

## Relational Autonomy & Decision Latitude of ASL-English Interpreters: Implications for Healthcare Practitioners



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## Structure of Presentation

- Presentation in ASL
- Presenters provide framework and “food for thought”
- Small group activities throughout





## Small Group Norms

### FOR TALKING

Use "I"

Use perception words –  
"it seemed to me" or "it  
appeared as if..."

Keep the focus on your  
thoughts, feelings, and  
perceptions

Support equal time for others  
to talk

### FOR LISTENING

Commit to engaged listening

Try to control non-listening behaviors  
– judging, saying "should", "me too"  
syndrome"

Focus on the speaker's feelings,  
needs, and perceptions

Paraphrase what you have heard  
to insure understanding



## Aim of Presentation

Deepen our understanding of  
**autonomy** and **decision latitude**  
in relation to interpreters and  
interpreter educators.

Take a moment and write down your  
definition of both.



## Problem Statement

Interpreters continue to struggle with the expectation that they function as if **“invisible”** — that they must suppress behaviors outside of linguistic transmission that could be perceived as **involvement** with the communication participants.



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Interpreters continue to struggle with the expectation that they function as if **“invisible”** — that they must suppress behaviors outside of linguistic transmission that could be perceived as **involvement** with the communication participants.

Ethical decision-making is taught as a rule-based versus an outcomes/context-based process.



## Consequences

Philosophical differences regarding the role of interpreters result in internal conflict between practitioners.

Limits our ability to develop a shared understanding of decision latitude.

Interpreters fail to act when circumstances require some type of intervention, but feel deeply conflicted.



## Interpreting as a Social Construction

The interpreter's role is socially constructed within human communication events.

In this relational activity, interpreters must be present, open, and transparent in their professional behaviors and decision-making.

Requires us to be prepared to exercise "voice" within our work.

## Interpreter Presence

- The manner and conduct of an interpreter in the midst of interaction with consumers.
- Evident in the quality of poise and effectiveness - spirit or manner that is felt and received by consumers as genuine engagement, attentiveness, readiness, acceptance, and respect.



## Professional Voice

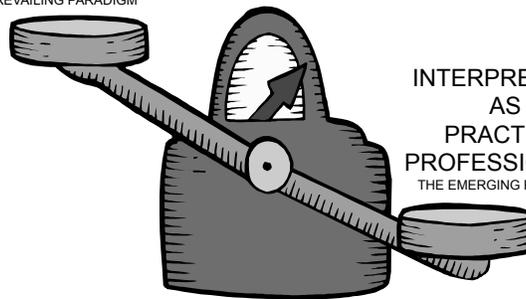
- The ability to interface with consumers in a natural and authentic manner that promotes collaboration.



- Involves recognition of when the need for intervention exists, knowledge of appropriate options, and the courage to act in a courteous, collaborative and transparent manner.

## Shifting Paradigms

INTERPRETERS  
AS "TECHNICIANS"  
THE PREVAILING PARADIGM



INTERPRETERS  
AS  
PRACTICE  
PROFESSIONALS  
THE EMERGING PARADIGM

## Defining a Practice Profession

Patterns of practice evolve over time

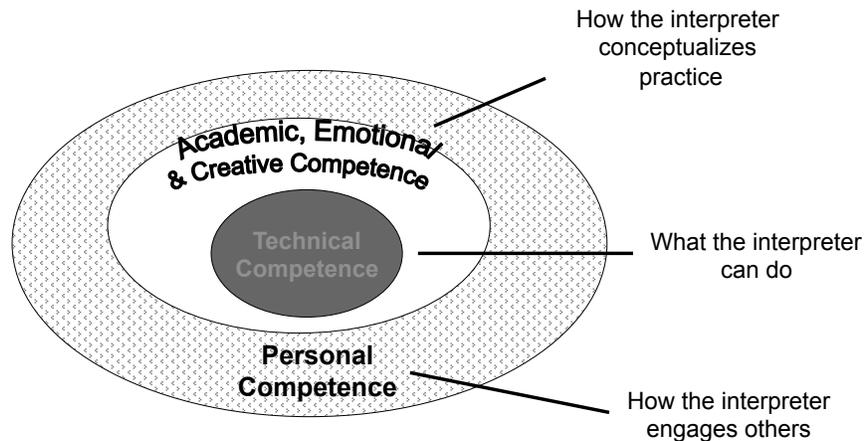
Practitioners are reflective and engage in ongoing assessment

Standards of practice are framed by theories and ethical tenets

Applied within the human contexts



## Competencies of Practice Professionals



## Foundation for Decision Latitude

The professional discretion exercised by an interpreter in deciding how to meet the various demands associated with her work.  
(Dean & Pollard, 2001)

## How is Discretion Forged?

The profession's deep conceptualization of the professional acts and practices of its members.



