

**Becoming an Interpreter: Navigating Feedback, Fear, and Professional Identity Through
Reflective Practice**

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ABSTRACT

Novice American Sign Language-English interpreters often grapple with impostor syndrome, doubting their abilities despite adequate training and performance. Feedback plays a crucial role in shaping professional confidence, yet it is not always delivered constructively. In some cases, feedback mechanisms are influenced by horizontal violence (harmful interactions among colleagues) that can exacerbate self-doubt and hinder professional development. This autobiographical action research project examined how feedback, both constructive and harmful, intersects with impostor syndrome and professional identity formation in the early professional experience of a novice interpreter.

Using self-reflection journals, feedback logs, and Demand Control-Schema supervision session documentation collected over 15 months, this study analyzed patterns in feedback dynamics and their impact on the development of confidence and professional identity. Findings revealed that even a single incident of horizontal violence can create sustained psychological distress lasting months without intervention, and that public feedback delivery amplified harm disproportionately compared to private feedback. DC-S supervision emerged as a powerful intervention, particularly through community validation and cognitive reframing. However, impostor syndrome proved persistent, and responses to intervention varied, suggesting that comprehensive approaches may need to extend beyond cognitive reframing alone.

Keywords: feedback culture, horizontal violence, demand control schema, impostor syndrome, professional identity formation, novice interpreters

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

In my journey as a novice ASL-English interpreter, I have been plagued by a profound sense of impostor syndrome that has turned my world upside down and inside out. Despite graduating *summa cum laude* with a bachelor's in interpreting, I entered the field feeling woefully unprepared, even though I was technically well-equipped. My self-doubt was so overwhelming that I declined potentially valuable job opportunities, paralyzed by the fear that my team or consumers would expose me as a fraud.

The emotional landscape of my early professional experience was marked by shame and isolation. Moments in my journey instilled a deep sense of self-doubt that felt endless, a never-ending cycle of defeat in which I dwelt exclusively on perceived shortcomings. I excessively judged every mistake, feeling defeated by criticism and constantly believing I was falling short, a failure. These experiences not only impacted my professional trajectory, but my lack of confidence as a novice also had detrimental effects on both my personal growth and professional development, eroding my resilience.

As I joined Western Oregon University's master's program, I was granted a practicum, a low-stakes opportunity to gently enter the profession. However, the path was far from smooth. Colleagues sometimes seemed to exclude, distance themselves from, or even provoke, creating an environment rife with horizontal violence (Ott, 2012). I became hesitant to admit my vulnerability, knowing that the professional landscape could quickly become a space of scapegoating, criticism, and shaming.

Through conversations with peers, seasoned professionals, mentors, and coaches, I discovered this experience was far from uncommon. As my research progressed and my

educational journey continued, I was haunted by persistent self-doubt, continually questioning my skills and worth as an interpreter. It was during this challenging period that I encountered supervision guided by the Demand Control-Schema framework (Dean & Pollard, 2013), which emerged as a potential remedy for the persistent issues in the field: horizontal violence, destructive feedback practices, and the treacherous waters novice interpreters navigate.

American Sign Language-English interpreting presents unique challenges, particularly for novice interpreters transitioning from training to professional practice (Dean & Pollard, 2001; Witter-Merithew, 2001). New interpreters frequently battle feelings of inadequacy and impostor syndrome, doubting their abilities despite demonstrating competence. Feedback, whether constructive or harmful, plays a significant role in shaping these perceptions (Jug et al., 2019; Forsythe & Johnson, 2016). Unfortunately, feedback mechanisms often lack structure or become compromised by negative dynamics that can exacerbate impostor syndrome and impede professional development (Smith, 2021; Emmart, 2015; Hill, 2018).

Statement of the problem

Novice interpreters frequently experience impostor syndrome, questioning their competence despite their training and capabilities (Sakulku & Alexander, 2011). This psychological phenomenon is particularly pronounced in American Sign Language interpreting, where practitioners must simultaneously navigate complex linguistic, cultural, and interpersonal dynamics in high-stakes environments (Dean & Pollard, 2001). While feedback is essential for professional growth, supervisors and colleagues do not always deliver it constructively, which can contribute to negative self-perceptions and reinforce impostor syndrome (Block, 2015; Witter-Merithew, 2001). When horizontal violence impacts feedback, where criticism is delivered in a harmful, belittling manner by peers rather than superiors, it can significantly

deepen feelings of inadequacy and create a cycle of self-doubt that extends beyond individual interpreting assignments (Ott, 2012; Hill, 2018). This toxic feedback environment creates barriers to skill development precisely when novice interpreters are most vulnerable and in need of supportive guidance. Despite extensive literature on interpreter training and professional standards, little attention has been paid to the psychological dimensions of interpreter development and to how negative feedback mechanisms specifically affect novice practitioners (Miller, 2023).

The intersection of impostor syndrome, feedback practices, and horizontal violence in the Signed Language interpreting profession represents a critical gap in both research and practice (Curtis, 2017). Current models often fail to account for the emotional and psychological components of interpreter development, focusing instead on technical skill acquisition without addressing the underlying confidence issues that may impede progress (Witter-Merithew, 2001; Block, 2015). The DC-S offers a potential framework for structured supervision that might mitigate these issues, but its application specifically to novice interpreters' experiences with impostor syndrome remains underexplored (Dean & Pollard, 2001; Vascimini Protheroe, 2024). Without evidence-based approaches to combat the detrimental effects of negative feedback cultures, the interpreting field risks perpetuating cycles of attrition among promising novice interpreters, reducing service quality for Deaf communities, and continuing harmful professional practices (Ott, 2012; Hill, 2018). This research aims to address this gap by examining how structured approaches can better support novice interpreters during the vulnerable early career phase, while fostering resilience against impostor syndrome and creating more constructive feedback environments (Dean & Pollard, 2001; Witter-Merithew, 2001).

Purpose of the Study

Through this study, I will reflect deeply on my personal journey as a novice ASL-English interpreter, documenting how feedback dynamics and horizontal violence have contributed to my experiences with impostor syndrome and shaped my early professional development. This study serves as an inventory of my experiences and perceptions as I navigate the transition from student to practicing interpreter, examining the psychological impact of various feedback encounters I have faced along the way. By examining these interconnected factors in my own experience, I aim to understand the challenges I have confronted and identify strategies that have helped me respond effectively to difficult feedback. This study is not intended to suggest specific practices for the field as a whole, but rather to document and reflect on my experiences, in the hope that they might resonate with others facing similar challenges. While primarily autobiographical in nature, this study aims to uncover ideas for improving my resilience against impostor syndrome and potentially add another tool to the many already available to novice interpreters. By sharing my personal insights gained through this process, I aim to contribute one voice to the ongoing conversation about supporting interpreters during their vulnerable early career phase, with the understanding that my experience represents just one perspective within the diverse landscape of interpreter development.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three complementary frameworks to understand how novice interpreters develop professional identity during the transition from student to practicing professional.

The first is Wenger's (1998) communities of practice framework, which positions professional identity as inherently social. Rather than developing solely through skill acquisition,

identity emerges through participation in a professional community, moving gradually from the periphery toward fuller membership. This framework helps explain why horizontal violence was so damaging in this study: harmful peer dynamics disrupted the very process of belonging that professional identity formation requires. It also explains why supervision group membership proved so restorative, as community participation was both the wound and the medicine.

The second framework is Schön's (1983) reflective practitioner model, which distinguishes between reflection-in-action (thinking in the moment during work) and reflection-on-action (processing experiences afterward). This distinction maps directly onto a central finding of this study: the persistent gap between in-the-moment harsh self-talk and the more balanced self-assessment that emerged through structured reflection. DC-S supervision functions as a formalized approach to reflection-on-action, providing the theoretical rationale for how structured dialogue supports professional growth in ways that experience alone cannot.

The third framework is Ibarra's (1999) concept of provisional selves, which describes professional identity formation not as a linear progression but as an iterative process of experimentation and gradual internalization. Professionals try on different versions of a professional self, observe which ones fit, and gradually consolidate a more stable identity. This framing accommodates the nonlinear arc documented in this research, the repeated return to core mantras, the setbacks alongside growth, and the eventual consolidation of a professional self-concept that could hold both mistakes and competence simultaneously.

Together, these three frameworks provide the conceptual vocabulary for understanding how feedback dynamics, horizontal violence, and supervised reflection interact to shape professional identity in novice ASL-English interpreters. Where Wenger (1998) explains the social conditions that enable or impede belonging, Schön (1983) explains the reflective

mechanisms through which learning occurs, and Ibarra (1999) explains why identity development is necessarily iterative rather than linear. This integrated lens honors both the complexity of the data and the lived reality of becoming a professional.

Organization

This action research project follows a six-chapter structure. Chapter 1 introduces the study by presenting background, problem statement, purpose, theoretical framework, limitations, and definitions of terms. Chapter 2 presents a thematic literature review examining impostor syndrome, feedback dynamics, and horizontal violence in relation to novice interpreter development. Chapter 3 details the qualitative, autobiographical methodology, including data collection tools and analysis procedures. Chapter 4 presents findings organized around themes that emerged from thematic analysis across three data sources. Chapter 5 presents conclusions, including a summary of findings, significance of the study, limitations, implications for future research, and recommendations for practice.

