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POC RETENTION WITHIN INTERPRETING EDUCATION AND THE PROFESSION

**Cultural Familiarity Through Mentorship: A Way to Increase People of Color Retention
within Interpreting Education and the Profession**

Valerie C. Manseau

Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies

Western Oregon University

September 1, 2021



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

Action Research Project Title:

Cultural Similarity through Mentorship: A Way to Increase People of Color Retention within Interpreting Education and the Profession

Graduate Student: Valerie Manseau

Candidate for the degree of : _____

*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:

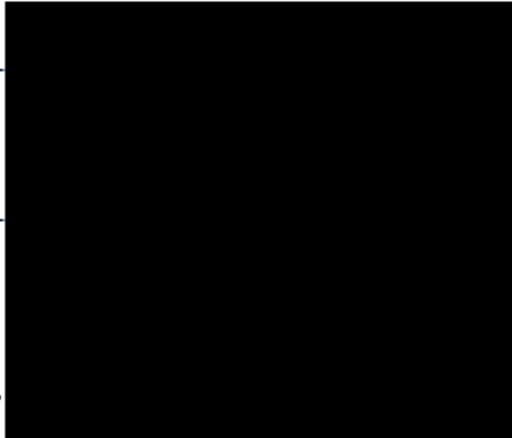
Name: _____
Date: _____

Committee Member:

Name: _____
Date: _____

Dean of Graduate Studies and Research:

Name: Dr. Hillary Fouts
Date: _____



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Abstract

**Cultural Familiarity Through Mentorship: A Way to Increase PoC Retention within
Education and the Profession**

The goal of this study is to explore one way to increase the retention of People of Color (PoC) within the interpreting field in hopes of increasing numbers within Interpreter Training Programs (ITPs). Short term mentoring experiences consisted of four stages with various mentors of different backgrounds. I gathered reflective data via journaling pre- and post-mentorship meetings. This is a personal narrative from a recent ITP graduate entry-level interpreter who is continuing to seek mentorship and growth while starting in the professional field. Interpreter mentoring for this project consists of discussions centered around interpreting skills, decision making, self-care aspects, self-identity, imposter syndrome, and perspectives on how to break through the barriers as a PoC interpreter. The objective is to identify different mentoring experiences with various types of mentors. The desire is to spread knowledge to ITP educators, students, interpreters, and mentors within the field about the benefits of working with a mentor/mentee who has a similar cultural background and lived experience. Lastly, a goal of this project is to increase institutional awareness of the need for more PoC involvement in education, mentorship, and overall interpreting. I aim to demonstrate the importance of how this process is similar to the butterfly effect; the phenomenon whereby a minute localized change in a complex system can have large effects elsewhere and can lead to significant results over time. By providing familiar mentors, retention of PoC interpreting students can increase, therefore, increasing the numbers of PoC graduates within ITPs. More importantly, retention of PoC interpreters provides more options for the PoC Deaf community.

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Key words: Mentoring, interpreting, educators, PoC, people of color, students, ITP

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

I am a recent graduate from two Interpreter Training Programs (ITP) that focused on American Sign Language (ASL) and English. The action of interpreting is one that is very complex and intricate. It requires multiple abilities that are not limited to language competencies or cognitive processes (Bontempo & Napier, 2007; Metzger, 2005; Obst, 2010; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005). Mentoring is a widely used learning practice in the education and nursing fields, and it is becoming a standardized practice in the ASL interpreting field. Mentoring is a way to bridge the gap between graduating from an interpreting training program and entering the profession (National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers [NCIEC], 2009). A mentorship is a supportive relationship established between two or more individuals where knowledge, skills, and experiences are shared (International Coaching Federation, 2020). Mentoring through practicum is built into many ITP curriculums to support the complex requirements of this profession. Practicum is a course similar to an internship where students are paired with a mentor and work under their supervision. The students observe and gain hands-on experience in a variety of interpreted settings throughout their ITP (Paradise, 2013).

Throughout my interpreter training program, I had many opportunities to be assigned to a mentor and gain internship experience. Throughout my experiences with each mentor, I gained a variety of valuable skills and made amazing connections, all that have helped shape the interpreter I am today. Each mentor offered something unique, as they all came from different educational backgrounds and had varying years of experience. As I started to develop my role/identity as an interpreter and find what aligned with my ethics, I had curiosities and

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questions that stemmed from my cultural background and part of my intersectional identity as a Person of Color (PoC).

