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## Rooted in Reflection: Developing My Professional Identity During My First Year as an Interpreter

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**Rooted in Reflection: Developing My Professional Identity**

**During My First Year as an Interpreter**

Rachel R. Williams

Western Oregon University



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**WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE GRADUATE FACULTY OF  
WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY HAVE EXAMINED THE ENCLOSED**

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Action Research Project Title:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Graduate Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Candidate for the degree of : Master of Arts in 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.*

**Committee Chair:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

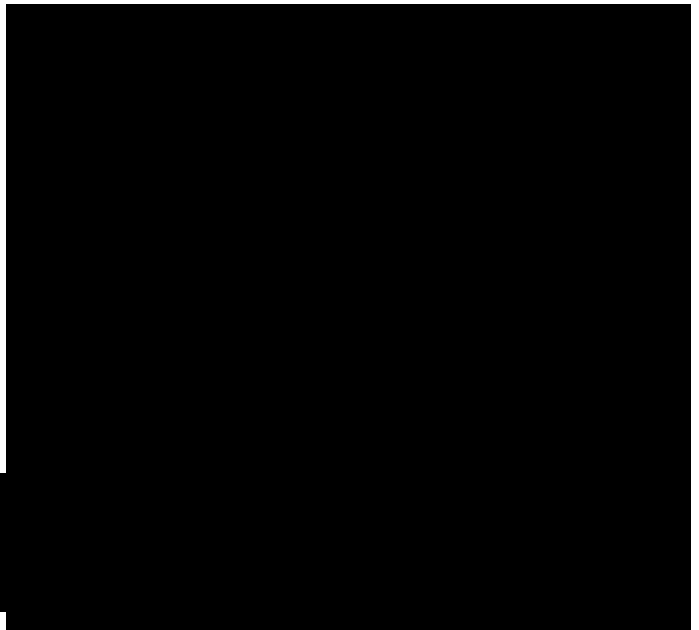
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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Dean of Graduate Studies and Research:**

\_\_\_\_\_



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 For encouraging me to read and write and always pursue further learning,  
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 But above all, for always believing in my ability to Shine.  
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 and always reminding me of the reasons why I didn't *actually* want to give up.  
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## Table of Contents

<b><i>Acknowledgements</i></b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b><i>Table of Contents</i></b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b><i>List of Tables and Figures</i></b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b><i>Abstract</i></b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b><i>Chapter 1: Introduction</i></b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Background</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Statement of the Problem</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Purpose of the Study</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Theoretical Framework</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Self-Efficacy: A Brief History .....	9
Group Decision-Making Theory: A Brief History.....	10
<b><i>Chapter 2: Literature Review</i></b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Decision-Making</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Interpersonal Relationships</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Mentorship</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Demand Control Schema</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Professional Identity Development</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b><i>Chapter 3: Methodology</i></b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>Self-Report Data Collection</b> .....	<b>18</b>
Perception of Team.....	18
Familiarity .....	18
Confidence .....	19
<b>Action Plan</b> .....	<b>19</b>
Supervision.....	19
Coaching .....	20
Reflective Writing.....	20
<b>Data Analysis</b> .....	<b>21</b>
Self-Report Data .....	21
Reflective Writing Data.....	22
<b><i>Chapter 4: Results</i></b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>Self-Report Measures Results</b> .....	<b>23</b>
Perception of Team’s Experience and Confidence.....	23
Familiarity and Confidence .....	23
Perceived Openness and Confidence.....	24
<b>Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) Results</b> .....	<b>25</b>
Clout .....	25
Authenticity.....	26
Drives.....	26
<b><i>Chapter 5: Discussion</i></b> .....	<b>28</b>

**Self-Report Measures ..... 28**

**LIWC Data ..... 29**

    Clout and Confidence .....30

    Authenticity in Reflection .....31

    Drives over Time .....32

**General Discussion..... 33**

***Chapter 6: Conclusion ..... 36***

***References ..... 38***

***Appendix A..... 44***

***Appendix B..... 45***

***Appendix C..... 46***

***Appendix D ..... 47***

### List of Tables

<i>Table 1. Correlations: Confidence and Team Variables. ....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Table 2. MANOVA Post Hoc Test Results. ....</i>	<i>47</i>

### List of Figures

<i>Figure 1. Means of "Clout" Variable as Measured in Reflective Writing Assignments. ....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Figure 2. Means of "Authenticity" Variable as Measured in Reflective Writing Assignments. ....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Figure 3. Means of "Drive" Variable as Measured in Reflective Writing Assignments. ....</i>	<i>27</i>

**Abstract****Rooted in Reflection: Developing My Professional Identity During My First Year as an Interpreter**

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Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies

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December 2020

This study focuses on my journey of professional identity development starting out in the field. Over the course of my first year of practice, I collected reflective data about my teamed interpreting experiences, and reflected about my process through regular meetings with a seasoned interpreter functioning as a coach, supervision sessions with colleagues and mentors, and written assignments focused on personal reflection and developing a strong sense of professional identity. The analysis focuses on the evolution of my professional identity and my ability to establish and navigate boundaries in interpersonal relationships with team interpreters. This study is intended to be an asset to new interpreters seeking to establish their professional identities as they begin working in the field of interpretation. Ultimately, in this study, I found that strong relationships exist between a new interpreter's decision-making self-efficacy in interpreting scenarios and the perceived openness of a team interpreter; I also found that intentional engagement in reflective practices is positively correlated with an increased sense of confidence and a stronger sense of professional identity.

*Keywords:* interpreting, self-efficacy, openness, reflective practices, professional identity



## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Background

Interpreting situations are often fraught with decisions to be made - sign choices, positioning in the room, alignment with hearing and Deaf consumers, what role(s) to take in a situation... the list is endless. New interpreters' decision-making is often impacted by perceived power dynamics with other interpreters or professionals present, as well as by their overall confidence in the setting, comfort with those consumers, and confidence in their knowledge about the topic at hand. Decisions made in an interpreted interaction are linked to the interpreter's role and ultimately impact the success of the interaction (Lee & Llewellyn-Jones, 2011).

Studies have examined the relationships between experienced and novice interpreters (Boeh, 2016; Flora, 2013; Hewlett, 2013; Hill, 2018; Hoza, 2010; Reinhardt, 2015; Ott, 2012). One study examined the opinions of experienced interpreters with regard to working with novice interpreters and found that some experienced interpreters perceive novice interpreters to be arrogant, judgmental, and under-informed about the field (Flora, 2013). As an inexperienced interpreter, I wanted to explore the working relationships between myself and more experienced interpreters, and how those relationships impacted my self-efficacy on the job.