Definition of Terms

Constructive Feedback: Feedback that is descriptive, nonjudgmental, behavior-focused, actionable, and delivered with the intent to support the recipient's professional growth rather than evaluate their worth. (Jug et al., 2019; Witter-Merithew, 2001).

DC-S (Demand-Control Schema): A framework developed by Dean and Pollard (2013) for examining the demands interpreters encounter in practice and the controls available to manage those demands. In this study, DC-S serves as both a theoretical lens and the structure guiding supervision sessions.

Feedback Culture: The shared professional norms, expectations, and practices that govern how feedback is given, received, and responded to within a professional community. In

interpreting, feedback culture has been characterized as largely unstructured and, at times, harmful (Smith, 2021; Emmart, 2015).

Feedback Log: A data collection tool used in this study to systematically document all feedback received during the research period, including context, source, type, emotional response, and impact on professional practice.

Horizontal Violence (HV): Persistent harmful behaviors, including gossip, diminishing comments, rudeness, excessive or condescending criticism, and devaluation of professional worth, perpetrated by members of a professional group toward one another (Ott, 2012). Unlike top-down criticism, horizontal violence occurs among peers or colleagues at similar hierarchical levels.

Impostor Syndrome: A psychological phenomenon characterized by persistent feelings of inadequacy and fraudulence despite evidence of competence or success. Individuals experiencing impostor syndrome fear being "exposed" as less capable than others perceive them to be (Sakulku & Alexander, 2011).

Novice Interpreter: A practitioner in the early stages of professional interpreting practice, typically within the first few years following graduation from an ITP. Novice interpreters are characterized by the development of technical skills alongside an emerging professional identity (Vascimini Protheroe, 2024; Isaacson, 2023).

Professional Identity: An interpreter's internalized sense of self as a practitioner, including their values, beliefs about their competence, understanding of their role, and relationship to the broader professional community (Wenger, 1998; Ibarra, 1999).

Story Form: A structured self-reflection journal template developed by Trine (2019), used in this study as the primary tool for documenting and interpreting experiences, emotional responses, self-talk patterns, and impacts on professional identity.

Supervision (DC-S Supervision): As defined by Dean and Pollard (2013), a structured professional dialogue in which practitioners discuss their work with colleagues to obtain a "superior vision," perspectives, and insights they could not have reached through introspection alone. DC-S supervision encompasses normative (collegial), formative (skill-building), and restorative (supportive) functions (Curtis, 2017).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The psychological well-being of interpreters, particularly during their transition from student to professional, represents a critical yet understudied aspect of interpreter development. This literature review examines the interconnected phenomena of impostor syndrome, feedback dynamics, and horizontal violence among ASL-English interpreters, with particular focus on how the Demand Control Schema [DC-S] (Dean & Pollard, 2013) supervision may address these challenges. By understanding how these phenomena interact and impact interpreter experiences, and by raising awareness, providing education, and implementing structured DC-S supervision, the profession can begin to address these systemic issues.

Impostor Syndrome

Impostor syndrome represents a significant barrier to professional development for Signed Language interpreters, particularly given the public nature of interpreting work. Sakulku and Alexander (2011) describe individuals with the Impostor Phenomenon as experiencing "intense feelings that their achievements are undeserved and worry that they are likely to be exposed as a fraud" (p. 73). Similarly, Holden et al. (2024) characterize it as "high-achieving individuals also fear[ing] being found out to be a fraud and having their achievements taken from them due to their inability to internalize their accomplishments," (para. 1). Sherman (2013) further notes that "people with this syndrome lack confidence and think they don't deserve the success they've achieved," emphasizing that affected individuals "don't feel good enough, [are] unsure of what [they are] doing, and [feel they] can't live up to others' expectations," (para. 3). These converging definitions highlight how impostor syndrome creates systemic challenges that

impede interpreters' professional growth and contribute to the psychological barriers faced during development.

Risk Factors and Vulnerability

Sakulku and Alexander (2011) note that "feeling like an impostor seems to be widely experienced [and] subsequent research has shown Impostorism affects a wide range of people" (p. 73), while identifying specific risk factors. First-generation college students are "more likely to experience impostor syndrome than other students" (Holden et al., 2024, discussion section, para. 3), a finding that is particularly relevant given the evolving educational requirements for interpreting. Professional advancement paradoxically increases vulnerability, as Holden et al. (2024) observe that as expectations increase, "so, too, do the feelings that they may be incapable or unworthy of actually meeting those expectations." (Discussion section, para. 3). This heightened vulnerability highlights a critical consideration for interpreter education programs seeking to address impostor syndrome as part of professional development.

Psychological Impact and Professional Consequences

The psychological consequences of impostor syndrome extend far beyond simple self-doubt. Researchers document consistent patterns of distress across studies. Sherman (2013) observes that "people with impostor syndrome feel a level of self-doubt that can lead to overwork and a paralyzing fear of failure. The fear of being unmasked causes incredible stress." (para. 4). Sakulku and Alexander (2011) similarly note that for "Impostors, success does not mean happiness. Impostors often experience fear, stress, self-doubt and feel uncomfortable with their achievements. Impostor fears interfere with a person's ability to accept and enjoy their abilities and achievements, and have a negative impact on their psychological well-being" (p. 86). When facing tasks that might reveal their perceived incompetence, "Impostors often

experience uncontrollable anxiety due to their fear of failure" (p. 86). This state of psychological distress directly impacts interpreters' professional functioning and can contribute to broader systemic challenges like burnout and attrition.

The impact of impostor syndrome on interpreters' career trajectories is particularly concerning. Vascimini Protheroe (2024) establishes a direct link between impostor feelings and career limitations, noting that "novices may experience strong feelings of impostor syndrome that hold them back due to fear of taking on new opportunities and practicing their skills" (p. 31). This fear-based limitation represents a significant barrier in a profession where skill development necessitates exposure to varied interpreting scenarios. Cabrera (2023) provides a candid example in her action research: "There have been moments where I have declined interpreting assignments due to nervousness or because I am doubtful that I can do a good job. I would...perceive that my team or my consumer thinks that I am a fraud." (p. 9). This direct connection between impostor feelings and career limitations illustrates how psychological barriers can manifest as concrete obstacles to interpreters' development.

Manifestations: Perfectionism and Self-Diminishment

Impostor syndrome often manifests through perfectionism and a tendency to minimize accomplishments. Cabrera (2023) identifies perfectionism as an underlying factor, noting that "everything I put forth into the world must be perfect, if not, it is a complete failure." (p. 35). This perfectionism leads to harmful self-assessment, in which "many of my accomplishments throughout the years as a novice interpreter were either ignored or diminished." (p. 36). Sakulku and Alexander (2011) explain this seeming contradiction, noting that most "Impostors are able to fulfill their academic or work requirements despite their self-perceived fraudulence" because "they may compensate through excessive preparation and perfectionism, potentially leading to

burnout." (p. 74). These patterns become particularly problematic in feedback contexts, as perfectionistic interpreters may focus exclusively on perceived failures while dismissing positive observations.

Transition Vulnerability

The transition from student to working interpreter creates a period of particular vulnerability. Isaacson (2023) captures this precarious phase: "After graduation and beginning my journey, I felt overwhelmed with figuring out what qualifications I needed to improve to be work-ready and how to get my foot in the profession." (p. 1). This feeling of being overwhelmed, despite having a formal education, reflects the gap between academic preparation and professional readiness that many interpreters experience, heightening their susceptibility to impostor syndrome during this critical developmental period. This transitional vulnerability is compounded by the typical reduction in structured feedback and mentorship that occurs after graduation, leaving novice interpreters to navigate professional challenges with limited support precisely when impostor feelings may be most intense.

Limitations and Interventions

While literature documenting impostor syndrome among interpreters remains limited, emerging research suggests promising pathways for intervention. Vascimini Protheroe (2024) observed that "as my confidence grew, my feelings of impostor syndrome declined, as did my fear of accepting new opportunities" (p. 30). suggesting a potentially virtuous cycle where confidence and professional engagement mutually reinforce each other. Sherman (2013) proposes that "sharing your insecurities with someone you trust and respect can help you separate what's real from your perceptions of insecurity" (para. 7). highlighting the potential value of mentorship and structured dialogue. This relationship between confidence and

willingness to accept new opportunities suggests potential pathways for addressing impostor syndrome as part of interpreter professional development.

A critical limitation in the current literature is the lack of longitudinal studies tracking how impostor feelings evolve throughout interpreter career development. Most existing research relies on retrospective self-reporting or cross-sectional designs that capture experiences at a single point in time. Additionally, the research on impostor syndrome in interpreting specifically remains preliminary, as Vascimini Protheroe (2024) acknowledges: "There is little research on interpreters battling feelings of impostor syndrome." (p. 4). This gap is particularly significant given the unique aspects of interpreting work, its public nature, the high consequences of errors, and the complex interplay of linguistic, cultural, and interpersonal skills required, which may shape how impostor syndrome manifests and can be addressed in this professional context. These gaps in the literature, particularly the lack of longitudinal, field-specific research, underscore the need for the kind of sustained, practice-based documentation this study aims to provide.