Statement of the Problem

When I started my journey with ASL and interpreting, I had excellent and highly qualified professors and mentors. However, as a Latina, I could not find a mentor that was able to simultaneously help me develop my abilities and my identity as a PoC interpreting student. I was blessed with two amazing cohorts but was limited to PoC classmates. This meant I had few peers who I could relate to regarding cultural struggles, experiences, fears, and values. Moreover, very few of my PoC peers made it to graduation, much less continued into the field. Unfortunately, the demographics of students and mentors in my programs were not as culturally diverse as the clients we serve.

It is important that students of color (SoC) have access to a population consisting of mentors, role models, and leaders of color. It is important for SoC to have effective mentors and role models because SoC report qualitatively different experiences within education compared to their white peers and white student networks (Harris & Lee, 2018). Additionally, there is a lack of institutional support for groups of color, adding barriers to the academic and psychosocial success of SoC (Harris & Lee, 2018).

These barriers and challenges became evident towards the end of the last semester of my undergraduate program, as I began to wonder what it would be like to have had experiences with PoC mentors throughout my educational journey. Would I have felt less hesitant to ask questions and more comfortable opening up? Would having a cultural connection with a mentor have encouraged my PoC peers to keep going? These inquiries led me to the question that has guided

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my action research: Would a culturally familiar mentorship influence the mentee's self-development while increasing self-confidence in a predominantly white field?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine if a mentor who shares a familiar cultural relationship with a mentee SoC can improve development in various areas. Furthermore, PoC mentorship serves to increase the amount of PoC interpreting students, graduates, and professional interpreters. As an entry level interpreter who identifies as a PoC, I have struggled to find PoC mentors within my field. I hope this research will reach interpreter educators, mentors, and PoC interpreters. If PoC mentors seek out those who were once in their position, they can provide a safe and familiar environment for the mentee to continue the journey of self-development and interpreting. I hope this study can provide self-assurance in those mentees to persevere. The field is in need of more PoC interpreters to not only serve the Deaf community as a whole but the PoC Deaf community in particular.

In this action research paper, I will report on the similarities and differences of a PoC mentee having experiences with a white mentor, a PoC mentor, and a PoC coach. Within this process, I hope to provide insight on PoC mentor/mentee benefits for the different communities that are involved within this profession—IITP educators, SoC, interpreters of color, the Deaf community, and the Deaf community of color. By researching this topic, interpreter educators can have a better understanding of SoC. This can spark thoughts on how their SoC can benefit by being placed with a PoC mentor during their required practicum hours.

Theoretical Framework

Relational-Cultural Theory

The field of interpreting is still a new and evolving profession. If we look at other professions for models on how to develop competent professionals, we can inform our interpreting community and our interpreting education system. One theory that is aligned with my research is the Relational-Cultural Theory (RTC). RTC is a framework for bridging relational, multicultural, and social justice competencies (Comstock et al., 2008). Within this framework, the authors mentioned that healing takes place in mutually empathic relationships (Comstock et al., 2008). Empathy comes from a much deeper place compared to sympathy, where a person can feel for you but not feel with you. SoC and PoC are in need of finding a safe space with those who are of the same cultural background. A mentor who can help in high quality interpersonal connection through their shared history, traumas, backgrounds, and successes, can really become the source of confidence for an PoC. Comstock and colleagues' (2008) goal was to identify how sociocultural and contextual struggles interfere with individuals' abilities. These included the ability to create, sustain, and engage in growth-fostering relationships (Comstock et al., 2008). While experiencing cross cultural mentorship, I too encountered the struggles that Comstock and colleagues (2008) discussed in relation to finding connectedness through a sense of community. Furthermore, my ability to create and engage with a white mentor was present but had limits due to not being able to connect with them on a cultural level. However, my white mentor and I were able to work together and navigate through a cross cultural mentorship.

Cross-cultural Mentoring

One influence that guided me through my mentorship experience was Carpenter's (2017) thesis work. Carpenter (2017), a Western Oregon University alumna, investigated the lack of educational systems teaching Black cultural narratives and examined the void of support and knowledge that former Black signed language interpreters left for incoming Black interpreters in the field. I have experienced and noticed similar parallels within the interpreting field in relation to Latinx students and mentors. As a PoC, I have searched considerably hard to find a qualified and willing mentor of color. During time in ITPs, I have had highly skilled and qualified white interpreters as mentors. I have come across the nervousness or awkwardness of white interpreters not knowing how to navigate feelings and questions that come from a PoC. This is similar to what Carpenter (2017) stated,

To my surprise, I was met with apprehension when the white interpreters realized the prospective mentees were Black. When I inquired about the reason for the apprehension, they would convey a feeling of inadequacy because of cultural factors that may be present during a mentor/mentee relationship. They expressed that they would not be able to adequately address those needs. (p. 1)