### Statement of the Problem

In my work as a new interpreter, I noticed a clear distinction between situations when I was doing solo work and when I was working with a team interpreter. In the context of interpreting, a "team" is an additional interpreter working the same assignment. These interpreters often alternate who is actively interpreting the message and who is resting while supporting the person actively interpreting. When I was working alone, I felt confident in my

decisions and used my training in the Demand Control Schema (Dean & Pollard, 2013) to assess and respond to situations as they arose. When paired with a team interpreter, however, I noticed that I felt less confident, and that I was more likely to defer to the team interpreter on any decisions, even those that I knew how to make and felt comfortable making when working on my own. While it may be appropriate for new interpreters to defer some decision-making to more experienced teams, I quickly realized I was deferring without considering making the choice myself. I was curious about the various factors of teamed situations and how those factors were impacting my self-efficacy with regard to decision-making.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The initial goal of this project was to identify factors that could be addressed in my own cognitive process to help myself discern instances where it is most appropriate to defer to others from those in which it is appropriate to make the decisions myself. When this study was originally designed, I aimed to identify the different factors that impact my decision-making process and explore to what degree they can be addressed in my everyday work. Due to COVID-19, among other considerations, the scope of the project shifted to examine my growth and the development of my professional identity over the course of my first year as a working interpreter, examining both the data collected for the initial purpose and the evolution of my mindset and language over the course of the year of intentional reflection and development of my interpreting practice.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research began with two theoretical pillars: Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (1977) and the Integrated Model of Group Decision-Making created by Hirokawa and Johnston (1989). Bandura's theory of self-efficacy was used to help establish my levels of confidence and belief in

my abilities to make decisions. Hirokawa and Johnston's model of group decision-making was used to analyze the factors of team settings that may impact my levels of self-efficacy and choices about decision-making. A visual representation of this theoretical framework can be found in Appendix A.

### ***Self-Efficacy: A Brief History***

American psychologist Bandura first published his theories of self-efficacy in 1977. Bandura (1977) hypothesized that there were several factors that impact a person's own expectations of efficacy: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. The theory of self-efficacy is that an individual's belief in their own capabilities will have an impact on what that individual chooses to do in a given situation, how much persistence they have in relation to that choice, and how they feel overall about the task and their choices (Bandura, 1993). Self-efficacy is closely related to self-confidence, self-concept, and how individuals view themselves within the scope of their work and their environment. Moore (2020) studied the self-efficacy of novice interpreters and found that both self-esteem and self-efficacy were closely related to the success of novice interpreters.

From self-efficacy theory, I built a framework for analysis of my self-confidence and self-concept by creating self-report measures of my confidence as it related to the content of the interpreted interaction, as well as the decision-making of that interpreted interaction. I noted that my self-efficacy was lower when working with teams versus working solo, and that this seemed to be impacting my decision-making. For my data collection, I recorded my feelings of confidence in both areas before, during, and after interpreted interactions. In this study, I chose to examine how my belief in my ability to make decisions impacted my process of decision-making.

*Group Decision-Making Theory: A Brief History*

Hirokawa and Johnston (1989) discuss the need for the integration of group decision-making research across a wide variety of fields and professions. They posit that previously existing theories fail to account for the complex system of interactions between individual and group factors: individuals' schemas, personalities, and decision-making processes, as well as the group's communication norms, externally applied rules of decision-making, and the nature of interpersonal relationships (Hirokawa & Johnston, 1989). Their theory is an amalgamation of the wide variety of theories that existed across fields such as psychology, economics, sociology, and political science; it considers the individual factors that are present in each member of the team, how the team members are interacting with one another, and what the environment dictates as far as communication and decision-making (Hirokawa & Johnston, 1989).

From this theory, I drew inspiration for the factors that may play into the relationship of self-efficacy and decision-making in teams (see Appendix B for a graphic representation of these factors of self-efficacy). In the current study, I recorded my perceptions of my team interpreters, including how much experience it seemed they had, and how open they seemed to be. When evaluating my team's openness, I looked for evidence of factors such as honesty, self-disclosure, engagement in the interaction, willingness to team with me, and intellectual curiosity. These perceptions were measured in order to analyze how these factors might affect my self-efficacy while working with those teams.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The first key topic to explore in connection to the current research is the concept of the role of the interpreter and the decisions that are integral to the interpreting process (Lee and Llewellyn-Jones, 2011). Additionally, the current research has a strong focus on the concept of self-efficacy, which has been explored quite extensively in a variety of fields of research (Bandura, 1977; Lenz & Shortridge-Baggett, 2002; Greene, 2018; Schwarzer & Renner, 2000; Gwaltney et al., 2009; Olander et al., 2013). The current research also employs supervision and the Demand-Control Schema (DC-S) for personal reflection and growth (Dean & Pollard, 2013). Finally, the current research explores the connection between a reflective interpreting practice and professional identity development (Smith, 2019; Trine, 2019).

### **Decision-Making**

Lee and Llewellyn-Jones (2011) argue that the role of the interpreter is manifested through the series of interconnected decisions made by an interpreter in a given situation. Whether the interpreter takes on an assignment alone or as part of a team, there are decisions to be made. These decisions include choices about the interpreting process, choices about dynamic equivalence of the message, and choices that aim to manage the interaction and other aspects of the situation at hand (Hoza, 2010). These decisions are crucial to ensuring the interpretation is effective and suited to the situation. When decisions are made during a teamed assignment, it is paramount that the interpreters seek collaboration and interdependence in order to accomplish a shared goal (Hoza, 2010).

In relation to decision-making latitude, Karasek (1979) identifies connections between physical and psychological stress and a lack of control related to decisions at work. Specific to interpreters, Hill (2018) suggests that interpreters in intense interpreting situations who feel

limited in their options or decision-making power may feel less safe, more stressed, and experience psychological or physiological strain. When working in interpreting teams, the interpersonal relationships between the interpreters may impact how empowered each interpreter feels to make decisions within the interaction.

### **Interpersonal Relationships**

A great deal of research has been done related to interpersonal relationships in the field of interpreting (Flora, 2013; Ott, 2012; Hill, 2018; Ramirez-Loudenback, 2015; Hewlett, 2013). These studies have found that there are distinct, and often negative, attitudes that exist between experienced and novice interpreters (Flora, 2013). These studies have identified a pattern of toxic and negative interactions within the field of signed language interpreting, often labeled as ‘horizontal violence’ (Hewlett, 2013; Ott, 2012). Hewlett’s (2013) thesis discusses the impact that positive or negative feedback can have on an interpreter and analyzes the effects that may stem from the manner in which that feedback is delivered.

The interpersonal aspects of interpreting to be navigated may include cultural differences between generations of experienced and novice interpreters (Flora, 2013), and differences in approaches for giving feedback to team interpreters (Hewlett, 2013). In addition to these interpersonal stresses, novice interpreters face higher levels of physiological stress in simultaneous interpreting scenarios than their more experienced counterparts (Kurz, 2003). This indicates that newer interpreters experience higher levels of intrapersonal stressors in these settings, perhaps due to uncertainty, lack of self-efficacy, or a lack of familiarity with the various elements of interpreted settings.

Working with teams creates a situation in which two interpreters are sharing their work with one another, being vulnerable, and opening themselves up to criticism, feedback, and a

variety of potentially harmful circumstances (Hewlett, 2013). Research about trust within interpreting scenarios has shown that pre-conferencing helps to build trust (Reinhardt, 2015). Factors that positively influence the ability to pre-conference, and thereby the ability to build trust, include attitudes of “open-mindedness, willingness to collaborate, shared goals, honesty, and respect” (Reinhardt, 2015, p. 72); the same study illustrated that attitudes of defensiveness, ego, or arrogance served as barriers to the ability to preconference and build trust (p. 72). The interpersonal relationships formed between teaming interpreters are a key factor of enabling the interpreters to be vulnerable and engage in true collaboration about the work. When the interpersonal relationships between teaming interpreters feel unsafe, the quality of work will likely suffer, along with the psychological safety of the interpreters (Hill, 2018).