Feedback

Feedback processes emerge as particularly consequential in shaping interpreters' professional identity and confidence, serving as either a bridge to growth or a barrier to development. For novice interpreters struggling with impostor syndrome, the quality of feedback experiences can either reinforce feelings of fraudulence or provide pathways to professional confidence. Researchers converge on defining effective feedback as a structured communicative process designed to support professional growth. Across the literature, effective feedback is characterized by its descriptive and nonjudgmental quality, its deliberate use of language, and its orientation toward helping practitioners translate self-awareness into meaningful behavioral

change (Jug et al., 2019; Forsythe & Johnson, 2016; Witter-Merithew, 2001). When feedback is designed this way, it functions less as evaluation and more as professional dialogue.

The interpreting profession's struggle with feedback reflects deeper systemic challenges that directly impact novice interpreter development and exacerbate impostor syndrome. Krugielki (2025) captures this complexity: "feedback and criticism are frequently used as interchangeable terms, describing a comment or observation made by others about the work we complete" (p. 7), while documenting the emotional toll this creates: "I found that I was often overwhelmed by my variety in feedback experiences...As a result, I often found myself unwilling to reach out for help because of how terrified I was of receiving it" (p. 8). This fear-based relationship demonstrates how "practice professionals shy away from feedback that creates opportunities for growth because of these negative experiences" (Krugielki, 2025, p. 8). Yet as Krugielki (2025) also notes, "feedback is a bridge between novice and expert, granting novice interpreters critical insight about growth opportunities needed to be independently successful" (p. 10), making the stakes of getting this right especially high.

Characteristics of Effective Feedback

Multiple researchers converge on specific characteristics that distinguish effective feedback from mere evaluation or criticism. Across the literature, effective feedback is characterized by being goal-referenced, actionable, specific, and personalized, delivered in a timely and consistent manner, and grounded in observable behavioral descriptions supported by concrete examples rather than general evaluative language (Wiggins, 2012; Witter-Merithew, 2001; Jug et al., 2019). The precision of language becomes vital, as "using specific language and avoiding judgment, the tone of the message remains nonthreatening and provides an opportunity for dialog, establishing a positive interpersonal environment, which in turn fosters learning" (Jug

et al., 2019, para. 8). Together, these characteristics shift feedback from a judgment about a person to a map for their development.

A central focus of effective feedback is behavioral focus rather than personal evaluation. Rather than commenting on who an interpreter is, effective feedback describes what an interpreter did, observable, specific actions tied to a particular moment in the work. Research consistently emphasizes that "caution must be taken to avoid language attributing feedback to the recipient rather than to the directly observed behavior" and that "feedback based on personality traits should be avoided unless an observable behavior relating to personality can be described" (Jug et al., 2019, para. 18). In practice, this means the difference between saying "you seemed nervous" and "your pacing slowed in the second half", or between "your signs were unclear" and "the handshape for that classifier shifted mid-production." The first type of statement attributes a quality to the person; the second describes something that happened and can be changed. For interpreters already prone to fusing their performance with their self-worth, this distinction is not merely stylistic but the difference between feedback that opens a door to growth and feedback that confirms their worst fears about themselves.

Problematic Feedback Practices

The prevalence of harmful feedback practices in interpreting helps explain why impostor syndrome persists. Research has identified several harmful feedback patterns that can exacerbate impostor syndrome and hinder professional development. Multiple sources warn against evaluative language, terms like "good," "bad," "right," "wrong," or "appropriate," because such language implies judgment about the worth of the work rather than providing actionable guidance (Witter-Merithew, 2001; Colonomos, 2015; Jug et al., 2019). Similarly, researchers caution against reflexive praise, noting that statements like "great job" or "keep up the good

work" shift focus from the work itself to the person performing it, and can create dependency in learners who come to expect validation and feel discouraged in its absence (Jug et al., 2019; Witter-Merithew, 2001).

Research distinguishes between feedback that is difficult to receive, characterized by evaluative, controlling, or personally targeted language, and constructive feedback, noting that effective messages tend to be descriptive, solution-oriented, grounded in equality, and delivered with openness and support (Witter-Merithew, 2001; Miller, 2023). This distinction is particularly crucial for interpreters experiencing impostor syndrome, as evaluative feedback can reinforce feelings of inadequacy, whereas descriptive feedback provides concrete pathways for improvement. The contrast suggests that structured approaches emphasizing descriptive dialogue could serve as antidotes to the evaluative culture that currently pervades much interpreter feedback.

Quantity, Timing, and Recipient Participation

The mechanics of feedback delivery significantly influence whether feedback sessions support or undermine the development of interpreters' confidence. Research emphasizes the importance of modulating the quantity and timing of feedback for maximum effectiveness. Multiple sources recommend that feedback givers be deliberate about quantity, recognizing that delivering too many points at once can overwhelm the receiver. Rather than addressing every observation, effective feedback prioritizes the most important items and omits lesser concerns as needed, a determination that is inherently contextual and requires emotional intelligence on the part of the giver (Jug et al., 2019; Witter-Merithew, 2001). The principle of quality over quantity emerges consistently, with researchers noting that while "it is always easier to make generalizations that do not require explanation or justification," the critical question remains

"whether faster and easier is consistent with the goals of feedback" (Witter-Merithew, 2001, p. 4). This emphasis on focused, high-quality interactions prioritizes depth over breadth in examining interpreter decisions.

Research emphasizes that effective feedback is not a one-way transmission but a collaborative process that requires the learner to actively participate rather than passively receive. Learner self-assessment plays a central role in this dynamic, offering the feedback giver insight into the learner's own understanding of their performance and allowing the conversation to be guided by the learner's perspective and language (Jug et al., 2019; Forsythe & Johnson, 2016). When interpreters are positioned as active participants rather than passive recipients, the feedback encounter itself becomes a model for the kind of reflective practice that supports long-term professional growth.

Psychological Dimensions and Professional Culture

The substantial emotional weight that feedback interactions carry requires careful consideration, particularly for interpreters experiencing impostor syndrome. Multiple researchers acknowledge the inherent tension at the heart of feedback: it sits between the human desire to grow and improve and the equally human need for acceptance and validation as one already is. This tension means that even well-intentioned feedback carries an implicit message of insufficiency, making it genuinely difficult for receivers to remain open, cognitively and emotionally, to what is being offered (Stone & Heen, 2015; Witter-Merithew, 2001; Forsythe & Johnson, 2016). This psychological tension becomes particularly acute for interpreters already doubting their competence, as any suggestion for improvement can be interpreted as confirmation of their perceived fraudulence. The challenge intensifies as "students cannot escape the discomfort or frustration of disappointment that comes with receiving unfulfilling feedback"

while "giving good individualized feedback takes time, and few academics today have the time to sit down with highly anxious students and attend to their personal and emotional needs during a feedback session" (Forsythe & Johnson, 2016, Discussion section, para. 7). This tension, between the need to grow and the need to feel accepted, sits at the heart of why feedback so often goes wrong, and why structural solutions matter more than individual goodwill.

The interpreting profession's cultural relationship with feedback presents systemic challenges that compound these psychological dimensions, creating conditions ripe for impostor syndrome to flourish. Multiple sources document a cultural resistance to feedback within the interpreting profession, noting that it carries negative connotations in performance evaluation contexts and that the field has yet to develop effective norms for giving, receiving, or soliciting actionable feedback, whether from colleagues or from the consumers most directly affected by interpreters' work (Smith, 2021; Emmart, 2015). The absence of systematic feedback approaches thus perpetuates a cycle where novice interpreters receive inconsistent or harmful feedback that reinforces rather than addresses their self-doubt.

Novice vs. Expert Self-Reflection Patterns

Research demonstrates that "novice interpreters tended to focus on the negative aspects of their work" and "talked about how it was discouraging to hear their work again because they saw so many things wrong with it," while "expert interpreters focused mostly on the overall success of their work and were more positive" (Sowa & McDermid, 2018, p. 25). This gap between novice and expert self-assessment patterns suggests that the internal voice interpreters bring to their work is not fixed but develops, and can be shaped by the quality of the external feedback they receive along the way.

Systemic Challenges and Connections to Horizontal Violence

The absence of systematic feedback approaches creates broader professional challenges that extend beyond individual interactions. Research links inadequate feedback practices directly to horizontal violence, noting that "the lack of appreciation feedback brings up the concern of whether this could play a role in a continued perpetuation of the horizontal violence seen across the field of interpreting" (Ramey, 2021, p. 26). This connection illustrates how feedback challenges compound other professional issues, creating what Block (2015) identifies as a relationship between poor feedback, negative self-perception, and impostor syndrome. The systemic nature of these interconnected challenges suggests that piecemeal solutions addressing individual symptoms may be insufficient; comprehensive approaches that address the underlying feedback culture may be necessary to break these destructive cycles and create environments where novice interpreters can develop confidence rather than self-doubt.

