism and/or cultural competency? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Extremely effective
- ☐ Quite effective
- ☐ Moderately effective
- ☐ Slightly effective
- ☐ Not at all effective
- ☐ N/A

36. How self-aware would you say your colleagues are when it comes to recognizing their own cultural biases and their impact on consumers and colleagues? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Extremely self-aware
- ☐ Very self-aware
- ☐ Moderately self-aware
- ☐ Slightly self-aware
- ☐ Not at all self-aware

37. In addition to interpreting, do you also work as a mentor and/or instructor of interpreting? \*Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

38. How frequently have you experienced overt instances of racism directed towards you while on the job? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Extremely frequently
- ☐ Very frequently
- ☐ Moderately frequently



## PERSISTENCE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN/BLACK INTERPRETERS

- ☐ Slightly frequently
- ☐ Not at all frequently

39. How frequently have you witnessed overt instances of racism directed towards other African American/Black colleagues while on the job? \* Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Extremely frequently
- ☐ Very frequently
- ☐ Moderately frequently
- ☐ Slightly frequently
- ☐ Not at all frequently

40. How frequently do you consider leaving the field of interpreting for something else?  
\*Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Extremely frequently
- ☐ Very frequently
- ☐ Moderately frequently
- ☐ Slightly frequently
- ☐ Not at all frequently

41. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences as an African American/Black interpreter?

42. May I contact you to conduct a follow up interview? If yes, please provide your contact information below. If no, you may skip this question and submit the questionnaire.

Note: If you decide to share your contact information it will be disaffiliated from your survey responses so that it will not be possible in any way for your identity to be connected to your responses within this survey.

## **APPENDIX C: Interviews**

### **Participant Information Page and Consent Form**

Dear Colleague,

I am a master's degree student at Western Oregon University in the College of Education under the supervision of Dr. Elisa Maroney. I am conducting a research study seeking to understand the experiences of African American/Black ASL-English interpreters in the U.S. and I am requesting your participation in the data collection process.

#### **Invitation to Participate in a Research Study Leading to a Graduate Thesis**

I would like to invite you to take part in this research study, which focuses on the experiences of African American/Black interpreters. As an interpreter of color your perspective on the current state of interpreting is crucial in helping the field understand the experiences of African American/Black interpreters in relation to their colleagues from other diverse backgrounds. Your input could lead to a better understanding of whether or not there is a need for more African American/Black interpreters.

#### **What will you be asked to do?**

If you decide to take part in this study you will be asked to participate in a recorded one-on-one interview that will last no more than 1 hour and may be conducted face-to-face or online via Adobe Connect or other web conferencing software. You will need a high-speed internet connection and a webcam to access the online session.

#### **Who is eligible to participate?**

Professional ASL-English Interpreters age 18 and over who reside within the U.S.

#### **Why is this research being done?**

The study is looking to identify what shared experiences if any exist among African American/Black interpreters as they enter the field of interpreting, how those experiences compare to interpreters of other demographic backgrounds and to what extent those experiences impact their persistence in the field.

#### **Benefits**

Identifying reasons why African American/Black interpreters do not persist in the field of ASL-English interpreting will help to identify knowledge gaps in interpreter education and among interpreting colleagues. Study participants will benefit from knowing that their shared stories helped to further research and, possibly, lead to an increase in the number of African American/Black interpreters in the field.

#### **Discomforts and Risks**

During the interview participants will be asked to answer questions about their professional experiences. This project will be recorded by the primary investigator to allow for further data analysis once the interview is complete. The researcher acknowledges that in small communities confidentiality may be difficult to maintain.

## PERSISTENCE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN/BLACK INTERPRETERS

Your name, location and/or any identifying information will not be used in the final thesis. There will be no physical risk of any kind.

### **Who will see the information about me?**

The primary investigator will see your responses, and the data will be shared in a graduate thesis with no identifying information – specific locations & names will not be discussed.