Carpenter suggests that building mentor/mentee relationships within a cross cultural group can build upon the cultural knowledge gap. The results of such work would be an increased number of Black signed language interpreters within the field (Carpenter, 2017). The theoretical principles behind this can be applied to my research and data collection. I conducted several stages of research with a diverse group of interpreters. I provided cultural knowledge to my white mentor, and in return they could understand and learn how to mentor a PoC. This can

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have long term effects if PoC mentees share cultural norms, history, and insights with white mentors. As the white mentor may learn things they did not learn within their ITP, this knowledge can help while interpreting for Deaf PoC, or benefit future PoC mentees.

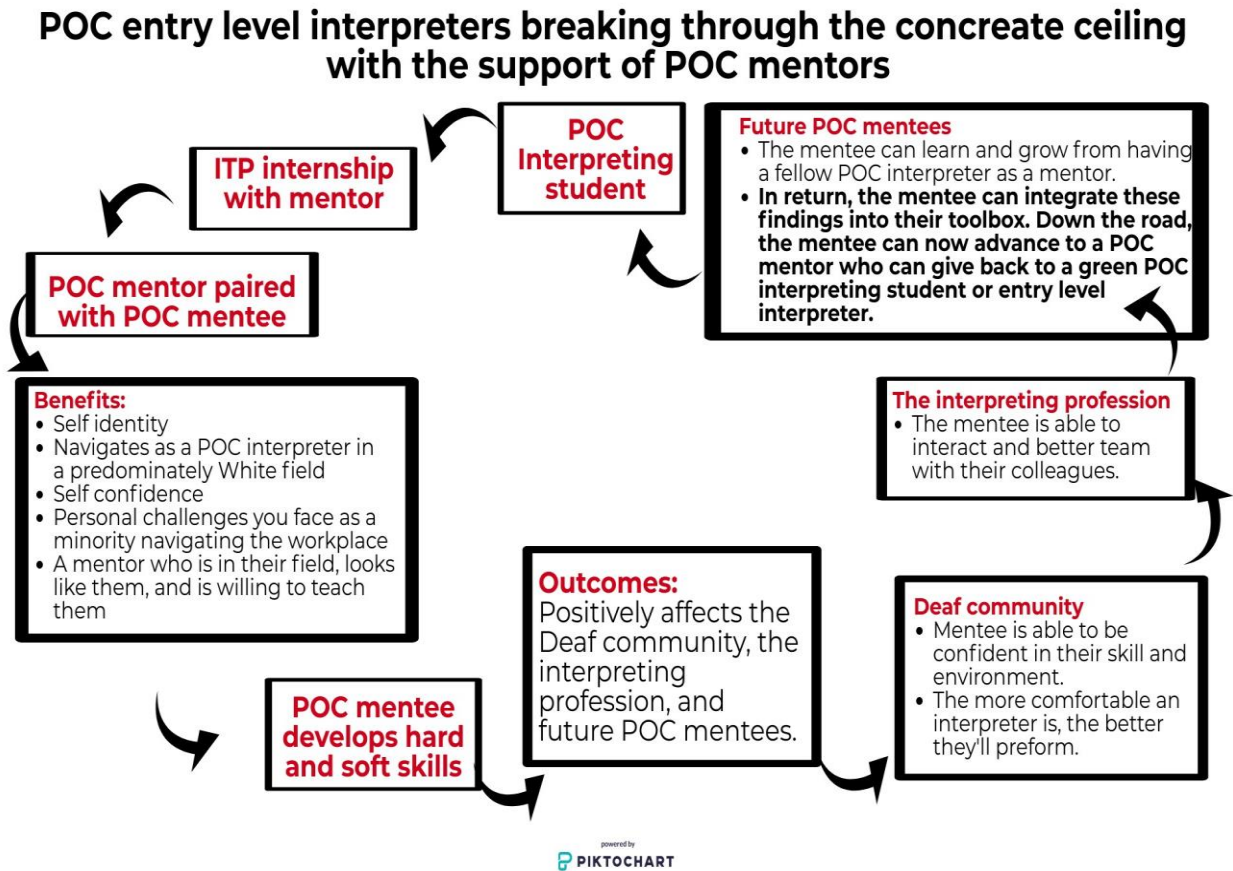
The Mentoring Gap: Race and Higher Education