Ramirez-Loudenback’s (2015) thesis explores the potential conflict that can arise when teaming interpreters prioritize motivations and values in their work. Two interpreters working together is a much more difficult task when their goals for their work are not aligned. There is a need for openness and communication between interpreters, without these practices, it can be incredibly difficult to overcome these kinds of conflicting motivations. Ramirez-Loudenback (2015) also found that there was a relationship between the years of experience an interpreter had and the values they ranked as most important in their work. This suggests that newer interpreters may hold different values than their more experienced teams, and therefore may have different beliefs about decisions that need to be made, different goals for the interaction, and different approaches to engaging with teams and consumers. These differences may cause conflict that make these interpersonal connections more difficult to form, and thereby impacts the quality of the work being performed.

## **Mentorship**

The current study includes mentorship, or *coaching*, as one aspect of the action plan. Mentorship has been shown to have incredible benefits for mentees and their work, particularly in practice professions such as teaching, nursing, and counseling (see Boswell et al., 2015; Simpson et al., 2007; Allen et al. 2004; Jakubik et al, 2016, among others). Interpreting has been classified as a practice profession (Dean & Pollard, 2004, 2005), as well, and mentoring is not a new topic within the field. Mentorship has been used to help mentees adjust to the unspoken culture of a profession, to nurture practitioners with less experience, and to support new practitioners in a variety of professional and personal arenas (Carpenter, 2017). *The Standard Practice Paper on Mentoring* from the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf encourages mentorship for new interpreters and suggests that mentoring may occur in a variety of manners and relationships, and provides benefits to the mentee, mentor, and consumers encountered by interpreters engaged in mentoring practices (RID, 2007). One study examined the benefits that mentoring can have for helping novice interpreters enter the field and adjust to expectations from interpreting professionals; the study also found that mentoring helped novice interpreters apply the knowledge gained through Interpreter Training Programs about topics like the scope of practice and responsibilities of interpreters, application of ethics and standards for ethical practices, freelance business practices, and other issues that arise for new interpreters navigating the field (Boeh, 2016).

Another study examined factors that helped establish novice interpreters' professional identities, and many participants identified mentors and mentorship as part of their growth (Harwood, 2017). Furthermore, Harwood (2017) found that having a mentor affirm a novice interpreter's belonging within the field was a helpful step toward developing a professional



identity. Faculty at Western Oregon University have studied the benefits that come from a concentrated program of mentorship and DC-S supervision to help novice interpreters transition into their new roles as professionals the field, and researchers suggest that the combination of the two supports could help to benefit mentors, mentees, supervision leaders, and the profession as a whole (Smith, et al. 2012).

### **Demand Control Schema**

The current research relies heavily on the DC-S framework, which allows interpreters to have a common language to discuss the aspects of a situation, or the *Demands* which impact the choices an interpreter can make (Dean & Pollard, 2013). These *Demands* are categorized into four groups: Environmental, Interpersonal, Paralinguistic, and Intrapersonal; together, the Demands describe all the aspects of a situation that have the potential to affect how an interpreter reacts or what decisions an interpreter makes (Dean & Pollard, 2013). During the process of *supervision*, a group of colleagues helps one or more interpreters identify all the potential Demands in a given situation, and then process all the options, or *Controls*, an interpreter might have in that situation. The process of supervision is meant to be a place free of judgment and evaluative language – it is simply a forum in which an interpreter can work through a situation safely with trusted mentors and colleagues (Witter-Merithew, 2001). The benefits of supervision process are plentiful, but in a study that specifically investigated the benefits of DC-S supervision for interpreters, specific benefits included increased knowledge and skills, reflection on ethics and decision-making, and validation and support from colleagues (Curtis, 2017).

In a field where confidentiality is a core value, practitioners can feel limited in their ability to discuss their work, find resources for improving, and process important experiences had on the job (Dean & Pollard, 2001). DC-S provides a framework for open, honest

communication about experiences without violating the confidentiality that is so important to the field and the integrity of interpreting work (Dean & Pollard, 2009). Through supervision, an interpreter is able to ethically, objectively, and directly discuss opportunities to improve the work and benefit consumers, teams, and all individuals within interpreted interactions (Dean & Pollard, 2009).

### **Professional Identity Development**

Professional identity development in general has been defined as “the process through which individuals gain the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for successful entry into a professional career” (Weidman et al., 2001, p. iii). Professional identity development often does not occur within the vacuum of a single practitioner; it is influenced by internal interpretations of the expectations and interactions that come with our connections to other individuals during and after our professional experiences (Harwood, 2017; Trine, 2019; Bontempo et al., 2014). Harwood (2017) synthesized that collective professional identities develop when there are common expectations for professionals within a field in terms of their “attire, demeanor, behaviors, knowledge, and vocabulary” (p. 12-13). Harwood (2017) found that “both collective and individual professional identities are strengthened through mentorship, educational opportunities, research, and a sense of community” (p. 108). In the study, Harwood explores the idea that a collective professional identity is still being formed for ASL/English interpreters due to the relatively short history of the profession (p. 13).

However, an individual practitioner’s professional identity may still be impacted by their relationship to other professionals within the practice. Harwood (2017) found that being viewed as a colleague and being accepted into a community of practice was a key factor in bolstering the self-esteem and professional self-concept of novice interpreters. Other studies have found links

between confidence and professional identity development. Holland et al. (2012) suggested that individuals whose professional identity is not clearly defined may also struggle with confidence; in fact, the same study found that confidence level is closely related to competence, and that both are key factors of professional identity development. In an international study of signed language interpreters, high self-esteem was found to be the number one predictor of competence (Bontempo et al., 2014). Interpreters who are building their professional identities as they enter the field as practitioners can benefit from a sense of belonging (Harwood, 2017), confidence (Moore, 2020; Holland et al, 2012; Bontempo et al., 2014), and intentional reflection about their work and their progress (Smith, 2019; Trine, 2019).

Trine (2019) explains that professional identity development is a continuous process by which practitioners engage in “vulnerable reflection, intentional work, and integrity” (para. 5). In this way, interpreters can work to develop their professional identity through their reflective practice. Smith (2019) defines *reflective practice* as “the ability to reflect on one’s actions so as to engage in a process of continuous learning.” Developing a reflective interpreting practice requires consistent introspection and seeking further resources to develop and hone the variety of skills required for interpreting. The MAIS program encourages the development of a reflective practice through a variety of channels, including DC-S supervision, coaching, and reflective writing assignments.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

My methodology had two distinct parts: my self-report data collection and my action plan. Due to this, my data analysis has two focuses: my self-report data and the reflective writings collected throughout the year as part of my action plan.

#### **Self-Report Data Collection**

During jobs for which I had a team, data was collected in real time using a paper form (see Appendix C). Overall, the data was intended to gather information about how different factors relate to my self-efficacy (see Appendix B for a graphical representation of these aspects as I propose they combine to influence my self-efficacy).

#### ***Perception of Team***

Each time I was placed in a teamed setting, I recorded how much experience I perceived my team to have in years. I also recorded how open I perceived them to be on a Likert scale from least open (0) to most open (10). It is important to note that my perception of the team may differ from reality, as I did not inquire directly about their interpreting history or experiences, but rather recorded solely my own perception of their level of experience in years, based on factors such as their age, confidence, and reputation. Relating to my perception of their openness, I looked for evidence of their honesty, self-disclosure, engagement, willingness to team with me, and their intellectual curiosity.