### **Confidentiality**

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely on a password-protected computer and only the researcher will have access to the records. If you provide identifying information, be assured that the write-up of data will use pseudonyms, and situations will be modified to make it nearly impossible to identify individuals.

### **May I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. Even if you begin, you may discontinue your participation at any time without fear of retaliation. If you decide to discontinue your participation all data collected from you to that point will be discarded.

### **Who can I contact for questions?**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact Erica West Oyedele, Principal Investigator at [eoyedele13@wou.edu](mailto:eoyedele13@wou.edu) or 916-501-8681 or Dr. Elisa Maroney, Thesis Committee Chair, at [maronee@wou.edu](mailto:maronee@wou.edu) or 503-838-8735.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the WOU Institutional Review Board at any time regarding the study at [irb@wou.edu](mailto:irb@wou.edu) or 503-838-9200.

Thank you for your participation!

### **About the Researcher:**

Erica West Oyedele is a nationally certified Black ASL-English interpreter with 10 years of experience working primarily in Northern California.

Erica West Oyedele, NIC  
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Western Oregon University | Masters Student, College of Education

---

### **Consent**

You have been given a copy of this consent form to keep. By signing below you indicate your willingness to participate in this study.

---

Participant's Name (*please print*)

---

Participant's Signature

---

Date

**One-on-One Interview – Questions**

***Interpreter demographic-related questions:***

1. In which region of the U.S. do you reside?
2. How old are you?
3. How long have you been working as a signed language interpreter?
4. What is your ethnicity?
5. What is your highest degree received?
6. What is the highest degree you received from an interpreter education program?

***Interpreter education related questions:***

1. Tell me about your pathway to the field of interpreting, did you undergo training?
2. What types of discussions and/or courses about diversity, multiculturalism or cultural competency did your training include?
3. How often did these discussions focus on the interpersonal relationships between colleagues?
4. What instances of racism directed towards you or your classmates did you experience or witness?
5. In terms of cultural competency, what was missing from your interpreter training that you wish you would have been exposed to?

***Interpreter practitioner related questions:***

1. How often do you work with colleagues who share your ethnic identity?
2. How often do you work with consumers who share your ethnic identity?
3. How often have you worked with a mentor who shares your ethnic identity?
4. How self-aware would you say your colleagues are when it comes to recognizing their own cultural biases and their impact on consumers and colleagues?
5. How often have you experienced or witnessed instances of racism directed towards you, your colleagues, or your consumers?
6. In terms of cultural competency, what do you perceive to be lacking in the field of interpreting?
7. What else would you like to share about your experiences as an interpreter of color?

***Potential follow-up questions:***

1. Please tell me more about that.
2. Why do you think that is?
3. How does that make you feel?
4. Please share specific examples.

**APPENDIX D: Codes and Criteria****African American/Black Deaf Consumer Focus Group**

<b>Codes (frequency)</b>	<b>The following codes were applied when...</b>
Provision of Services Negative (55)	The consumer shared negative experiences related to the provision of interpreting services.
Race Same (46)	The interpreter being of the same race or ethnicity as the consumer was a marked reference in the narrative.
Consumer Non-Match (41)	Participants mentioned a lack of access to interpreters who they felt matched their style of discourse.
Cultural Competence (41)	Participants mentioned feeling that interpreters' were able to interact within the African American/Black Deaf community in ways that showed they understood and valued the community's norms.
Race Different (40)	The interpreter being of a different race or ethnicity than the consumer was a marked reference in the narrative.
Provision of Services Positive (39)	The consumer shared positive experiences related to the provision of interpreting services.
Lack of Cultural Competence (38)	Participants mentioned feeling that interpreters' behaviors when interacting within the African American/Black Deaf community showed they lacked an understanding of the community's values.
Consumer Match (34)	Participants mentioned having access to interpreters who they felt matched their style of discourse.
Deaf Consumer Lack of Confidence (29)	Participants mentioned feeling that the interpreter or the interpretation provided could not be trusted.
Lack of Linguistic Competence (29)	Participants referred to the interpreter's lack of production skills in either ASL, English or dialects thereof.
Linguistic Competence (28)	Participants referred to the interpreter's production skills in either ASL, English, or dialects thereof.
Access to Training (24)	Participants mentioned feeling that interpreters' need to have access to cultural training that informs them about the African American/Black Deaf community
Deaf Consumer Power (23)	The consumer felt empowered in their ability to impact the provision of services.
Hearing Consumer Power (22)	The consumer felt the hearing consumer held the majority of the power, which impacted the provision of services.
Deaf Consumer Lack of Power (17)	The consumer felt their power to impact the provision of services had been taken away by the interpreter, hearing consumer, or interpreter referral agency.
Deaf Consumer Confidence (16)	Participants mentioned feeling that they could trust the interpreter, and the interpretation they provided.