Another influence in my research came from the Harvard Law Review Forum. The Mentoring Gap: Race and Higher Education Commentary Series discussed the dire need for several types of accountabilities in providing mentorship to underrepresented students (Brown-Nagin, 2016). It was discussed that accountability in several areas needs to be addressed in order for change to occur (Brown-Nagin, 2016). This supports that the lack of PoC mentors for PoC interpreting students does not only affect interpreting students but the whole cycle of training and practice within the field of interpreting. Within this cycle are PoC interpreting students, their white peers, white mentors, ITP professors, future PoC incoming students, outgoing PoC graduates, and, ultimately, the Deaf community—particularly PoC Deaf community members. By not providing underrepresented students diverse mentorship, it is like a butterfly effect. Brown-Nagin's commentary in the Harvard Law Review Forum (2016) demonstrates that accountability falls under institutional and interpersonal realms. This is where the field of interpreting must start if they wish to close the gap.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Mentoring

Mentoring programs took flight in their development in the early 1980's and have continued to grow. Mentoring programs exist in a wide range of occupations and educational training programs. Mentoring programs should not be confused with coaching. Both mentoring and coaching are used in programs for professional development and there is still a mentor/coach and protege relationship (International Coaching Federation, 2020). In general, coaching can be defined as collaborating with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires the clients to adopt their fullest personal and professional potentials (International Coaching Federation, 2020). Coaching is very important but can solely focus on professional development and not give similar time to identity development, behavior, self-assurance, among others. These benefits can be found in a mentoring relationship where the mentee can be freer to have the opportunity to ask more questions and explore their mentors' expertise (Jakubik et al., 2016). In general, mentoring can be defined as a more experienced individual (the mentor) taking the role as an advisor, counselor, or guide to a trainee (WebFinance Inc., 2020). The mentor's responsibilities are to provide support to and feedback on the individual's performance (WebFinance Inc., 2020). Mentoring can be valuable as it can help with a more holistic approach and not only check the box for professional development but for self-care aspects as well (Jakubik et al., 2016). Mentors are a close, experienced, trusted guide who can build a relationship-oriented bond. A relationship with a coach is more of a short-term, task-oriented process (Jakubik et al., 2016).

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Healthcare

For this action research project, I wanted to investigate different professions that practice mentorship. One area of interest related to mentorship is within healthcare systems. In particular, it has been demonstrated that mentorship has been beneficial in the nursing profession (Woolnough & Fielden, 2016). One similarity between the interpreting and nursing profession is that both fields are predominantly occupied by women. There are men who have broken through those barriers and the numbers are still rising in hopes to even it out. Due to nursing having a dominant number of women in the field, mentorship is more than likely to be female to female (Woolnough & Fielden, 2016). This dynamic can have pros and cons due to having one gender option. Yet, it's important to note that a mentor should have good intentions and want to actively and positively support the mentee through their journey.

Woolnough and Fielden (2016) suggested that the major barrier that presented itself within mentoring was the lack of role models. They mentioned the term 'queen bee' which was defined as a woman who had climbed the ladder of success but was not willing to leave room on the ladder for other junior women. One notable example of this from the interpreting field is horizontal violence (Ott, 2012). Being a women dominated field; interpreters may experience this not only from their male counterparts but from other women as well. However, Woolnough and Fielden (2016) mentioned that women who are highly qualified within their professional role may feel like they are in competition to stay there. Thus, this situation leaves newer juniors or novice interpreters in a bind to find role models or become a victim of horizontal violence from the 'queen bees.'

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People of Color

The main focus of my study is to investigate whether having a PoC mentor for a PoC mentee would really make a difference in not only their development of skills but also the development of a professional identity. I have had a handful of wonderful and experienced mentors who I would recommend to any of my peers. My skills developed with my mentors' aid, and because of that, my self-confidence grew. I was comfortable with my mentors in the past, but there was always something missing, and I couldn't figure out what that was. Finally, I realized through conversations that my mentors did not share any cultural familiarities with me. They did not experience a similar upbringing, barriers due to ethnicity, or struggles of finding the right word or sign due to being trilingual. I inquired if a PoC mentor could possibly support my identity and intersectional development and what impact it would have on me if I were to see a familiar story across from me, mentoring me.

As research has demonstrated, the benefits of mentorship are very important to skill and identity advancement (Woolnough & Fielden, 2016; Jakubik et al., 2016). However, it is harder for minorities to find a mentor, let alone one of the same race. In general, it is very difficult for PoC to access mentors at all (Brown-Nagin, 2016). If PoC do find access to a mentor, they must overcome additional barriers. These barriers can include differences in gender, race, profession, job level, etc. (Brown-Nagin, 2016). Also, interpreter educators must actively seek mentors of color for their students of color. Alienation of PoC students and those from low-income backgrounds occurs regularly (Brown-Nagin, 2016). I am from a low-income family, and as a low-income student, it's hard to open up and relate to any of my White middle-class peers.