#### ***Familiarity***

I rated each of the following aspects on a Likert scale ranging from least familiar (0) to most familiar (10): familiarity with the team, familiarity with the consumer(s), and familiarity with the environment/situation as a whole. My level of familiarity was simply a rating of my

feelings toward that particular aspect, and may have been related to factors such as: how many times I had worked with that person, my experiences working in a similar setting, or if I had previously worked at that particular location.

### ***Confidence***

I rated my confidence levels in two distinct areas. First, I rated my confidence with regard to the content of the job, such as the vocabulary, linguistic considerations, and my ability to complete the meaning-transfer portion of the work. Second, I rated my confidence level with regard to decision-making, such as making choices about the location of interpreters within the room, the needs of the consumer, and Controls used to address interpersonal and environmental Demands. I rated each of these categories on a Likert scale ranging from least confident (0) to most confident (10). For each job, each category was rated three times: before the interpreted interaction, during the interpreted interaction, and after the interpreted interaction.

### **Action Plan**

The action plan for this project was interrupted by the outbreak of COVID-19, so while the interventions – supervision, coaching, and reflective assignments – were occurring throughout the year, I was unable to collect specific pre-/post-intervention data. Therefore, data analysis was adjusted in order to work with the data that was collected prior to COVID-related shutdowns. The interventions centered around three key aspects of WOU's MAIS field experience curriculum: DC-S supervision, coaching, and reflective writing assignments.

### ***Supervision***

My first intervention was formal supervision. Through this process, I was able to use real-life situations as cases and work with colleagues to employ DC-S in order to analyze the

situations to identify interpersonal, intrapersonal, and environmental Demands, and to create a variety of Control options for similar situations that might arise in the future (Dean & Pollard, 2001). I hypothesized that the more Control options I was prepared to employ, the more comfortable I would be choosing an option and standing my ground with more experienced teams and making decisions where appropriate.

### ***Coaching***

The second intervention was forming a relationship with an experienced interpreter to function as a coach. I met with this coach three times per term for three terms to discuss my progress with this project, my personal experiences in my work, and specific instances of self-doubt and decreased self-efficacy. The goal of this part of my action plan was to gain perspective from an experienced interpreter, to expand my list of potential control options, and to seek validation and encouragement from a mentor figure.

### ***Reflective Writing***

The third intervention was based in the reflective writings required as part of the field experience program. By utilizing guided reflections to process difficult or particularly salient experiences, writing periodic reflection papers, and reflecting on the experiences from both supervision and coaching, I was able to spend time each week reflecting on my work, my experiences, and my data collection. I used each of these writing exercises as opportunities to engage meaningfully in reflection and introspection about my work and the factors that impact my work, as well as the effects my work has on my emotions, my personal life, and my mental health. Spending time in reflection about the work and the continuing development of my

professional identity allowed me to consciously make choices to improve and develop over the course of the year.

Other professions, such as counseling, have found that the development of professional identity “involved a cycle of learning, practice, and feedback” (Gibson, Dollarhide, & Moss, 2015). I found that a very similar cyclical process occurred in my work over the course of this year: I would perform work as an interpreter, and then engage in reflection about that work through data collection, DC-S supervision, my discussions with my interpreting coach, and written reflective assignments. After these reflections, I would incorporate new approaches into my work, and the cycle would begin anew. After a year of these cycles, my practice looked a lot different than when I began. I decided to analyze the written assignments from across the year, looking for linguistic changes that mirrored the changes I saw in my practice.

### **Data Analysis**

The two separate data sets were analyzed, each with a unique focus in mind. The self-report data followed my original plan of examining my self-efficacy in relation to various environmental and interpersonal factors, as explained above. The reflective writing data was analyzed with the idea of professional identity development in mind – looking for evidence of change over time.

### ***Self-Report Data***

In order to analyze my data, I used SPSS Statistics software to examine correlations between the variables present in my self-reported data. I ran correlation analyses between all variables, and I looked for relationships across different categories of data, such as perceptions of team, content confidence, decision-making confidence, and term. I also analyzed the variables

from my initial conceptual framework (see Appendix A), looking for evidence of the hypothesized relationships within my data.

### *Reflective Writing Data*

Unfortunately, in the wake of COVID-19, the collection of self-reported data was cut off before I was able to truly measure the variables before and after specific interventions. In talking with my professors, my coach, and my peers, I realized that over the course of the year, I had experienced a major shift in my own professional identity. I had grown from being incredibly unsure of every decision to being able to defend my opinions and stand up for ethical practices in my work. I knew that the self-report data was not going to be thorough enough to look at my growth over the year, due to the interruption from COVID-19 and the lack of pre- and post-intervention data. In order to look at the development of my interpreting practice over the course of the year, I needed consistent data collected over time. I realized that an analysis of the reflective writing exercises collected as part of the field experience classes across the year would perhaps be the best approach to analyze these changes over time and look for evidence of my professional identity development across the year.

These written reflective exercises were analyzed using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) software (Pennebaker, Booth, Boyd, & Francis, 2015a), looking for differences in my language use across the three terms: fall, winter, and spring. The data collected from LIWC software was added to SPSS and analyzed with a combination of correlation analyses and a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). Using these analyses, I was able to note salient differences in my linguistic choices across the year and attempt to posit potential reasons for these significant differences over time. The data analysis, having been done in two distinct parts, will be separated as such in the following sections.



## Chapter 4: Results

Due to COVID-19, the data for this project encompasses two distinct sets, and I will be presenting statistical findings from both sets of data as two distinct sections within this chapter. The first is self-report data that I collected during teamed jobs using Likert Scales and variables that related to my perception of my team interpreter. The second data set comes from the series of reflective exercises completed as part of the field experience portion of the MAIS program as analyzed through the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) software program.

### Self-Report Measures Results

#### *Perception of Team's Experience and Confidence*

I originally hypothesized that my lack of confidence when working with teams was related to my feeling intimidated by their level of experience. However, when examining the relationships between the confidence variables and my perception of the team's experience, I found that there were no significant correlations. This lack of relationship held across pre-, during-, and post-interaction collections of my decision-making confidence (see Table 1 below).

#### *Familiarity and Confidence*

Perhaps the most interesting set of correlations occur when examining my ratings of familiarity and the confidence variables. As one might guess, my familiarity with the setting and with the consumer had a strong correlation with all the confidence variables: pre-, during-, and post-job for both decision-making and content. However, the surprising turn of events happened when I looked at my ratings of familiarity with my team (as rated prior to the beginning of the interaction). The ratings of familiarity with my team had no significant relationship with any of the confidence variables.

***Perceived Openness and Confidence***

Another key finding from my research was the variation in the relationship between perceived openness and decision-making confidence across the pre-, during-, and post-job ratings. The relationship was strongest during the interaction ( $r=.768, p = .004$ ). This indicates that during an interpreted interaction, the team’s openness was strongly related to my decision-making confidence. The relationship was slightly weaker (but still significant) in the pre-interaction condition, indicating that my initial perception of my team’s openness correlated with my decision-making confidence even before the interpreting process began.