## PERSISTENCE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN/BLACK INTERPRETERS

Interpreter Non-Initiative (11)	Participants mentioned feeling like interpreters' did not take the time to learn about the African American/Black Deaf community.
Request Race Same (11)	The consumer made a request for the interpreter to be African American/Black.
Witness Distrust (8)	The consumer witnessed negative colleague dynamics between the team interpreters who arrived to provide interpreting services.
Culture Over Skill (7)	Participants mentioned that cultural awareness was valued more so than linguistic fluency.
Supply Low (7)	Participants made comments indicating that there were not enough African American/Black interpreters.
Interpreter Initiative (6)	Participants mentioned feeling that interpreters' took the time to learn about the African American/Black Deaf community.
Interpreter Isolation (5)	Participants shared stories of the isolation they had observed among African American/Black interpreters.
Interpreter Power (5)	The consumer felt the interpreter held the majority of the power, which impacted the provision of services.
Community Support (3)	The need for more African American/Black Deaf community members to support African American/Black interpreters in their professional development was mentioned.

## PERSISTENCE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN/BLACK INTERPRETERS

### African American/Black Interpreters: Codes and Criteria

<b>Codes (frequency)</b>	<b>The following codes were applied when...</b>
Lacks cultural awareness (155)	The participant indicated that their classmates, educators, colleagues, consumers or others, behaved in ways that did not demonstrate cultural competence or sensitivity towards multicultural issues.
Sense of community – yes (122)	The participant indicated feeling that they had established close ties with classmates, educators, colleagues, consumers and others.
Culturally aware (100)	Participants referenced their own ability, or the ability of classmates, educators, colleagues, consumers or others to behave in ways that indicated they were culturally competent.
Interpreter race different (85)	The interpreting colleague being of a different race or ethnicity than the interpreter was a marked reference in the narrative.
Sense of community – lacking (75)	The participant indicated feeling a lack of close ties towards classmates, educators, colleagues, consumers and others.
Isolation (72)	The participant indicated feeling a lack of close ties to classmates, educators, colleagues, consumers or others, or when they indicated feeling like they had no other African American/Black interpreters to share their experiences with.
Colleague dynamics – negative (71)	Participants indicated holding negative feelings towards their colleagues.
Frustration (48)	Participants expressed feelings of frustration after recalling encounters with classmates, educators, colleagues, consumers or others.
Role models – yes (44)	The participant indicated having access to role models who are African American/Black.
Increased aspirations (43)	Participants expressed wanting to increase their status through more certifications, or academic degrees.
Interpreter initiated (42)	The participant initiated discussions of cultural competence among classmates, educators, colleagues, consumers or others.
Organizational support (39)	The participant indicated feeling supported by professional organizations such as NAOBI which helped to reduce feelings of isolation.
Persistence – yes (39)	The participant indicated they had considered leaving the profession but decided to stay.
IPP – lacking (37)	The participant indicated that their classmates, educators, guest presenters, mentors, administrators and others, during their interpreter preparation program did not recognize issues of cultural competence or multiculturalism.
Need for training	The participant indicated that their classmates, educators, colleagues,