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Interpreting

Interpreters work with a variety of people from different ethnic groups. These groups consist of the Deaf and hearing consumers that interpreters encounter. Carpenter (2017) mentioned that interpreter education programs lack diverse cultural narratives. Due to the predominantly white profession, Carpenter (2017) mentioned that none of the students had a full semester or quarter dedicated to the minority experience. None of the students had Black, Hispanic, Asian, etc. specific courses that would ultimately benefit the consumers. Therefore, mentoring is so important for SoC who are navigating their way through academia. Students of color, unfortunately, have challenges, whether it be having a low-income background or social alienation that may cause them to drop out of their ITPs. PoC mentors would be a great benefit to those PoC interpreting students and could help them with self-assurance in order to stay in this field. Furthermore, with more PoC interpreters entering the field, PoC Deaf individuals can benefit from having more options of interpreters that share similar backgrounds to them.

Benefits of Mentoring

After reading up on different types of mentoring and mentoring settings, I wanted to look into mentoring in the teaching profession. I found a lot of things related back to the interpreting profession. Mentoring not only helps the mentee but also helps veteran teachers. This is because veteran teachers often reflect on prior knowledge and activities that help improve their teaching practices (Danielson, 1999). While mentoring, both brain and social skills are working, and this can help mentor teachers develop a better understanding of the profession (Danielson, 1999). The benefits of mentoring can include but are not limited to the development of hard and soft skills, the reason behind sign choices, cleaning up signs, how to professionally speak to consumers, etc.

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(Danielson, 1999). However, it can also help with self-confidence, self-assurance, self-care discussion, support in breaking the barriers as a PoC interpreter, and in learning how to work with colleagues.

Mentors provide feedback that can be beneficial and empowering to the mentee. As part of the dynamic communication process, feedback is an invitation to interact and discuss observations (Porter, 1982). In general, feedback promotes the learning of basic concepts in order to provide effective feedback. When applied among those who are committed to professional growth and development, it can create an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect (Porter, 1982). This atmosphere of mutual trust and respect is a huge contributing factor in developing a mentee's confidence. It can be a smoother transition in feeling at home with each other, if the mentee identifies with the mentor. Deborah Hughes, President and CEO of Brookview House in Boston states that it is very important and beneficial to have someone who not only knows the field but can also relate to the specific personal and professional struggles professionals may encounter as a minoritized individual navigating the workplace (McInelly, 2019).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Design

The design of this study consisted of four stages. Each stage lasted two to three months. The first stage involved me with no mentor. The second stage was with a white female interpreter who is currently working in the interpreting field. The third stage was with a PoC male interpreter who is currently working in the interpreting field. The fourth stage was an independent stage which allowed for opportunities for occasional debriefs with a PoC female coach. Throughout the stages, I was working as an interpreter doing community, K-12, and postsecondary education interpreting. Data was collected through reflective journaling pre- and post- mentor meetings. Mentor meetings were held one to three times a week for one to two hours. We reviewed how my work went for that week, professional development, demands and controls, etc.

Research Participant

I have collected data about myself. I am a 32-year-old woman of color. At the start of my graduate program and my research, I consider myself an entry level interpreter. As a graduate student, I was able to look back at my training during my associates and undergraduate interpreting programs. I started my American Sign Language journey seven years ago. The community I live in is known to have a big Deaf community. I have been fortunate enough to be trained, mentored, and work in various settings ranging from academia, medical, DeafBlind, and more.

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Data Analysis Procedures

The data collection for this research started early August 2020. Stage one was with no mentor and ended early October 2020. Stage two with Mentor A started early October 2020 and ended early January 2021. Stage three with Mentor B started early January 2021 and ended early March 2021. Stage four started early March 2021 and ended early June 2021. This stage was a little more independent. I had my coach during this time.

For the data collection, I journaled on a daily basis. This happened before and after each mentoring session. I freely wrote my feelings, thoughts, benefits of the day, challenges, self-talk, confidence levels and other information regarding events of the day. I made note of key themes within the journals to better organize my data collection. I selected three salient experiences that stood out to me. These experiences demonstrated the key themes that repeatedly appeared.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The following highlights three pivotal experiences that were extracted from a series of personal journal reflections. Within the four stages, I discussed the various themes that occurred throughout mentorship. Themes I explored include sympathy vs. empathy, professional conduit model vs. feeling human (being able to incorporate my humanity into my professional practice), and minority solidarity. The themes paired with key quotes from the journal reflections demonstrate the importance of having cultural familiarity with a mentor.