Toward Solutions for Feedback

Research converges on describing quality feedback as fundamentally relational and growth-oriented, an invitation to reflect collaboratively on specific observed events, offered in a spirit of collegiality with the aim of empowering the receiver rather than evaluating them, and creating space for both parties to engage in dialogue that serves mutual development (Witter-Merithew, 2001; Stone & Heen, 2015). This vision recognizes that "feedback includes any information you get about yourself. In the broadest sense, it's how we learn about ourselves from our experiences and from other people—how we learn from life" (Stone & Heen, 2015, para. 4).

However, significant implementation challenges persist, underscoring the need for systematic approaches. Krugielki (2025) identifies that "feedback in interpreting work is still a

largely unexplored terrain, and feedback sessions are unique and required for both novice and experienced interpreters to develop" (p. 79), while research consistently shows that "none of the participants reported having a formal routine to reflect on their work" despite documented benefits of structured reflection approaches (Sowa & McDermid, 2018, p. 24). This gap between recognizing the importance of feedback and implementing effective practices leaves interpreters vulnerable to harmful patterns that can exacerbate impostor syndrome and professional isolation. The evidence suggests that without systematic intervention, novice interpreters will continue to encounter the same problematic feedback patterns that have characterized the profession, perpetuating cycles of self-doubt and avoidance that impede professional development. Before examining DC-S supervision as a potential framework for addressing these challenges, it is necessary to understand a third force that compounds them: horizontal violence within the interpreting profession.

Horizontal Violence

Ott (2012) provides a comprehensive definition, describing horizontal violence as "persistent behaviors such as gossip, diminishing comments, rudeness, devaluing others' professional worth, and criticism, perpetrated by members of a group toward one another" that "cause harm, anxiety, and stress in the receiver." (p. 15). What distinguishes horizontal violence from merely difficult feedback is its persistence and its source (harm that comes from within the professional community itself).

Prevalence and Perpetuation Patterns

Research consistently documents alarmingly high prevalence rates, with multiple studies finding that the majority of interpreters experience horizontal violence as "victims" at some point in their careers (Miller, 2023; Ott, 2012). Miller's (2023) research revealed that "30 (75%) of the

participants stated that they had been a victim of HV [horizontal violence]" with nearly half experiencing it "as both a student and practicing professional" (p. 26, 33). That nearly half experienced it as both student and practicing professional suggests horizontal violence is not a single traumatic event but a recurring feature of professional life.

More disturbing is the cyclical nature of horizontal violence within professional communities. Research reveals that those who experience horizontal violence and those who perpetuate it frequently occupy the same professional spaces, and that individuals who have themselves been harmed often unknowingly reproduce the same harmful dynamics toward others (Ott, 2012; Hill, 2018). This pattern emerges from what Hill (2018) identifies as a lack of "tools to handle vulnerability and shame or interpersonal conflict," leading to "burnout, hiding in the shadows, and limiting their experiences" (p. 6). This cyclical pattern reveals how horizontal violence becomes self-perpetuating within the profession, creating ongoing barriers to supportive professional development. The cycle is particularly insidious because the harm is invisible to those causing it, perpetuating a culture no one consciously chose.

Psychological Impact and Self-Blame Patterns

Interpreters experiencing horizontal violence consistently tend to read these harmful interactions as personal failings rather than recognizing them as manifestations of a broader systemic pattern (Hill, 2018; Miller, 2023). Hill (2018) captures this destructive pattern: "I assumed this [horizontal violence] was happening because I was an unskilled interpreter or just an inept person in general" rather than understanding that "the dynamics of the people involved were contributing to this sense of unsafety, and it was not all my fault" (p. 3). The cruelest aspect of this pattern is its self-reinforcing logic; the more an interpreter blames themselves, the less able they are to recognize the systemic source of the harm.

The emotional consequences documented across studies reveal the profound impact on professional identity and career sustainability. Research consistently identifies feelings of being "frustrated, less competent, angry, belittled, less trusting," and "worthless, lost, depressed, and powerless" following horizontal violence experiences (Miller, 2023, p. 34). These emotional impacts create what Hill (2018) describes as "negative self-talk" patterns that send "demeaning" messages about their lack of worth as humans and as professionals" (p. 57). When an interpreter already doubts their competence, being made to feel "worthless" and "powerless" by a colleague doesn't feel like an interpersonal conflict; it feels like confirmation.

Professional Environment and Cultural Factors

Multiple researchers identify how professional isolation compounds the problem, noting that "confidentiality standards can limit an interpreter's ability to process work experiences with others," leaving interpreters feeling "that they have no outlet to work through their feelings" (Hill, 2018, p. 4). This isolation increases "job-related stress," which can then "exacerbate instances of intrapersonal conflict, such as vicarious trauma and shame, as well as interpersonal conflict," including horizontal violence itself (Hill, 2018, p. 4). Confidentiality, a cornerstone of professional ethics, thus becomes, paradoxically, a structural barrier to the processing and healing that horizontal violence requires.

The broader professional culture further enables horizontal violence through ambivalent collegial relationships that leave interpreters uncertain about professional support. Research reveals that interpreters often feel only "somewhat valued" by colleagues and experience limited comfort in "approaching and speaking openly with other interpreters" (Miller, 2023, p. 38). This cultural ambivalence creates conditions where horizontal violence can flourish while victims remain silent, as "most respondents did not share their HV encounters with others" often due to

"fear of retaliation" (Miller, 2023, p. 55). Silence, enforced by fear rather than choice, means that horizontal violence rarely gets named, and what doesn't get named cannot be adequately addressed.

Vulnerability During Professional Transitions

Research identifies that horizontal violence "appears most damaging during periods of professional vulnerability, including but not limited to the transition from training to practice" when new professionals experience "transition shock" as they move "from their training programs into the professional community" (Ott, 2012, p. 28). This observation aligns with documented patterns of vulnerability to impostor syndrome during career transitions, creating a perfect storm in which multiple challenges converge. The novice interpreter navigating their first professional year is not encountering these challenges in isolation; they arrive together and amplify one another.

The distributed nature of horizontal violence across settings and hierarchical relationships means that novice interpreters cannot easily avoid these experiences by changing contexts. Research shows that horizontal violence occurs "across multiple settings" with perpetrators including both "peers" and "authoritative figures" (Miller, 2023, p. 33). The implication is sobering: there is no safe corner of the profession to retreat to, which means protection must come from within the interpreter rather than from avoiding difficult environments.

Toward Solutions for Horizontal Violence

Research recognizes several characteristics that enable effective intervention, including creating "space for vulnerability that will allow growth to happen" and helping interpreters develop "tools to handle vulnerability and shame or interpersonal conflict" (Hill, 2018, p. 4, 67). Hill (2018) proposes that addressing horizontal violence requires interpreters to "engage in

self-study related to dealing with their own shame and vulnerability" while developing skills in "emotional intelligence, imperfection, brave spaces, microaggressions, power, and privilege" to create "better engagement with the diverse field and diverse colleagues" (p. 67). What Hill (2018) describes is less a set of therapeutic interventions and more a professional culture, one that DC-S supervision is specifically designed to cultivate.

Despite the concerning findings on horizontal violence in the interpreting profession, several research limitations highlight the need for a more comprehensive understanding and intervention development. Studies examining horizontal violence have generally relied on small sample sizes and self-reported data, which may be influenced by recall bias and varying interpretations of what constitutes horizontal violence (Ott, 2012; Miller, 2023). Most concerning is the notable lack of intervention studies testing approaches to reduce horizontal violence or mitigate its effects, leaving the profession without evidence-based strategies for addressing this systemic problem. Furthermore, research has not fully explored the relationships between horizontal violence and other professional challenges like impostor syndrome, though the documented psychological impacts suggest significant overlap. Most significantly, research has not yet examined these relationships longitudinally or from within a single practitioner's sustained experience, a gap this study seeks to address.

DC-S Supervision

DC-S emerges as a promising framework that addresses the interconnected challenges of impostor syndrome, ineffective feedback, and horizontal violence through systematic professional dialogue. Dean and Pollard (2013) present DC-S not merely as a theoretical model but as a practical approach to professional growth through collaborative dialogue, arguing that "the most effective way practitioners can 'constantly re-examine those values, principles, and

beliefs that underscore and shape the decisions we make, and the actions we undertake' is by talking about your work in structured, validated ways, with your colleagues" (p. 139). The implications of this approach for interpreters navigating impostor syndrome, harmful feedback, and horizontal violence are significant and worth examining in detail.

Theoretical Foundation and Distinctive Features

The theoretical strength of DC-S supervision lies in its systematic approach to professional dialogue that distinguishes it from casual conversation or informal mentoring. Dean and Pollard (2013) emphasize that "multiple perspectives, conveyed via structured dialogue, provide benefits that introspection or 'sharing stories' alone cannot" (p. 139). The structure of DC-S supervision offers an antidote to the generalizations and evaluative language identified by Witter-Merithew (2001) as harmful aspects of ineffective feedback, providing instead a systematic approach to examining work experiences that supports growth rather than inducing shame or self-doubt. This observation underscores the distinction between casual conversations about work and the more structured, purposeful dialogue facilitated by the DC-S framework.