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(35)	consumers or others, need further training in order to become more culturally competent.
Diversity within groups (32)	Participants felt as though their classmates, educators, colleagues, consumers or others recognized the diversity that exists within the African American/Black community.
Consumer race different (31)	The consumer being of a different race or ethnicity than the interpreter was a marked reference in the narrative.
Microaggressions (31)	The participant indicated that their classmates, educators, colleagues, consumers or others, made racially charged comments that were offensive, yet unintentional.
Responsibility (30)	The participant referenced feeling burdened, or overburdened with responsibilities as an African American/Black interpreter.
Recruitment (28)	The participant indicated feeling that recruitment efforts were necessary, or if they indicated that they are involved in recruitment efforts.
Community based training (26)	Participants indicated that their training happened among the Deaf community, or in workshops/seminars outside of a formal interpreter preparation program, or if they indicated desire for more trainings of this nature.
Overt racism (25)	The participant indicated having comments directed towards them or others in their presence, from classmates, educators, colleagues, consumers or others, that were overtly racist in nature.
Teacher race – different (25)	The teacher being of a different race or ethnicity than the interpreter was a marked reference in the narrative.
Leadership (24)	The participant indicated serving as a role model, or aspirations towards serving as a role model in order to positively impact the field for up and coming African American/Black interpreters.
Role models – lacking (23)	The participant indicated a lack of access to role models who are African American/Black.
Cognitive dissonance (22)	Participants indicated experiencing an inner conflict between their values/beliefs, and their actions while on the job.
Colleague dynamics – positive (22)	Participants indicated holding positive feelings towards their colleagues.
Confidence in self – high (22)	Participants indicated feeling confident in their skills/abilities as an interpreter, or confident in their identity as an African American/Black person.
Mentor race different (22)	The mentor being of a different race or ethnicity than the interpreter was a marked reference in the narrative.
Proving self (20)	The participant indicated feeling as though they have to prove themselves to others in order to be respected by classmates, educators, colleagues, consumers and others.
Consumer	Participants mentioned receiving comments from consumers who



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confidence – high (19)	indicated feeling confident in their skills/abilities as an interpreter.
Mentor race same (19)	The mentor being of the same racial or ethnic background as the interpreter was a marked reference in the narrative.
Interpreter race same (17)	The interpreting colleague being of the same racial or ethnic background as the interpreter was a marked reference in the narrative.
IPP – positive (17)	The participant indicated that their classmates, educators, guest presenters, mentors, administrators and others, during their interpreter preparation program did recognize issues of cultural competence or multiculturalism.
Persistence – no (17)	The participant indicated having classmates or colleagues who have left the profession.
VRS (13)	The participant mentioned working in VRS as a marked part of the narrative.
Assumptions (10)	Participants were confronted by assumptions that colleagues or consumers held about them on the basis of their race or ethnicity.
Trilingual interpreting (10)	The participant mentioned working in trilingual settings as a marked part of the narrative.
Religious interpreting (9)	The participant referenced interpreting in religious settings as a marked part of their narrative.
Confidence in self – low (7)	Participants indicated feeling a lack of confidence in their skills/abilities as an interpreter, or a lack of confidence in their identity as an African American/Black person.
Consumer race same (5)	The consumer being of the same race or ethnicity as the interpreter was a marked reference in the narrative.
Teacher race same (2)	The teacher being of the same race or ethnicity as the interpreter was a marked reference in the narrative.