Pivotal Experience One

The first experience took place on a Zoom platform for post-secondary students. It was a week-long celebration in honor of Black culture, Ethnic Studies, MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán), and Latinx culture. Several faculties of color were chosen to speak about their backstory, struggles, perseverance, and current community involvement. There were three Deaf SoC. The hearing students were from different backgrounds of a mix of White and SoC. The Zoom celebrations were hacked during multiple presentations. The Zoom host had no control over their screen and could not stop or shut down the Zoom rooms. The hackers posted racial slurs, pictures, and audio. The faculty and students of color were crying and pleading for them to stop. I was affected immensely as a POC participant engaging in what was happening. I was able to speak to my two mentors and coach to receive self-care, advice, and debrief.

When I logged out of the meeting, tears immediately rolled down my face. I texted Mentor A a brief description of what happened. I met with Mentor A the following day. We

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discussed ways of managing situations like this, but they specifically focused on hard skills. We examined multiple ways I could have flagged the consumer to let them know the situation that was happening. We examined whether my cultural perspectives and community ties affected my sign choices. This included facial expressions, terminology, and body language. Also, we discussed controls that could be implemented in a situation with no team. I had many positive takeaways from this session that were largely practical and included professional feedback.

Mentor A and I also brainstormed ways to implement self-care. According to the Crisis and Trauma Resource Institute (CTRI, 2021), there are four key components of self-care: physical (the body), emotional (the heart), psychological (the mind), and spiritual (the spirit). Mentor A suggested taking deep breaths, taking a walk, taking a relaxing bath, and accepting that I did the best I could to not become dominated by this situation. These suggestions fell under the self-care components of physical, and the last suggestion can be viewed as emotional or psychological self-care. Mentor A embraced a “tomorrow’s a new day” outlook. Mentor A showed sympathy for how incredibly heartbroken, yet numb, I felt and acknowledged my struggle. However, they did not understand what I was feeling because they’ve never had a similar experience due to them not identifying as a PoC. Even after all the positive takeaways, I did not feel seen. There was something missing.

Mentor B and my coach provided a different perspective for controls and self-care. After sharing what happened with them, the first thing they asked was, “How are you doing?” I immediately took a deep breath and vented. I felt at home. They were fully present and engaged in reflective listening. They were able to validate my feelings, because they too had gone through similar experiences. They held a safe space for us to discuss all of my intrapersonal demands but also space for quiet time. Research supports that quiet time gives individuals time to reduce

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internal noise and increase awareness of priorities (Cleveland Clinic, 2020). Mentor B and my coach displayed empathy and were able to put themselves in my position. They touched all four key components of self-care. Most importantly, they realized the spiritual component was something to take care of first. The heart, the body, and the spirit must mend before going into discussion about performance of hard skills. When another person was able to acknowledge the struggles I encountered and connect with them, I saw this as an example of solidarity. The power of solidarity became calming. A supervision session was also arranged to discuss controls. The supervision session consisted of Black, Indigenous, and Latinx individuals. The connections through unconditional solidarity were effective and beneficial. It helped ease self-doubt, validated my thoughts, and supported professional development as a PoC. Overall, the BIPoC supervision group addressed human emotions during trying times rather than simply deciding to continue through interpreting without showing feelings for the sake of professionalism.

Pivotal Experience Two

The second experience was also on a Zoom platform at a trilingual K-12 job. I was substituting for the original interpreter for two weeks. The students had limited English and ASL skills and comprehension. The first written language they engaged in was Spanish. I had a white team interpreter who did not know Spanish. The students were in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms. It was a complicated situation working with a team who did not know Spanish, nor related to students' culture. It became more complex trying to get directions or information to the Deaf students due to language barriers with English and ASL. To better communicate, I implemented Spanish fingerspelling, Spanish typing in the Zoom chat, and visual props. While the white interpreter was friendly, she was resistant to using alternate methods. Instead, she preferred to use only ASL and English. She was the staff interpreter with the district

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while I was a substitute. This power differential made me feel uncomfortable in suggesting tools and strategies.

When I brought the situation up in our weekly meeting, Mentor A gave suggestions on how to work with the white team interpreter. They provided controls for effective communication between interpreters but did not focus on communication with multilingual consumers. We discussed cultural mediation in terms of socio-cultural aspects. For example, I worried that I would hurt the white interpreter's feelings by being too forward when making suggestions about interpreting. Mentor A gave advice about feeding signs to the other interpreter and how to approach her in a way that made her feel comfortable. We brainstormed ways I could address certain comments the white interpreter made.