Central to the DC-S approach is Dean and Pollard's (2013) definition of supervision as "discussing your work with one or more colleagues, the goal of which is to obtain a 'superior vision' – one that you could not have achieved on your own" where "your perspective about a work situation is enhanced by the questions and thoughts your colleagues propose about an interpreting case you have presented" (p. 143). This definition positions supervision as fundamentally collaborative and growth-oriented, in contrast to the competitive or judgmental dynamics that characterize horizontal violence. This shift from evaluation to enhancement reframes the professional encounter itself from a site of potential exposure to a space for collaborative growth.

Professional Normalization and Cultural Transformation

Dean and Pollard (2013) position supervision as a normative component of professional development, noting that "reflective practice – talking about one's work with colleagues, in a structured manner, for the purposes of growth and improvement – is accepted and widespread among the practice professions" and that these "methods are learned during their educational years and become a standard, ethically mandated means of pursuing professional growth and improved outcomes for the remainder of their careers" (p. 140). When supervision is understood as standard professional practice rather than remedial intervention, seeking support becomes a sign of professionalism rather than inadequacy.

The values-oriented approach of DC-S supervision addresses deeper professional identity issues that contribute to impostor syndrome. Dean and Pollard (2013) observe that "talking about your work through the DCS framework helps illuminate and identify these other practice values" (p. 141), suggesting that supervision contributes to the development of a more nuanced professional ethos that informs decision-making across contexts. In a profession where interpreters often reduce complex decisions to binary judgments of success or failure, this values-oriented lens offers a more feasible way to understand the work.

Addressing the Reflection Gap

Sowa and McDermid (2018) note that while "self-reflection occurs retrospectively, as the interpreter reviews his or her work in order to understand interpreting processes and choices," their research found that "none of the participants reported having a formal routine to reflect on their work." (p. 24). This absence of structured reflection suggests a critical gap that DC-S supervision could address by providing a framework that allows interpreters to "acknowledge their successes and give them access to their own cognitive processes" while helping them

"identify problematic areas" (Sowa & McDermid, 2018, p. 26). Sowa and McDermid (2018) recommend that "interpreters might find it useful to create a more systematic approach and schedule time to engage in self-reflection or in working with a peer or expert to evaluate their practices" (p. 26). Structure, in this sense, is not bureaucratic overhead, but the scaffold that allows honest self-examination without collapsing into self-criticism.

Psychological Safety and Vulnerability

Sherman (2013) proposes that "sharing your insecurities with someone you trust and respect can help you separate what's real from your perceptions of insecurity" (para. 7), highlighting the potential value of mentorship and structured dialogue in addressing impostor syndrome. This observation aligns with the supervision process described by Dean and Pollard (2013) and addresses a central challenge of impostor syndrome: the inability to accurately assess one's own competence in isolation. This trusted space addresses something oft overlooked: the problem isn't only what interpreters know about their work, but what they can bring themselves to honestly examine.

Dean and Pollard (2013) explicitly acknowledge the emotional processing component of supervision, noting that "supervision is also the proper time and place for professionals to deal with their own emotions about their work and the people with whom they work" as "any practice professional who is directly involved in the intimate details of people's lives and their struggles can readily experience the emotional and psychological toll of such work" (p. 146). They emphasize that "supervision allows practice professionals to actively address those areas of psychological strain before it begins to adversely affect the professional or personal lives" (p. 146). For novice interpreters who have had no outlet to process the emotional weight of their

work, this permission to acknowledge psychological strain, built into the structure rather than treated as weakness, can be transformative.

Empirical Evidence for Effectiveness

Curtis (2017) reports that when asked "why do you participate in supervision," an overwhelming majority of respondents (91.3%) explained that they attend supervision for the benefits they receive, and many cited numerous benefits (p. 42). The most widely acknowledged benefit, with 98.10% agreement, was that "supervision helps me think through situations more critically" (p. 45), suggesting that the framework effectively supports the reflective practice that could counter rigid thinking patterns associated with impostor syndrome.

Curtis (2017) identified three primary benefit categories that directly address the challenges documented throughout this review: "collegial relationships (normative), gaining a new perspective (formative), and support (restorative)" (p. 52). This alignment suggests that DC-S supervision could serve as a comprehensive intervention for the interconnected challenges facing novice interpreters.

Further evidence demonstrates the impact of supervision on professional confidence and competence. Curtis (2017) found that "the majority of signed language interpreters who participated in supervision using the DC-S framework gained knowledge and skills that benefit their practice, reflected on ethical decision-making, and felt validated and supported by their colleagues" while participants "cited a different perspective on their work, additional control options, and a better understanding of decision-making" (p. 52-53). The interpreter who leaves supervision with new control options and a different perspective on their case is not the same professional who walked in, and that shift in viewpoint compounds over time.

Community Building and Horizontal Violence Prevention

Dean and Pollard (2013) emphasize that when supervision "is done well – [it is] a welcoming and supportive experience" where "supervisees come to value good supervision and to seek it out" (p. 147). They note that professional work is "difficult and demanding" and that "feeling like you are out there doing a little alone, making complex and impactful decisions without support or guidance or, worse, being criticized for your work, not only leads to distress, it impedes our professional growth and, most importantly, leads to poor outcomes for our consumer" (p. 147). What Dean and Pollard describe is more than mere support; it is accountability to something larger than individual performance, shared ownership of the profession's health.

Curtis (2017) explicitly connects supervision to horizontal violence prevention, noting that participants "cited feeling supported and validated by their colleagues" and that "many of the other benefits they received, such as a different perspective or learning new approaches to their work, came directly from their interaction with their peers" (p. 54). Most significantly, Curtis concludes that "participation in supervision could be used as a tool to combat horizontal violence in our field, resulting in increased collegial relationships" (p. 54). This direct connection highlights how DC-S supervision can transform professional relationships from sources of stress and self-doubt to resources for growth and support, addressing one of the most destructive dynamics identified in the interpreting profession.

Critical Transition Support for Novice Interpreters

The structure provided by DC-S supervision appears particularly valuable for novice interpreters navigating the vulnerable transition from training to practice, a period when impostor syndrome and horizontal violence risks peak. Curtis (2017) observes that supervision participants

"cited benefits including a different perspective on their work, a greater number of control options in responding to demands, a better understanding of decision-making and continued learning" and notes that "as practitioners enter the field, supervision may provide an opportunity for continued formative education helping bridge the gap between graduation from a program and professional competency" (p. 53). These benefits address precisely the challenges described by Isaacson (2023), who emphasizes that "since newly graduated interpreters from ITPs or IEPs, have a solid knowledge base within the interpreting profession, it is imperative that they find a support system to determine where there might be spaces for growth in their education or skill set." (p. 29). The gap between graduation and professional competency is real and well-documented. DC-S supervision is one of the few frameworks specifically designed to bridge it.

Implementation Considerations and Feasibility

Research suggests that DC-S supervision implementation may be more feasible than initially assumed, addressing concerns about the need for extensive experience to lead supervision sessions. Maffia's (2018) research provides evidence that supervision leadership need not be limited to the most experienced practitioners, finding that "the individuals for whom I have been leading supervision have a wide range of years of experience; for example, some have 35+ years of experience" yet "there is no evidence that my limited experience in medical settings and as a practitioner, in general, negatively impacted the effectiveness of the supervision sessions" (p. 31). Effective supervision leadership, in other words, can be developed; it is not solely reserved for the most seasoned practitioners.

The structural requirements for effective supervision also appear manageable. Curtis (2017) observes that "both ongoing supervision groups and the use of formal contracts may be

necessary in order for practitioners to take full advantage of the benefits offered by supervision" (p. 44). This emphasis on formal structure aligns with Dean and Pollard's (2013) characterization of supervision as a "structured process" that yields a "superior vision" through guided dialogue (p. 143). When structure is built into the practice rather than left to individual initiative, reflection becomes a professional habit rather than an occasional aspiration.

Current Limitations and Future Directions

Despite compelling evidence for DC-S supervision's benefits, significant challenges remain in implementation and research. Maffia (2018) observes that while "the importance of supervision in other practice professions is highly valued" with established "structure in place for well-established professions such as medicine and education to engage in reflective practices," currently, the interpreting field is not prepared to require these practices without having the infrastructure to support it" (p. 44). This observation highlights a gap between the potential benefits of DC-S supervision and the profession's current capacity to implement it systematically, suggesting that addressing this infrastructure gap could be a critical step toward mitigating the challenges of impostor syndrome, ineffective feedback, and horizontal violence.

However, growing recognition of the value of supervision among practitioners offers hope for systematic implementation. Curtis (2017) notes that "another theme in the recommendation category was the belief that supervision should be a required practice" (p. 50), suggesting that interpreters who have experienced the benefits of supervision increasingly view it as an essential component of professional development rather than an optional enhancement. This growing recognition could help build momentum for more systematic implementation, potentially creating a professional culture where structured reflection and collegial support become normative expectations rather than exceptional practices.