*Table 1. Correlations: Confidence and Team Variables.*

Team Variables		Confidence Variables					
		Content			Decision-Making		
		Pre	During	Post	Pre	During	Post
<b>Perceived Experience of Team</b>	Correlation ( <i>r</i> )	.025	.358	.339	-.077	.279	.244
	Significance ( <i>p</i> )	.938	.253	.281	.811	.380	.445
<b>Team Openness</b>	Correlation ( <i>r</i> )	.452	.594	.627	.612	.768	.540
	Significance ( <i>p</i> )	.140	.042	.029	.034	.004	.070
<b>Familiarity - Setting</b>	Correlation ( <i>r</i> )	.736	.545	.446	.709	.661	.706
	Significance ( <i>p</i> )	.000	.011	.043	.000	.001	.000
<b>Familiarity - Consumer</b>	Correlation ( <i>r</i> )	.676	.754	.691	.655	.776	.746
	Significance ( <i>p</i> )	.001	.000	.001	.001	.000	.000
<b>Familiarity - Team</b>	Correlation ( <i>r</i> )	.269	.087	.075	.147	.158	.261
	Significance ( <i>p</i> )	.239	.707	.745	.525	.495	.253

Note. Shaded cells indicate statistically significant relationships ( $p<.05$ ).

## Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) Results

LIWC was utilized to analyze a variety of linguistic factors, and the resulting data were analyzed in SPSS using a MANOVA. The most salient and significant relationships were found in the following three categories: clout, authenticity, and drives.

### *Clout*

Clout is a LIWC summary variable calculated with a proprietary algorithm; according to their Operator's Manual, "a high number suggests that the author is speaking from the perspective of high expertise and is confident; low clout numbers suggest a more tentative, humble, even anxious style," (Pennebaker, Booth, Boyd, & Francis, 2015b). There was a significant difference in my use of words that indicate clout ( $F(2,38) = 5.512, p=.008$ ). A Bonferroni post-hoc test revealed that my overall clout score was higher in my spring term ( $M=50.948, SD=3.794$ ) relative to the winter term ( $M=33.656, SD=3.794$ ), indicating increased levels of confidence in assignments completed during spring term (see Figure 1). There were no significant differences in my clout rating between fall and spring or fall and winter ( $ps>.08$ ).

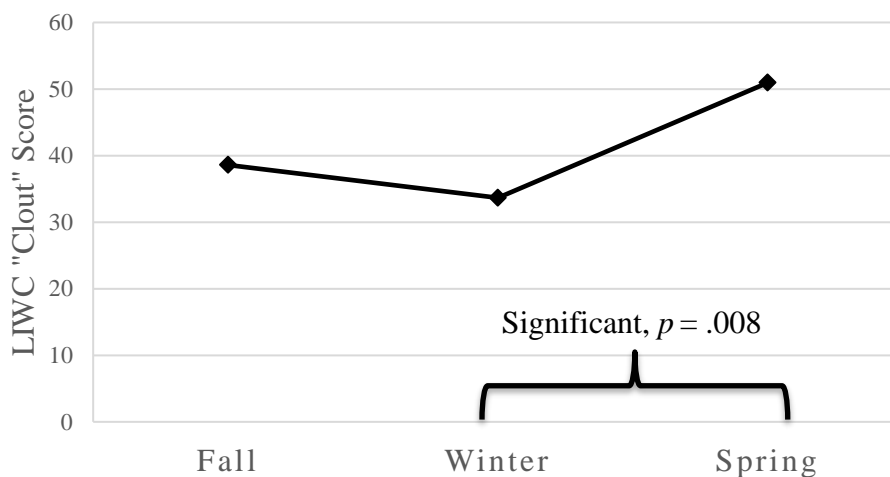


Figure 1. Means of "Clout" Variable as Measured in Reflective Writing Assignments.

**Authenticity**

Authenticity is a LIWC-generated summary variable in which “higher numbers are associated with a more honest, personal, and disclosing text; lower numbers suggest a more guarded, distanced form of discourse” according to the Operator’s Manual (Pennebaker, Booth, Boyd, & Francis, 2015b). The LIWC data revealed a significant difference in my use of words that indicate authenticity ( $F(2,38) = 4.941, p=.013$ ). A Bonferroni post-hoc test revealed that I had a higher level of authenticity in my reflective assignments during the winter term ( $M=79.768, SD=4.929$ ) relative to the spring term ( $M=58.544, SD=4.929$ ) (see Figure 2). There were no significant differences in my authenticity score between fall and spring or fall and winter ( $ps>.1$ ).

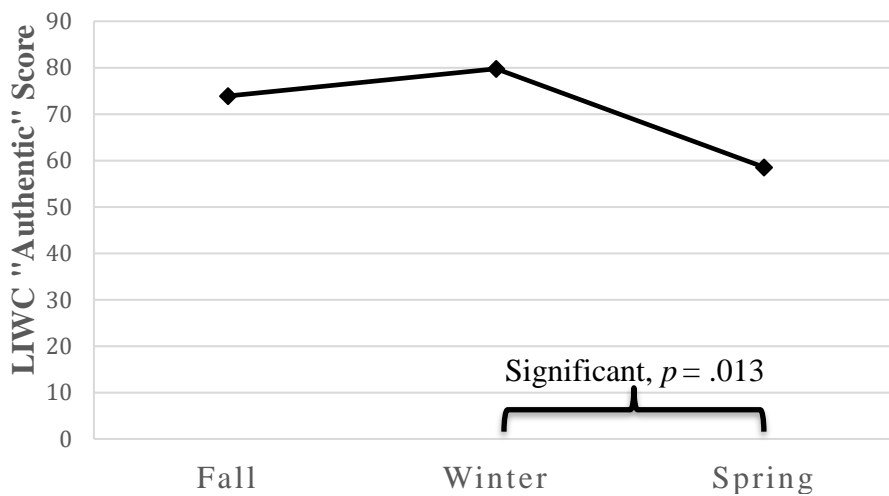


Figure 2. Means of “Authenticity” Variable as Measured in Reflective Writing Assignments.

**Drives**

Drives is an overarching category within the LIWC software that measures five categories of “needs, motives, and drives” - Affiliation, Achievement, Power, Reward-focus, and Risk-Focus - according to the Operator’s Manual (Pennebaker, Booth, Boyd, & Francis, 2015b).

There was a significant difference in my use of words that indicate drives ( $F(2,38) = 4.698$ ,  $p=.015$ ). A Bonferroni post-hoc test revealed that I used more words related to drives in my spring term reflective assignments ( $M=11.992$ ,  $SD=.717$ ) relative to my fall term reflective assignments ( $M=8.907$ ,  $SD=.717$ ) (see Figure 3). There were no significant differences in words indicating drives used between fall and winter or winter and spring ( $ps>.73$ ).

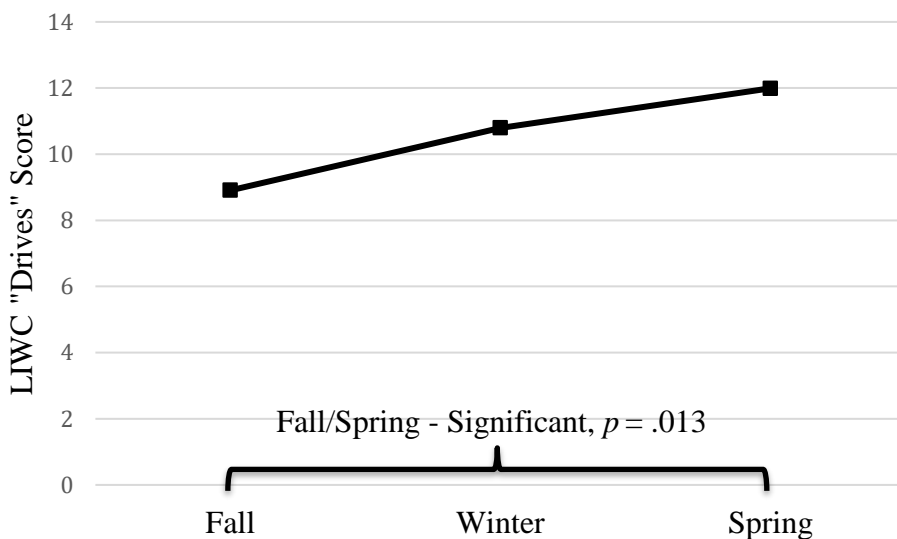


Figure 3. Means of "Drive" Variable as Measured in Reflective Writing Assignments.

