F.E.E.D. – FRID Engaging, Evaluating and Discussing

Discussion Topic

What Makes Us Tick? Sign Language Interpreters, Values & Motivation

> *Article retrieved from Street Leverage:*
> *(http://www.streetleverage.com/2016/10/makes-us-tick-sign-language-interpreters-values*
> *-motivation/). FRID claims no ownership of the article nor the ideas and concepts*
> *contained within.*

Knowledge of personal beliefs and value systems enhance a sign language interpreter's professional practice. Audrey Ramirez-Loudenback posits articulating our "why" may positively impact job satisfaction and longevity in the field.

I embarked on this research as a student in Western Oregon University's MA in Interpreting Studies with a belief that our motivations will influence every part of our professional practice. Literature confirms that values are the foundation for any decision making process, whether a person is consciously aware of this or not (Amentrano, 2014; Brown, 2002; Rokeach 1970, 1974). As sign language interpreters, our responsibility is to start identifying and articulating the values that are expressed through our choices.

[View post in ASL]

Values have been discussed by many in the field of sign language interpreting (Bienvenu, 1987; Cokely, 2000; Dean & Pollard, 2013), including here on Street

Leverage (Meckler, 2014). My research attempted to take what we know about values and collect information via an online survey from a large sample of sign language interpreters and interpreting students about their own personally held value systems to see what kind of patterns and trends emerged.

Values That Motivate

The survey included the Portrait Values Questions (PVQ), an instrument used to collect data that was designed by Dr. Schwartz, a researcher and teacher in the field of Psychology (Schwartz, 1994, 2012, Schwartz et al., 2001, Schwartz et al., 2012). The survey also included questions about demographics and one open-ended question. I received 298 completed responses from interpreters and interpreting students all over the United States. A large portion of the research results centered on the responses to the open-ended question; respondents were asked to briefly describe their reasons for becoming an interpreter.

My findings showed that most respondents described reasons for entering the field that were not congruent with the value system expressed in their PVQ results (Ramirez-Loudenback, 2015). One recurrent example of this incongruity was a response that described a pleasure derived from using American Sign Language. A common example of this was "I fell in love with the language". Most respondents that had a response similar to this example had results from their PVQ that did not match the values expressed with this idea of loving a language.

Much work has been done in the area of occupational fit and values (Amentrano, 2014; Brown, 2002; Watt & Richardson, 2007). This literature shows that values are an important part of choosing an occupation. One question that emerged from my research was about the consequence of having reasons for choosing to become a sign language interpreter that are not in-line with an individual's personal value system (prioritization of essential values). I believe that we should be encouraging all emerging interpreters to consider how their values are being expressed in the choice to pursue this profession. This will lead pre-professionals to consider if interpreting will provide a career in which they can have the longevity and satisfaction that comes with an occupation that is congruent with their value system.

Values That Divide & Unite

My research also indicated a variation in value systems from respondents who did not identify as "White/Caucasian" compared to those that did identify as "White/Caucasian". It is natural for individuals from distinct cultures to prioritize values differently. In fact, one of the reasons Schwartz developed this theory and model was to examine values across cultures (1994; Schwartz et al., 2001). The proportion of respondents (11%) who identified with an ethnic group other than "White/Caucasian" (89%) matches fairly closely with RID's membership data, which was 87.7% (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, 2014, p. 58). Within the small number of respondents who

did identify as "Asian/Asian-American" or "Latino/Hispanic," a stark contrast in the prioritization of values with the overall group emerged. Those that identified as "Latino/Hispanic" or "Asian/Asian American" ranked *conformity* the highest of all ten value types. *Conformity* includes the values of "Politeness, obedience, self-discipline, honoring parents and elders" (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003, p. 1208). The mean for the overall sample, of 298 participants, ranked *conformity* 5th out of the ten value types. I believe this leads us to some important questions as a professional community of sign language interpreters and interpreter educators regarding recruitment and retention of interpreters from diverse cultures. What is the experience of being raised with and having a value system that often seems to contrast or even conflict with the majority of your peers/colleagues? How does the majority's value system create barriers for others to be heard and understood?

Through my study of this topic and my own experience with Supervision Sessions as a Supervision Leader for Western Oregon University's Professional Supervision of Interpreting Practice (PSIP) program, I have noticed that most ethical conflicts can be reframed through the lens of values (Cokely, 2000; Dean & Pollard, 2013; Glover, Bumpus, Logan, & Ciesla, 1997; Karacaer, Gohar, Aygun, & Sayin, 2009; Meckler, 2014). Most dilemmas can be rephrased by asking: How are the values I am prioritizing conflict with my team/consumer/setting in this moment? Using Schwartz' Motivational Values Theory and Model we could teach interpreting students and emerging professionals to view professional ethics in a way that is less deontological (right vs. wrong) by framing them in terms of competing values. This could improve professional discourse and lead to deeper reflective practice. When we have the language to articulate those conflicting values, I believe we can engage in a more productive conversation about how to navigate a conflict, one that honors the integrity of all involved.

Start Early for Positive Outcomes

Beginning this self-assessment of personal value systems early in an interpreter's career may lead to richer dialogue about the impact of those values on ethical decision making. Values not only have profound impact on the choice to become a sign language interpreter, but also the choices in which settings to work, which consumers we feel we 'match', and the ethical standards we practice every day.

Questions to Consider:
1   What motivated you to become an interpreter?
2   What values do you see represented in your response to question 1?
3   Which values do you hold dear that have the greatest impact on your work?
4   Identify a time in your professional history when you thought a colleague was acting unethically. How can you reframe their choices and your own choices in terms of values that were being prioritized and conflicted?

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"What Makes us Tick? Sign Language Interpreters, Values & Motivation"

*Some of the following questions were created by members of the FRID Board and/or members of the Professional Development Committee. The questions are intended solely for discussion related to this article and should not be considered for any other purpose. Other questions come from the article directly and are intellectual property of the author(s).

1. The article states that many respondent's PVQ results did not align with their open-ended response when asked why he or she decided to become an interpreter.
   a. Why do you think this occurred?
   b. What are your own reasons for entering the field?
2. The author of the article states her concerns about the values of the interpreting field not matching the personal values of interpreters.
   a. How would you describe the values of the interpreting field?
   b. Now that you have listed the values of interpreting, are there any personal values you feel conflict with those of your profession?
   c. What do you think are some consequences of this occurring?
3. The author discusses how aligning values with your profession can greatly impact the longevity of your career in that field. What else in your career do you think would have a positive effect from this?
4. Should interpreters re-assess their values as they gain working experience in the field? What benefits and/or consequences could this have on their work?
5. The culture in which we are raised is responsible for shaping our values. Using your knowledge of different cultures, can you think of an ethical dilemma that does not apply to you but may apply to someone from a different culture?
   a. In support of diverse populations of interpreters, how do you think ITP programs, agencies, interpreters etc. could solve that dilemma?
6. The author states that she feels "…most ethical conflicts can be reframed through the lens of values". What do you think she means by this?
   a. Can you remember a time in your interpreting education/career that looking through the "lens of values" may have eased an ethical difference?
   b. How do you feel about self-assessment for interpreters that have been working in the field for many years? Do you think seasoned interpreters may recognize biases they never knew were there?
7. "Beginning this self-assessment of personal value systems early in an interpreter's career may lead to richer dialogue about the impact of those values on ethical decision making."
   a. Do you agree with this statement? Explain why or why not.
   b. Do you feel that your personal values affect the decisions you make in the field of interpreting, or are you confident that you can keep your personal values separate?