Research limitations also require acknowledgment. Few studies have directly measured how supervision affects impostor feelings or experiences of horizontal violence, instead focusing on broader professional benefits. Longitudinal research examining how participation in supervision influences professional trajectories over time is also lacking. What remains, then, is not a question of whether DC-S supervision addresses these challenges (the evidence suggests it does) but of how to make it systematically available to the interpreters who need it most.

Conclusion

The phenomena examined in this review do not operate in isolation. Impostor syndrome leads a practitioner to doubt their competence and to equate their professional performance with their personal worth. Into that vulnerability steps a feedback culture that is largely unstructured, frequently evaluative, and sometimes openly harmful, delivering exactly the kind of ambiguous, identity-threatening messages that a novice already struggling with self-doubt is least equipped to receive. And threading through both is horizontal violence: harm delivered from within the professional community, wearing the face of a colleague, and landing with the force of confirmation rather than injury. Each challenge makes the others worse. Together, they create conditions in which promising novice interpreters question their fitness for the profession, decline opportunities for growth, and sometimes leave the field entirely.

DC-S supervision emerges from this analysis not as one solution among several, but as a framework uniquely positioned to interrupt all three simultaneously. By creating structured space for professional dialogue, it counters the isolation that allows each challenge to go unnamed and unprocessed. By normalizing vulnerability and modeling balanced reflection, it offers an antidote to the perfectionism and self-blame that impostor syndrome can produce. By building collegial

relationships grounded in shared struggle rather than hierarchical judgment, it offers an alternative professional culture in which horizontal violence has less room to flourish and less power to wound. The evidence reviewed here suggests that access to DC-S supervision, particularly during the novice transition, could meaningfully shift the trajectory of early professional development.

What the existing literature has not yet provided, however, is a longitudinal, practitioner-level account of how these dynamics actually unfold, how they interact week by week, session by session, across a single interpreter's sustained experience. Most research has examined these phenomena in isolation, at a single point in time, from the outside. This study seeks to address that gap directly: by documenting 15 months of lived experience across three data sources, it aims to show not just that these challenges exist but how they compound, how they yield to intervention, and where intervention falls short. The goal is not to generalize from one interpreter's experience to the profession as a whole, but to offer the kind of granular, honest documentation that broader, more abstract research cannot and that other novice interpreters navigating the same terrain might recognize as their own.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Design

This study employed an autobiographical action research design using mixed methods to examine how feedback dynamics, including constructive feedback and horizontal violence, shaped my professional confidence and identity development as a novice ASL-English interpreter. The research centered on the researcher as primary participant, drawing on naturalistic data collected across three interconnected sources over 15 months. This design allowed for sustained, practice-based documentation of how impostor syndrome, harmful feedback, and DC-S supervision interacted in real time rather than retrospectively. This study received exempt status from the Western Oregon University Institutional Review Board. To protect the identities of individuals appearing in the data, pseudonyms and role descriptors were used throughout in place of identifying information.

Self-Reflection Journals

I utilized the Field Experience Professional Identity Reflection Form ("Story Form") developed by Trine (2019) as the primary structure for my self-reflection journals. This standardized form provided a consistent framework for documenting and analyzing my interpreting experiences through guided prompts that targeted both the cognitive and affective dimensions of my practice. The Story Form (shown in Appendix A) captured narrative descriptions of specific experiences or observations, the impact of those experiences on my professional development, and emotional responses triggered during interpreting situations. It also documented self-talk patterns that emerged during or after assignments, personal insights about my evolving identity as an interpreter, and connections between individual experiences and broader understandings of the interpreting profession.

This structured reflection tool proved particularly valuable for studying impostor syndrome, as it explicitly prompted documentation of self-talk patterns, emotional responses, and impacts on professional identity, which are crucial elements in understanding how impostor feelings manifest and evolve. Story Forms were completed on a roughly monthly basis, typically following significant professional experiences, yielding 12 completed forms across the 16-month data collection period. Together, these forms created a longitudinal record of how feedback encounters and professional interactions shaped my confidence and self-perception over time.

Feedback Logs

I maintained comprehensive feedback logs using Google Docs to systematically document feedback received throughout my practice. These logs recorded the context of each feedback encounter (e.g., team interpreting assignment, academic setting, mentoring session), the source of feedback (e.g., Deaf consumers, hearing consumers, team interpreters, supervisors), and the type of feedback (constructive, neutral, or potentially harmful). I also documented verbatim content when possible, my immediate emotional reaction, my delayed response, any actions taken as a result, and the impact on my confidence and subsequent practice decisions. Some entries were logged immediately after feedback encounters; others were recorded after the fact, as the significance of an interaction became clearer over time. Across the 16-month data collection period, this process yielded 15 or more distinct documented feedback instances.

For each feedback instance, I classified it as exhibiting characteristics of constructive guidance or horizontal violence based on criteria established in the literature. I specifically noted language that diminished professional worth, included unnecessary criticism, or created feelings of inadequacy. This classification allowed me to identify patterns in how different types of feedback influenced my professional confidence and development over time.

Supervision Session Documentation

Beginning in Winter 2025 and continuing through Fall 2026, I completed a structured Google Form (shown in Appendix B) following each supervision session to document the experience systematically. This form tracked the focus of the supervision session, demands and controls discussed based on the DC-S framework, and types of feedback received. It also documented my comfort level with vulnerability during the session, changes in my confidence level before and after supervision, impact on my understanding of specific interpreting scenarios, how the supervision affected my feelings of impostor syndrome, and strategies developed for responding to horizontal violence. Most forms were completed promptly following sessions, though some were completed after a short delay. This standardized approach allowed for consistent data collection across 22 supervision sessions and facilitated the identification of trends over time.

Timeline

Data collection spanned from Fall 2025 through Fall 2026 (September 2024 through December 2025), providing 15 months of documentation across a critical phase of early professional development. This extended timeline allowed for tracking the evolution of my experiences with impostor syndrome and responses to different feedback environments across multiple interpreting contexts and developmental stages, including performance interpreting, post-secondary settings, VRS, DeafBlind work, and freelance assignments. The collection schedule included roughly monthly self-reflection journal entries using Story Forms following significant professional experiences, feedback logging combining immediate and delayed documentation as encounters occurred, and supervision session documentation completed promptly following each of the 22 sessions, with some entries recorded after a short delay.

Population

The study involved me as the sole participant. As a novice ASL-English interpreter and the primary researcher in this action research project, my experiences constituted the core data across all three collection instruments. My professional background includes a Bachelor of Science in Interpreting Studies: Theory, and I completed this study while pursuing a master's degree in Interpreting Studies: Theory and Practice at Western Oregon University. At the time of the study, I had passed the NIC General Knowledge and Ethics examination but had not yet completed the performance component of certification. My practice during the data collection period spanned multiple settings, including freelance interpreting, DeafBlind interpreting, performance interpreting, Video Relay Service, and post-secondary environments.

The feedback providers represented in the data included team interpreters with varying levels of experience and certification, Deaf and hearing consumers across different settings, academic mentors and instructors, professional supervisors, and peers in educational and professional contexts.

This study received exempt status from the Western Oregon University Institutional Review Board. To protect the identities of individuals appearing in the data, pseudonyms and role descriptors were used throughout in place of identifying information. Because the study focused on my naturalistic professional experiences rather than on experimental interventions, the data reflect lived encounters as they occurred rather than controlled conditions. Findings are understood as specific to my individual experience and are not intended to generalize to the broader novice interpreter population, though they may resonate with others navigating similar professional challenges.

Data Analysis

Data analysis employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative thematic analysis with descriptive quantitative analysis of supervision session scores. This integrated approach allowed the quantitative data to support and triangulate the qualitative findings rather than operating as a separate analytical strand.

For the qualitative data, I employed thematic analysis beginning with open coding to identify initial patterns across all three data sources: self-reflection journals, feedback logs, and supervision session documentation. This process involved reading through all collected materials multiple times to gain familiarity, identifying and labeling recurring themes, emotions, and experiences, and developing a coding framework based on both emerging themes and concepts from the literature review, including manifestations of impostor syndrome, types of feedback, indicators of horizontal violence, and markers of professional growth. Related codes were then grouped into broader categories and themes, which were organized into the four major sections presented in Chapter 4.

Feedback instances were classified as constructive guidance or horizontal violence based on criteria established in the literature, with particular attention to language that diminished professional worth, included unnecessary criticism, or created feelings of inadequacy. This classification allowed me to identify patterns in how different types of feedback influenced my professional confidence and development across the data collection period.

For the quantitative data, supervision session scores were calculated as composite averages across the 14 items of the Supervision Impact Assessment Form for each session. Item-level averages were then calculated across all 22 sessions to identify which dimensions of supervision produced the strongest and weakest outcomes. Scores were also compared across

session types and group compositions to examine how context influenced the effectiveness of supervision. These quantitative findings were used to support and extend the qualitative themes rather than to stand on their own as claims.