For a complete table of means and differences for fall, winter, and spring terms for clout, authenticity, and drives, as obtained from the Bonferroni post-hoc test, see Table 2 in Appendix D.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

Action Research typically follows a pattern of data collection, interventions – actions taken to address patterns evident in the original data collection – and then further data collection to examine the impacts of those interventions. Unfortunately, in the wake of COVID-19, the collection of self-reported data was cut off before I was able to truly measure the variables before and after specific interventions. In order to look at the development of my interpreting practice over the course of the year, I needed consistent data collected over time. I realized that an analysis of the reflective writing exercises collected as part of the field experience classes across the year would perhaps be the best approach to analyze change over time.

I used my self-report measures as intended – to look for various factors that related to my self-efficacy and interpersonal relationships with team interpreters. I used the reflective writings to examine change over time, and to look for ways that the linguistic variables from the LIWC software related to the changes I saw in my practice through the self-report measures.

### Self-Report Measures

Perhaps the most intriguing of the statistical findings was what factors were and were not related to the confidence variables. At the start of my year of field experience, I noticed that I was less confident when working with teams than when working solo, and I hypothesized this was due to a sense of imposter syndrome (Schubert & Bowker, 2019) related to my team's level of experience relative to my own and might be dependent on my levels of preexisting familiarity with them.

I did not consider their openness as a factor until one week where I worked back to back with two team interpreters who had about the same amount of experience as each other, were about the same age, in very similar settings. I noted that my confidence was drastically different

in these two scenarios, and the only real difference, in my perception, was how the teams interacted with me. One was kind and open about their needs and their preferences from the first moment we started; they expressed their excitement about working with me, and they were quick to ask for my input about decisions and the setup of the interaction. The other team I perceived as a bit more closed off; they were less engaging, they felt a bit colder, and they seemed less open to collaboration. That is when I added *perceived openness* to my data collection, and those results proved quite fruitful and informative.

These statistics indicate that a team can be a complete stranger and have an incredible amount of experience, but the key factor that relates to my self-efficacy and confidence in all areas is their openness. In the interpreting field, there are a wide variety of attitudes toward new interpreters. I would argue that these findings suggest that being open to teaming with new interpreters, taking steps to build relationships and intimacy with teams, and forming a bond of trust are key aspects to increasing the confidence and abilities of newer interpreters just entering the field.

### **LIWC Data**

The LIWC data collected from the reflective exercises indicated a few key changes in my language use and word choice over the course of the year. I believe these changes are related to the time and energy spent on reflective practices, and an overall development of my professional identity and confidence. One limitation of my work was the infrequency of my reflective writings, as they were collected roughly every three weeks. I believe that if more data had been collected, such as a personal journal written at the end of each workday, this would have provided the statistics software with more instances to analyze, and more of these relationships would be statistically significant over the course of the year.

*Clout and Confidence*

Clout is the LIWC-generated variable that is most closely related to my overall theme of confidence in my self-reported measures. There was a significant increase in my clout scores from winter to spring term, which I believe indicates an increased level of personal confidence and stronger understanding of my values and ethics as a professional interpreter. With regard to clout and confidence variables, I believe that the growth and change over the course of this year is clearly evident in the following two instances.

Earlier in my year of data-collection, I faced a situation during a freelance job where I witnessed an incident that would require me to report someone to Child Protective Services. Having spent my entire teen/adult life working with children, I knew from the moment I saw how this person was interacting with children that I would need to make a report. But, being new in the interpreting profession, I was nervous and unsure of myself. I knew that the children were not in immediate grave danger, and so I waited until after the assignment and then called the coordinator I was working for and asked for their advice. After several long conversations with the coordinator, making it clear that I was seeking their guidance, I ended up filing a report the following day. Though I knew what the outcome needed to be for the best interest of the children in the situation, I felt unsure of myself and my role as an interpreter. I deferred most of the decision-making to the coordinator and allowed them to guide me through the process I already knew was right. This was indicative of the low level of confidence and clout that I had at the beginning of the year.

In contrast, toward the end of the year, I faced a situation where I knew that someone I was working with was making choices that were not in the best interest of the student with whom I was working. Feeling more secure in my own professional identity and values, I wasted no time



calling attention to the issue and fighting to get it resolved. By the time I witnessed this interaction, I knew where I stood as an interpreter, largely thanks to the reflective practices developed through the MAIS field experience program.

I had spent time reflecting on each important experience that occurred over the year, identifying the values that underpinned the emotions I was feeling, exploring options for dealing with difficult scenarios in supervision, and writing reflections about how these experiences were building my identity as an interpreter. Emboldened by these experiences and armed with the values upon which I had chosen to build my practice, I confronted this situation head on, with no guidance from coordinators and no hedging of my actions. I stood firm in the things I believe to be true, and I took action, deferring to no one in this crucial moment.

The difference in the way I handled each of these situations makes my growth over the course of the year quite plain. I believe that my approach to each situation was strongly indicative of the change in clout and confidence I experienced over this year. The evolution of my language across the year of reflective writing mirrors the changes I see in my work, my mindset, and my interpreting practice.

### ***Authenticity in Reflection***

Authenticity decreased significantly between winter and spring terms, perhaps due to the change in the nature of my work from in-person to online and the types of situations being discussed. Despite this decrease, I scored higher across all three terms (fall  $M=73.871$ , winter  $M=79.768$ , spring  $M=58.544$ ) than the mean authenticity score across various types of written works ( $M=49.17$ ), as published by the creators of the software (Pennebaker, Boyd, Jordan & Blackburn, 2015). The overall high scores of authenticity were an important part of the reason the reflective exercises were so beneficial to my practice. Being vulnerable and digging into my

experiences, my process, and my biases in those activities was a huge part of developing my professional identity. By being invested in the reflection, I gave myself space to process everything I was experiencing during my first year as an interpreter. I processed experiences that went incredibly well, and I processed experiences that were heart-wrenching. Using these activities as a way to sit down and truly examine my goals, my intentions, my values, and my interpreting practice as a whole unequivocally had the greatest impact on my personal and professional growth over the course of the year.

### *Drives over Time*

Drives followed a steady increase over the course of the year, showing a statistically significant difference from fall to spring. I think this is indicative of a change in my goals. In the beginning of the year, my reflective exercises focused more on my current experiences – my fears, my anxieties, and addressing problems in the here-and-now. Over the year, I began to consider my desires for the future, the things that motivated me in my career and my professional development. By the end of the year, I was ready to look forward to the rest of my career, my development over time, and the interpreter I was hoping to become. This shift in mindset was indicated by a shift in my use of words connected to my drives and my needs for the future. While the statistics about the change of specific drives (Affiliation, Achievement, Power, Reward-Focus, and Risk-Focus) over the course of the year were inconclusive, I personally believe that after a year of reflective practice, my focus has shifted toward a desire for Affiliation and Achievement within my professional life. This is consistent with the research about collective professional identity (Harwood, 2017). If more data had been collected, I believe it would have reflected the change in my goals over the year as I settled into my work, and my goals shifted from the immediate goal of being able to survive the job and complete my work, to

developing a sense of community with my fellow interpreters and continuing these reflective practices in order to become the best interpreter I am capable of becoming.