Agreement of members to behave in a manner that is similar to each other.

(Kasher 2005)

## Definitions

### Professional Practices

- Patterns of practice that are exemplified by a practitioner
- Reflect the agreed upon norms of professional protocol

### Professional Acts

- Distinctive and recurring professional behaviors evolved over time
- Recognized as best or effective practice



## Small Group Reflection

1. How have you acquired professional practices?  
From where did you receive or draw them?
2. What activities can we employ to deepen our conceptualization of professional acts and practices?
3. In what ways can the profession better support our understanding of professional acts/practices and application of discretion?



## Full Group Reflection

- Salient points from small group discussion



## Ideal: Competent Autonomy

The capacity of an individual to identify and access a significant range of viable options and retain authority over his or her social circumstances.

(Westlund, 2009)



## Definition Check-In

Look at the definitions that you wrote for “autonomy” and “decision latitude”.

How do your definitions compare to the ideas presented here?

## Application of Competent Autonomy

Capacity of professionals to make informed decisions and act responsibly

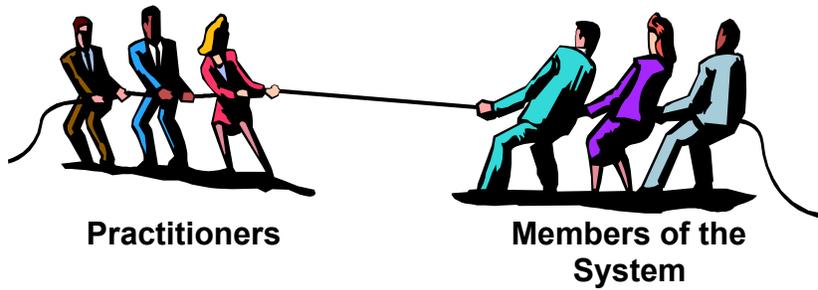
Based on discretion derived from a deep understanding of standards

Includes the ability to justify and explain professional acts based on a conception of the whole profession and its ethical principles.

## Competent Autonomy

- Assumes the decision-making is in accordance with professional standards
- “If our factual understanding of the *preconditions for autonomous action* is flawed, so will be our ethical reaction to that autonomy.” (MacDonald, 2002)

## Antagonistic Autonomy



## Pre-Conditions are Relational

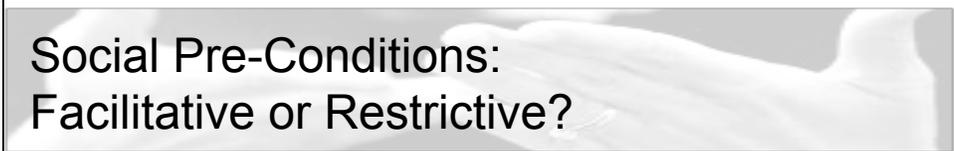
**Autonomy is socially constructed...**

within our particular social relationships and power structures in which professional practice is embedded.

**It requires...**

that professional relationships provide opportunities for genuine and transparent decision-making.

(MacDonald, 2002)



## Social Pre-Conditions: Facilitative or Restrictive?

- ✓ Unique bond to the Deaf Community
- ✓ Legislative mandates
- ✓ Professional standing
- ✓ Rich history of practice



## Social Pre-Conditions: Facilitative or Restrictive?

- |                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| ✓ Unique bond to the Deaf Community | ✓ Monolingual attitudes of broader society                        |
| ✓ Legislative mandates              | ✓ Oppressive behavior of individuals within the broader society   |
| ✓ Professional standing             | ✓ Academic and/or social gaps of some consumers and practitioners |
| ✓ Rich history of practice          |   |



## Functional vs. Relational Autonomy

### **Functional Autonomy**

Interpreter-centric

Work is central  
in the mind of  
the interpreter.



## Functional vs. Relational Autonomy

### **Functional Autonomy**

Interpreter-centric

Work is central  
in the mind of  
the interpreter.