To ensure the analysis remained grounded in existing knowledge, I implemented a constant comparative method by creating a reference matrix linking emerging themes to specific concepts and findings from the literature review, regularly revisiting the literature as new patterns emerged, identifying areas where my experiences aligned with or diverged from previous research, and using the DC-S framework as an analytical lens to interpret the interplay between demands encountered and controls employed in response to feedback and impostor syndrome.

Visual representations of the data were produced using Google Sheets, including timeline graphs tracking confidence levels across the data collection period, charts comparing different types of feedback and their emotional impacts, frequency analyses of impostor syndrome episodes and their triggers, and figures examining relationships between supervision experiences and changes in professional confidence. These visuals appear throughout Chapter 4 to illustrate key patterns and trends.

To enhance the trustworthiness of findings, I employed several strategies: maintaining consistent documentation protocols throughout the study period, using multiple data sources to triangulate findings, keeping an audit trail of analytical decisions and evolving interpretations, and practicing reflexivity by explicitly acknowledging my biases and emotional responses throughout the research process.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

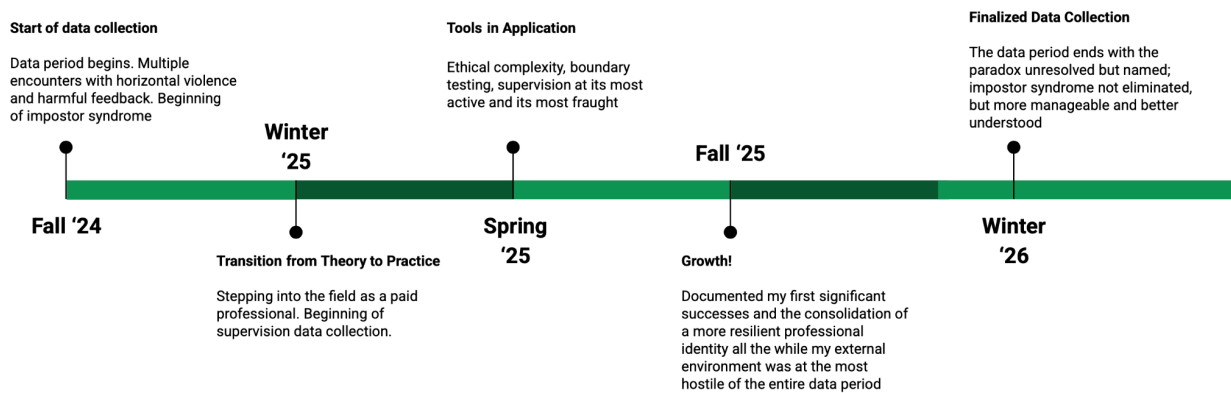
Over the course of 15 months (September 2024 through December 2025), I systematically documented my experiences as a novice ASL-English interpreter through three interconnected data sources: a feedback log tracking external evaluations and interactions, self-reflection journals (Story Forms shown in Appendix A) capturing my internal experience, and supervision session assessments (see Appendix B) measuring the impact of DC-S supervision on my professional development. This multi-perspectival approach enabled me to examine the complex interplay among feedback dynamics, horizontal violence, impostor syndrome, and professional identity formation from both external and internal perspectives.

The data collection period captured a critical phase of my professional development, beginning just as I entered the field and continuing through my transition into independent practice. During this time, I documented 15+ distinct feedback instances, completed 12 detailed Story Forms reflecting on significant experiences, and gathered data from 22 DC-S supervision sessions. Together, these data sources create a comprehensive portrait of novice interpreter development under conditions of both supportive mentorship and harmful workplace dynamics.

Analysis of these three data sources revealed a clear arc of transformation (Figure 1). The early months (Fall 2024) were characterized by repeated encounters with harmful feedback and horizontal violence, which triggered severe impostor syndrome and left me questioning my fitness for the profession. The middle period (Spring 2025) marked the beginning of my work to develop tools for processing harm, setting boundaries, and separating my work from my self-worth. The later months (Fall 2025) documented my first significant successes and the

consolidation of a more resilient professional identity, though perfectionism and some impostor feelings persisted.

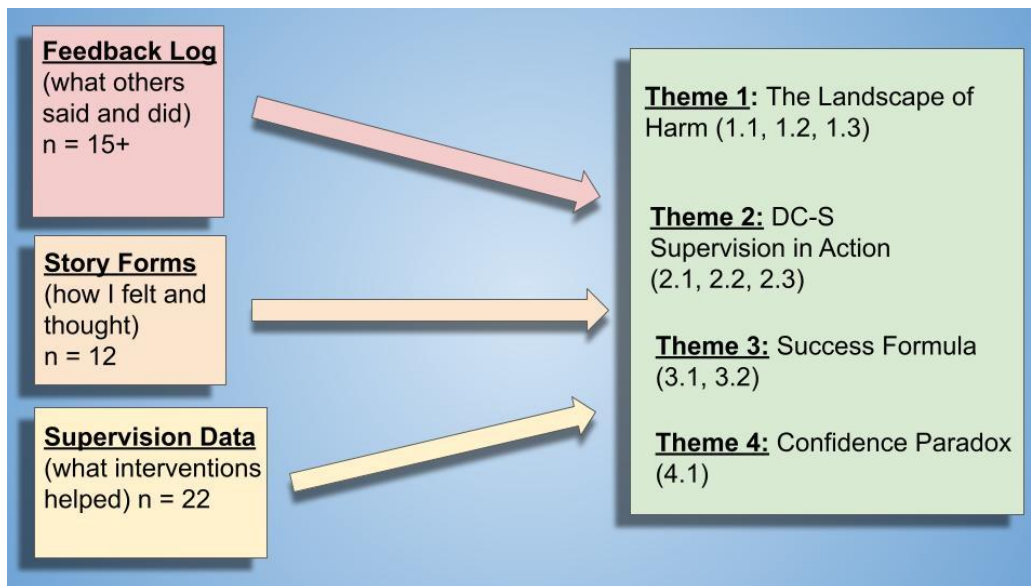
Figure 1: *Sequential Account of Professional Experiences, Feedback Incidents, and Supervision Sessions Across the Data Collection Period*



Note. Data are organized by academic quarter across three sources: self-reflection journals (Story Forms), feedback logs, and supervision session documentation.

The findings presented in this chapter are organized into four major themes that emerged from thematic analysis across all three data sources (Figure 2). Each theme is supported by evidence from multiple perspectives: what others said and did (feedback log), how I felt and thought (Story Forms), and what interventions helped (supervision data); creating a triangulated understanding of how novice interpreters navigate the challenges of professional development, harmful feedback, and impostor syndrome.

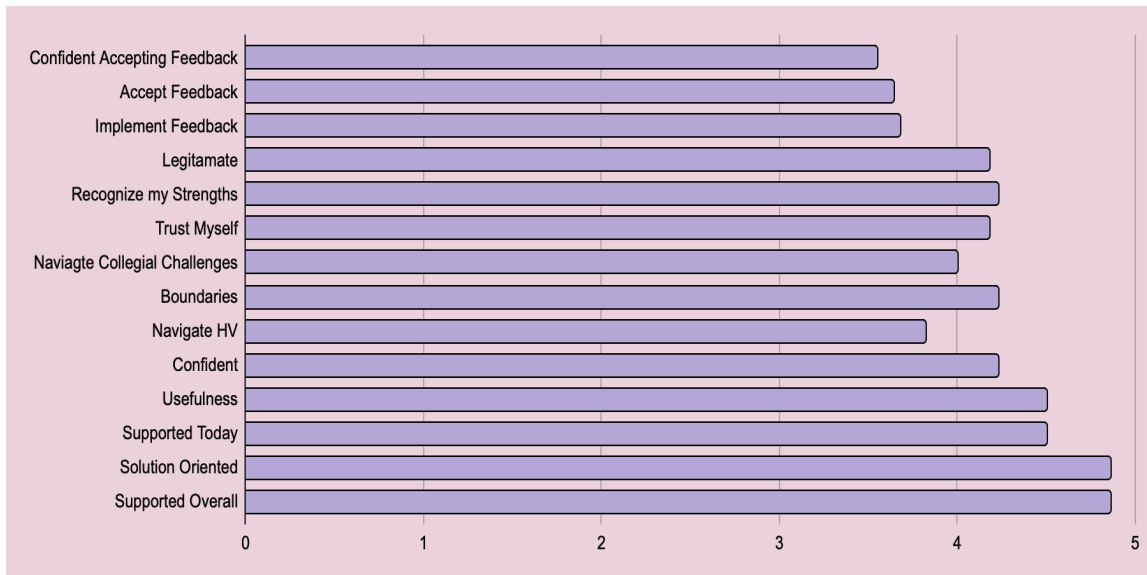
Figure 2: *Data Sources and Emergent Themes*



Note. Thematic analysis across the three data sources revealed four major organizational themes.