### **General Discussion**

While this study began with a focus on the interactions between my self-efficacy and my choices about decision-making while working with teams, the study and my focus evolved over the year, and the group decision-making theory (Hirokawa & Johnston, 1989) became less relevant. I used the theory to inform my data collection, but my project eventually evolved from looking at the specifics of decision-making to more broadly examining the interpersonal relationships of teamed interpreted interactions and my own professional identity over the course of the year. I officially made a change as I was looking for ways to adjust my project after COVID-19 made the collection of further data impractical: at that time, I expanded my analysis of data to include reflective writings from the year and sought to identify the factors of my professional identity that had grown and developed over the year.

Professional identity development has been a growing topic over the past few years with the field of ASL/English interpreting (See Hunt, 2015; Harwood, 2017; Meadows, 2013; Trine, 2019, among others). In talking with my professors, my coach, and my peers, I realized that over the course of the year, I had experienced a major shift in my own professional identity. I had grown from being incredibly unsure of every decision to being able to defend my opinions and stand up for ethical practices in my work. I wanted to expand my analysis to look for other factors that related to my professional identity development over the year, in order to better understand the growth and change I experienced through my first year of interpreting. This desire to analyze my change over time led to an exploration of my reflective practices over the course of the year.

Much of this project was focused on the interpersonal aspects of my work. The key findings are a demonstration of the importance of interpersonal relationships in teamed interpreting settings, and the results made it evident that the most crucial factors to building positive teaming relationships are not centered on levels of experience or a pre-existing relationship between team interpreters, though they may play a role. The most crucial factor identified in the results of this study is openness and a willingness to work and collaborate freely and with mutual respect.

This can be an intimidating field in which to work, with a well-demonstrated penchant for negative attitudes toward novice practitioners (Ott, 2012; Flora, 2013). Professional identity, competence, and confidence are all inextricably linked (Bontempo et al., 2014; Holland, 2012; Harwood, 2017), and so it is important for novice practitioners to strike a balance between confidence in their skills and humility. Being humble and willing to learn and grow does not mean that new interpreters have to be self-deprecating or look down on their own lack of experience. New interpreters, myself included, can work to be confident in the experiences that they do have, in the choices they know how to make, and in their abilities, while also constantly being open to and seeking opportunities for professional and personal growth. By engaging in reflective practices and intentionally working to develop and nurture my professional identity, I experienced a great deal of growth in my confidence over the past year. I believe that for new interpreters, there are few practices more beneficial than authentic reflection and engaging openly with teams and more experienced interpreters.

Overall, the results of this study suggest that interpreters who are focused on open collaboration and engaged in their own reflective practice will help to bolster the confidence and self-efficacy of themselves and their teams. A huge part of interpreting work is interpersonal; the

field is founded on the relationships built amongst teams, agencies, consumers, and communities. As the interpreting field continues to develop and adapt to the new and changing world, I believe that the value of cultivating an interpreting culture built upon reflective practices, professional identity development, and interpersonal relationships is not to be understated.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

The first year I spent as an interpreter will never be forgotten. It was a year of intense challenges, self-doubt, discovery, growth, and building community. The data collected is a time capsule, documenting my professional identity as it first began to develop, nurtured by caring professors, a dedicated mentor, conversations with colleagues, supervision sessions with peers and trusted experienced interpreters.

The results of this study suggest that while differences in experience and a lack of familiarity may be factors in the levels of confidence for new interpreters, the clearest connections to interpreter confidence are rooted in our interpersonal relationships and approaches to each other. Cheeley (*in press*) explores the relationship between team intimacy and self-efficacy, which is closely related to the exploration of perceived openness and self-efficacy explored in the current study. Building an interpreting culture of openness, team intimacy, and personal reflection can only serve to increase the self-efficacy of new and seasoned interpreters alike (Hewlett, 2013; Hill, 2018; Ott, 2012; Cheeley, *in press*).

This study's limitations stem predominantly from the impacts of COVID-19 and the resulting inability to collect specific pre- and post- intervention data, but the study was also limited by the intermittent collection of reflective data. Further studies could be conducted to explore the immediate and long-term impacts of the interventions proposed in this study: DC-S supervision, coaching, and reflective writing. In additional studies, I would recommend a more consistent collection of reflective data, perhaps in the form of a daily or weekly journal.

Despite these limitations, I hope that interpreters reading this project take away the importance of never underestimating the value of a reflective practice and connections with team interpreters through open communication and kindness. Our field is one of crucial importance,

and we must acknowledge the incredible honor and privilege it is to work so intimately with people – with our mentors, with our teams, and with our consumers. Developing a practice of reflection and introspection is key to developing a successful professional identity as an interpreter. We cannot neglect this part of our development and the benefits we reap from a consistent, reflective mindset about our work.