Mentor B had years of experience working in a K-12 setting. They also grew up with Spanish as their first language. They were able to provide hard skills and controls in relation to trilingual interpreting. Because they had shared the culture and languages, they were able to say, "What I do is..." I was able to acquire real life advice and feedback on how to support a Deaf student who was struggling to understand what was happening in the classroom. Additionally, Mentor B gave me tips on how to interact with the parents. They mentioned some Latinx families are hesitant to communicate with school educators because of the language barrier. Mentor B also provided guidance on how to work with the predominantly White Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team to better support students.

Pivotal Experience Three

The third pivotal situation occurred during a Zoom mentor meeting. While debriefing with Mentor A about the week, I mentioned how I would like to take a certification test in the future. This comment was said in passing during the transition to another discussion. Mentor A

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acknowledged my comment, but we quickly got back to our schedule for the week. The next week, I mentioned the same comment to Mentor B. After a motivating discussion with Mentor B, I again brought it up with Mentor A. I realized I received different responses from both mentors. Mentor A was supportive, but they did not immediately push me to take the certification test when I was debating whether to pursue it. After I had decided to take the certification, they were very supportive but repeatedly said, “It’s hard. If you want to take it, you should. But remember it’s really hard.” After talking with Mentor A, I sat with the overwhelming feeling of imposter syndrome. I felt like I wasn’t going to make it in the field. Mentor A’s comments reinforced my doubts about my own ability to advance in the field.

Mentor B, by contrast, encouraged me to embrace grit and perseverance. They reassured me that PoC can endure and succeed in the field. I admitted to Mentor B that I did not think I was ready to take the certification test. I voiced my concerns about wanting my English vocabulary to be on a more advanced level. My mentor immediately said, “You will not talk about yourself like this. You are a badass Latina from strong roots. You come from powerful people who do not give up. You got this! I will help you study, and we will get you this certification.” They immediately ignited a fire of confidence in me. If it wasn’t for Mentor B, I would have waited to take the certification test, which I ultimately took and passed. Self-talk was very important for me minutes before the exam. I kept repeating, “I can do this. I am a badass Latina from strong roots.” Mentor B showed me that positive self-talk is crucial for overcoming the impostor syndrome that comes from being a PoC in white spaces.

Further, Mentor B graduated from the same interpreting training program and had one of the same professors that I did. Mentor B said “That professor always told me that I needed to work on my English and that I was not going to succeed without amazing English. If I wanted to

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become an interpreter, I had to have exceptional English and articulate well. That my accent may get in the way.” They shared that their White peers did not receive these comments. Mentor B is now certified and has been working within the field for many years. Hearing their experiences paired with where they are at now gave me confidence and courage to keep striving within the field. This is an example of how minority solidarity is necessary for building confidence as a professional. Being surrounded by my own community, gave me the energy I needed to keep striving for success. Representation is important and helped me to drown out the feelings of isolation and not belonging in order to advance within the field of interpreting.

Discussion of the Findings

My hope when conducting this research was to give insight to those within the field. I hoped to grab the attention of PoC students, non-PoC students, interpreter educators and their curriculum, interpreting mentors, and interpreters in general. The interpreting field is a never-ending learning journey. Interpreters must continue to seek professional development in all aspects. Mentoring can benefit novice interpreters who may not feel ready to jump into the field with both feet. Furthermore, mentoring can help PoC students who are in interpreting training programs and may be struggling with self-confidence. However, there is very little research that covers PoC students and PoC mentors. I hope to contribute to this knowledge for our future PoC interpreting students who want to seek out more information that relates to them.

Sympathy vs. Empathy

The results of this study suggested that as a PoC novice interpreter, several salient themes emerged while navigating through the first year in the field. The themes are evidence of the differences between connections from a PoC and a non-PoC mentor. The first theme being the

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contrast between sympathy vs. empathy. Sympathy is acknowledging that the other person is going through an emotional or physical struggle and supporting them or giving them comfort. Empathy is deeper. It is actually understanding what the other person is feeling because one has had a similar experience or one is able to put themselves in another's shoes (7ESL, n.d.). My findings solidify that PoC mentors can provide both sympathetic and empathetic feedback due to having similar experiences and traumas. Non-PoC mentors, like Mentor A, can provide immense guidance; however, the cultural connection in language, community, backgrounds, and in-depth perception is absent. Mentor A was able to acknowledge how terrible it was to be a participant in a situation that was emotionally disturbing. Phrases such as, "I'm sorry that happened to you. I feel you." Mentor A was consoling rather than being in the moment with me. Mentor B and my coach intuitively provided advice that encompassed who I was as an interpreter and as a PoC. They showed empathy through words of affirmation. "I know exactly how you feel. I feel your suffering." Importantly, they not only felt for me, but they felt *with* me.