### **Relational Autonomy**

System-centric

Achieving the goals of  
the system and  
participants is central.



## Elements of Relational Autonomy

- **Internal Elements**

How the interpreter perceives herself, her role, and her work

How participants perceive themselves

- **External Elements**

How the work of the interpreter is perceived by others

How participants are perceived by others



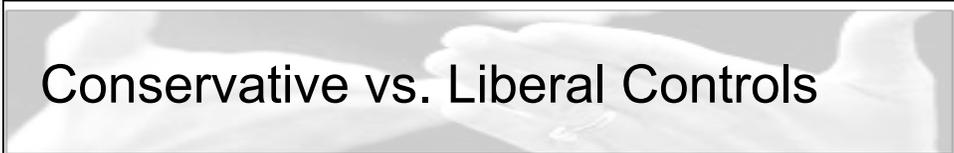
## Ethical Decisions Form a Continuum

(Dean & Pollard, 2004)

Conservative  
Decision-Making

Liberal  
Decision-Making





## Conservative vs. Liberal Controls

- **The more balanced** the autonomy expressed by participants, the more likely the interpreter is to exercise conservative choices



## Conservative vs. Liberal Controls

- **The more balanced** the autonomy expressed by participants, the more likely the interpreter is to exercise conservative choices
- **The less balanced** the autonomy expressed by participants, the more likely the interpreter is to exercise liberal choices



Assumption #1

Interpreting is a practice profession.



Assumption #2

In practice professions, ways of doing things are conceived over time by applying theory from the profession's scholarship to practice.



## Assumption #3

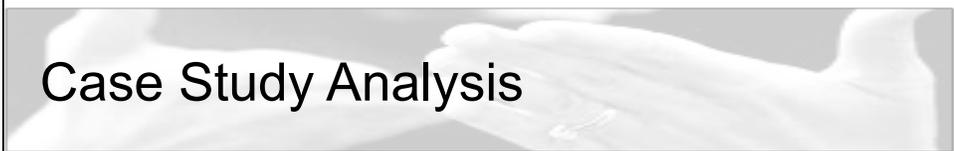
Functioning as a practice professional requires:

- recognizing what is occurring on multiple levels
- applying relational autonomy to make decisions that will benefit the interaction
- the ability to function within a system-centric view



## Strengthening Decision-Making

- Case Study Analysis
- Observation/Supervision
- Conflict Resolution Activities



## Case Study Analysis

Use complex case analysis to promote critical thinking. Case analysis promotes a system orientation.

Increases understanding of the issues, factors, and range of controls and solutions that impact day-to-day work of practitioners.



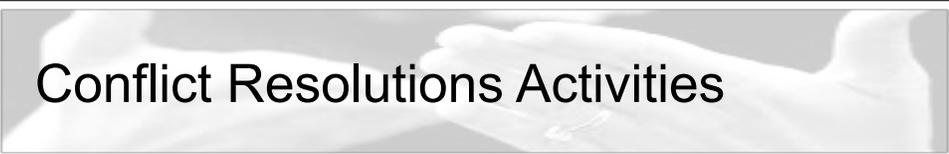
## Small Group Discussion Activity

- Form groups of 5-6 individuals
- Read Case Study #1
- Discuss the questions
- Report salient findings
- Small groups discuss implications for practice
- Report salient findings



## Observation/Supervision

- Is goal-oriented
  - Assumes a long-term collaborative working relationship between practicing peers
- Requires a high degree of mutual trust
  - Is systematic, although it requires a flexible and continuously changing methodology
  - Assumes a common framework



## Conflict Resolutions Activities

- Creates a cooperative context
- Excellent way to find voice and promote transparency
- Learn to be peacemakers (neutral)



## Small Group Discussion Activity

- Read scenario
- Engage in role play
  - Each person assumes a role:
    - Deaf person
    - Counselor
    - Interpreter
    - Group member
- Reflect on what transpired
- Report salient findings



## Next Steps for Healthcare Practitioners

- Complete acquisition of the 3 cycles of competence
- Engage in systems-thinking
- Adopt a system-centric view versus interpreter-centric view
- Participate in supervision and active reflection
- Explore and apply best practices



## Closing Thought

“Professionals cannot become effective by following scripts—it is not how discretion is forged. Instead, they need to create **knowledge in use** as they practice ... knowledge does not exist apart from the professional and the context in which they work.”

-Thomas Sergiovanni (2001) *Moral Leadership*



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