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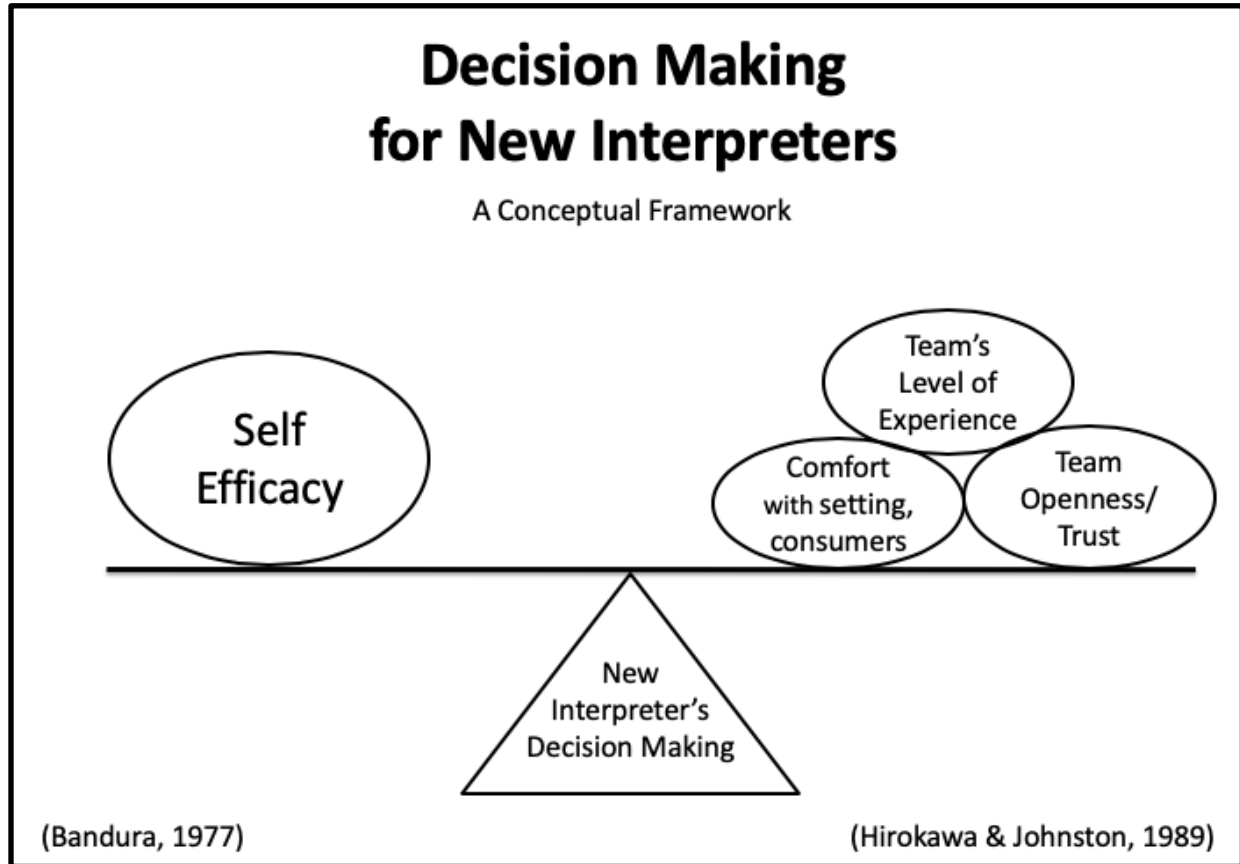
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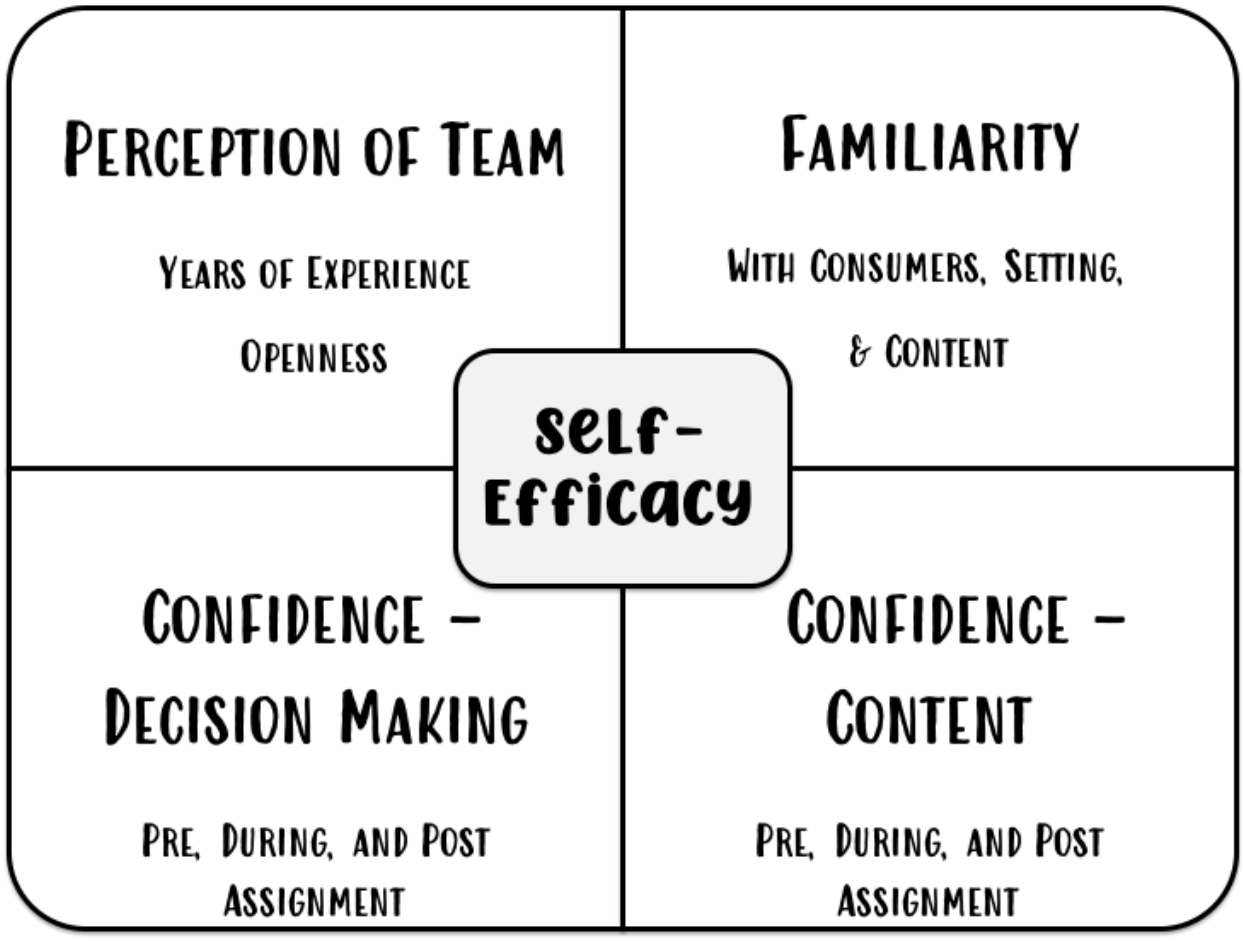
Appendix A

Conceptual Framework



**Appendix B**

Factors of Self Efficacy



**Appendix C**

Data Collection Sheet

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Work: \_\_\_\_\_

**Team:**

Team Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

Known? Y N

Experience: \_\_\_\_\_

Openness: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**Familiarity:**

Team: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Setting: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Consumer: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**Self-Efficacy:**

**Content:**

Pre: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

During: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Post: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**Decision-Making:**

Pre: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

During: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Post: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



## Appendix D

*Table 2. MANOVA Post Hoc Test Results.*

<i>Multiple Comparisons</i>							
Bonferroni							
Dependent Variable	(I) Term	(J) Term	Mean			95% Confidence Interval	
			Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Clout	Fall	Winter	4.9323	5.36593	1.000	-8.5418	18.4064
		Spring	-12.3600	5.36593	0.081	-25.8341	1.1141
	Winter	Fall	-4.9323	5.36593	1.000	-18.4064	8.5418
		Spring	-17.2923*	5.36593	0.008	-30.7664	-3.8182
	Spring	Fall	12.3600	5.36593	0.081	-1.1141	25.8341
		Winter	17.2923*	5.36593	0.008	3.8182	30.7664
Authenticity	Fall	Winter	-5.8977	6.97056	1.000	-23.4010	11.6057
		Spring	15.3269	6.97056	0.103	-2.1764	32.8303
	Winter	Fall	5.8977	6.97056	1.000	-11.6057	23.4010
		Spring	21.2246*	6.97056	0.013	3.7213	38.7280
	Spring	Fall	-15.3269	6.97056	0.103	-32.8303	2.1764
		Winter	-21.2246*	6.97056	0.013	-38.7280	-3.7213
Drives	Fall	Winter	-1.8862	1.01459	0.214	-4.4338	0.6615
		Spring	-3.0846*	1.01459	0.013	-5.6323	-0.5369
	Winter	Fall	1.8862	1.01459	0.214	-0.6615	4.4338
		Spring	-1.1985	1.01459	0.736	-3.7461	1.3492
	Spring	Fall	3.0846*	1.01459	0.013	0.5369	5.6323
		Winter	1.1985	1.01459	0.736	-1.3492	3.7461
Based on observed means. The error term is Mean Square (Error) = .178.							
*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.							