Conduit Model vs. Feeling Human

The second theme that came to my attention was the difference between adopting the conduit model vs. feeling human. The conduit model of interpreting is when an interpreter conveys information from one language to another without a personal/cultural context (Schick, n.d.). The emotion of feeling human is a spontaneous mental state that encompasses a full range of emotions like sorrow, anger, and compassion. During my sessions with Mentor A, we discussed how it was to continue through a job even when we felt uncomfortable. Interpreters are assigned to facilitate equal access communication. This means it was very important for me to proceed with the Zoom hacking session. I fully understand and agree with this. We discussed unbiased sign choices that would fit well within the session. Mentor A suggested controls that

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demonstrated an interpreter's role as a simple conveyor of information and messages. However, the controls lacked a lens of personal/cultural context. Mentor B and my coach has lived through experiences of discrimination and race. They assured me that even though I was there as the interpreter, racial slurs were targeting cultures of color; therefore, the heartbreak I felt was validated. Mentor B and my coach also informed me that as an interpreter, it is acceptable for me to alert the consumer of the severity of what is happening. It is also perfectly alright to inform the consumers that I may need to take a deep breath and gather myself.

Minority Solidarity

Finally, the third theme appeared during my first session with Mentor B. This is when I realized another person was able to acknowledge the struggles I encountered—this is what I came to see as solidarity. Acts of solidarity are worthy and beneficial to other PoC. Mentor B and my coach were able to discuss the positives of our shared histories. We discussed the negatives of the experiences we struggle with as PoC who are trying to keep up with our white counterparts. These types of discussions need a PoC mentor specifically. Mentor B and my coach helped invoke introspection in personal and professional aspects. The salience of having a mutual common understanding increased the level of confidence and comfort I had while expressing my thoughts and feelings. When I faced trauma during the Zoom hack, Mentor A did their best to connect with me, but they could not offer solutions nor could not fully offer a response. The differences between Mentor B and my coach and Mentor A were the shared commonalities of culture, history, internal attitudes, and beliefs.

Additional Findings

In addition to these themes, I noticed codeswitching and imposter syndrome appeared within the mentor stages. In my work, I often found myself code-switching, which “involves

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adjusting one's style of speech, appearance, behavior, and expression in ways that will optimize the comfort of others in exchange for fair treatment, quality service, and employment opportunities" (McCluney et al., 2019, para. 4). Due to the frequency of codeswitching, I often felt isolated because I could not be my authentic self. I have had to make myself more palatable to my white professional colleagues. Despite these challenges, I have tried to be as genuine as possible, while still navigating through unfamiliar territory.

Throughout my experience, I had to codeswitch when working with Mentor A, often without even knowing I was codeswitching. My experiences support that IoC need mentors of color. With Mentor B and my coach, it was easier for me to absorb and learn everything without worrying about cultural differences or how my language usage would be perceived. This does not necessarily mean white mentors are not a good fit for IoC. This suggests that IoC may feel more comfortable having discussions about their experiences of race and culture with other IoC (Jones, 2021).

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The findings of the study support that a PoC mentor is beneficial for an IoC's professional and personal development. Based on what I have learned, mentors of color should be integrated into ITPs. Mentors of color can support in increasing or maintaining the numbers of SoC in ITPs. SoC, as recent graduates, can enter the field with the confidence that they have a community of role models supporting them. Through this research, I found strength and energy to persevere. I found energy in my community. When interpreters do not notice other sign language interpreters who look like them, they often feel disconnected and alone if they are the only one from that racial/ethnic group. Research supports that IoC's are lacking access to mentors of color (Jones, 2021). Mentors of color are crucial to me and my fellow IoC's persistence in the field and to our identity as IoC. To circle back to the question, would a culturally familiar mentorship influence the mentee's self-development while increasing self confidence in a predominantly White field? In my personal experience, the answer is yes. By having mentors of color, my skills have been enhanced in both hard and soft skills. My self-confidence vastly increased, allowing me to explore more professional development and jobs. Ultimately, my overall capabilities were no longer questioned by me but put into a positive perspective. I hope to one day become a mentor to novice IoC. The tools I have gained will benefit others one day. The butterfly effect will create a positive wave into the future.

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