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### Interview Two and Three: Codes and Criteria

<b>Codes</b>	<b>The following codes were applied when...</b>
Lacks cultural awareness (28)	The participant indicated that their classmates, educators, colleagues, consumers or others, behaved in ways that did not demonstrate cultural competence or sensitivity towards multicultural issues.
Microaggressions (17)	The participant indicated that their classmates, educators, colleagues, consumers or others, made racially charged comments that were offensive, yet unintentional.
Colleague dynamics – negative (14)	Participants indicated holding negative feelings towards their colleagues.
Interpreter race different (13)	The interpreting colleague being of a different racial or ethnic background than the interpreter was a marked reference in the narrative.
Need for training (13)	The participant indicated that their classmates, educators, colleagues, consumers or others need further training in order to become more culturally competent.
Sense of community – lacking (12)	The participant indicated overall feeling a lack of close ties towards classmates, educators, colleagues, consumers or others.
Culturally aware (10)	Participants referenced their own ability, or the ability of classmates, educators, colleagues, consumers or others to behave in ways that indicated they were culturally competent.
Assumptions (8)	Participants were confronted by assumptions that colleagues or consumers held about them on the basis of their race or ethnicity.
Colleague dynamics – positive (8)	Participants indicated holding positive feelings towards their colleagues.
Frustration (6)	Participants expressed feelings of frustration after recalling encounters with classmates, educators, colleagues, consumers or others.
Sense of community – yes (6)	The participant indicated overall feeling that they had established close ties with classmates, educators, colleagues, consumers and others.
IPP – lacking (5)	The participant indicated that their classmates, educators, guest presenters, mentors, administrators and others, during their interpreter preparation program did not recognize issues of cultural competence or multiculturalism.
Trilingual interpreting (5)	The participant mentioned working in trilingual settings as a marked part of the narrative.
Community based training (4)	Participants indicated that their training happened among the Deaf community, or in workshops/seminars outside of a formal interpreter preparation program, or if they indicated desire for more trainings of this nature.
Recruitment (4)	The participant indicated feeling that recruitment efforts were necessary, or if they indicated that they are involved in recruitment efforts.
Responsibility (4)	The participant referenced feeling burdened, or overburdened with responsibilities as an interpreter of color.
Consumer race	The consumer being of a different race or ethnicity than the interpreter

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different (3)	was a marked reference in the narrative.
Consumer race same (3)	The consumer being of the same race or ethnicity as the interpreter was a marked reference in the narrative.
Isolation (3)	The participant indicated feeling a lack of close ties to classmates, educators, mentors, and colleagues, or when they indicated feeling like they had no other interpreters who share their same race or ethnicity to share their experiences with.
Mentor race different (3)	The mentor being of a different race or ethnicity than the interpreter was a marked reference in the narrative.
Teacher race – different (3)	The teacher being of a different race or ethnicity than the interpreter was a marked reference in the narrative.
Diversity within groups (2)	Participants felt as though their classmates, educators, colleagues, consumers or others recognized they were among multicultural communities.
Increased aspirations (2)	Participants expressed wanting to increase their status through more certifications, or academic degrees.
IPP – positive (2)	The participant indicated that their classmates, educators, guest presenters, mentors, administrators and others, during their interpreter preparation program did recognize issues of cultural competence or multiculturalism.
Mentor race same (2)	The mentor being of the same race or ethnicity as the interpreter was a marked reference in the narrative.
Persistence – yes (2)	The participant indicated they had considered leaving the profession but decided to stay.
Cognitive dissonance (1)	Participants indicated experiencing an inner conflict between their values/beliefs, and their actions while on the job.
Confidence in self – high (1)	Participants indicated feeling confident in their skills/abilities as an interpreter, and/or confident in their racial and ethnic identity.
Consumer confidence – high (1)	Participants mentioned receiving comments from consumers who indicated feeling confident in their skills/abilities as an interpreter.
Interpreter race same (1)	The interpreting colleague being of the same race or ethnicity as the interpreter was a marked reference in the narrative.
Interpreter initiated (1)	The participant initiated discussions of cultural competence among classmates, educators, colleagues, consumers or others.
Leadership (1)	The participant indicated serving as a role model, or aspirations towards serving as a role model in order to positively impact the field for up and coming interpreters of color.
Proving self (1)	The participant indicated feeling as though they have to prove themselves to others in order to be respected by classmates, educators, colleagues, consumers or others.
Role models – yes (1)	The participant indicated having access to role models who share their same racial or ethnic identity.