To ground the qualitative themes that follow in a quantitative context, below, Figure 3 presents mean scores across all 14 items of the Supervision Impact Assessment Form, averaged across all 22 sessions. These scores provide a bird's-eye view of how supervision functioned over the full data collection period, before the individual themes examine the mechanisms behind those patterns. The overall picture is one of contrast: items related to overall support, collegial relationships, and solution orientation consistently produced the highest scores, while items specific to feedback reception, confident acceptance of feedback, willingness to implement feedback, and separating feedback from self-worth produced the lowest scores. This gap between the effectiveness of general supervision and the struggle with feedback-specific issues is not incidental. It is the quantitative signature of the confidence paradox that Theme 4.1 examines in depth, and it surfaces as an undercurrent throughout the preceding sections of findings.

Figure 3: *Mean Supervision Impact Assessment Scores Across All 14 Items Over the Full Data Collection Period*



Note. Scores reflect participant-reported ratings on a 1–5 scale across 22 sessions ($n = 22$). Feedback-related items (Confident Accepting Feedback, Accept Feedback, Implement Feedback) consistently produced the lowest mean scores. Items related to overall support and solution orientation produced the highest mean scores.

Section 1: The Landscape of Harm

Theme 1.1: When One Incident Creates Cascading Trauma

The data revealed that feedback dynamics and impostor syndrome create a mutually reinforcing negative cycle in which each element amplifies the other. The most striking example emerged from what I have come to call "the ANONYMOUS incident," which appeared across all three data sources and demonstrated how harmful feedback dynamics can derail professional development even when the recipient possesses adequate skills. The incident first appeared in my feedback log on November 16, 2024, while interpreting a musical performance where I was teamed with a more experienced interpreter, whom I will call ANONYMOUS. My raw,

immediate response captured in the feedback log reflects the emotional intensity of the experience:

Everything [they] say, I just immediately dismiss... [they] told me [one thing], yet [they] constantly correct my timing... I know [they] are my superior; [they] have more experience, but I can't seem to take any of [their] advice seriously without dismissing it instantly because [they] make me so mad... I guess volume of hypercritical feedback is part of the problem.

This entry reveals several characteristics consistent with horizontal violence as defined in the literature: a condescending tone, contradictory messages that set impossible standards, an excessive volume of criticism, and a power dynamic that intensified the harm (Ott, 2012). Notably, my response was anger rather than receptiveness, a defense mechanism that, while protecting me from the emotional impact in the moment, also prevented me from engaging with any potentially valid content in the feedback. Horizontal violence functioned as a weaponization of impostor syndrome.

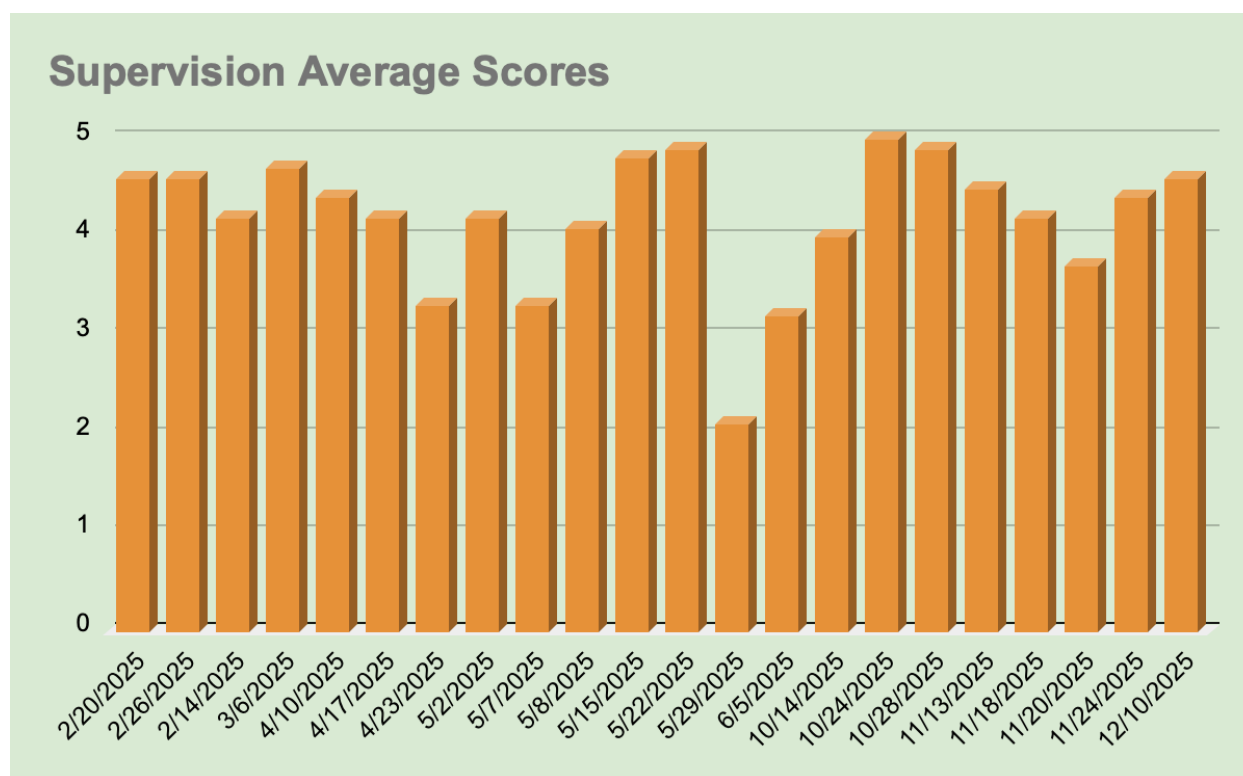
The incident reappeared a month later in my December 2024 Story Form, but with a critical addition: external validation of my experience. I wrote:

A seasoned interpreter provided feedback on my performance, but [their] tone and approach made it difficult for me to engage with the feedback productively... My coach later labeled this behavior as 'horizontal violence,' which made me pause and reflect.

This naming was significant. Having an authority figure explicitly identify the behavior as horizontal violence provided a framework for understanding what had happened and separated

my professional competence from the interpersonal dynamics at play. However, the Story Form also documented my continued struggle: "I'm left grappling with the tension between receiving critical feedback and the emotional impact it has on my professional identity... I worry I might be falling into the trap of ignoring valid feedback, which could ultimately hinder my development."

Figure 4: *Supervision Impact Assessment Mean Scores by Session*

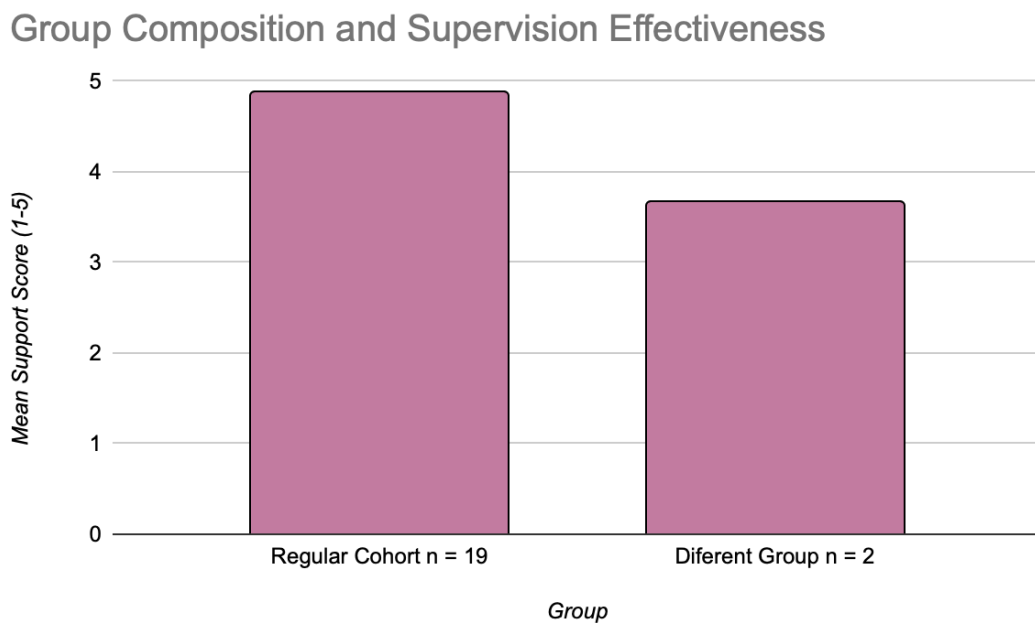


Note. Each bar represents the mean of all 14 Supervision Impact Assessment items for a single session ($n = 22$). Notable low-scoring sessions on May 29 ($M = 2.07$) and June 5 ($M = 3.10$) correspond to sessions held with an unfamiliar peer group. The overall trend indicates increasing scores across the data collection period, with the highest scores clustered in October–November 2025.

The resolution of this incident finally came four months later, documented in my March 6, 2025, supervision session. The supervision data shows this was an exceptional session, scoring 4.7 out of 5.00, with the most valuable insight recorded as, "Trust your judgement, set boundaries, don't let others' opinions get you down." When asked how supervision specifically

helped, I wrote, "We went over a case involving horizontal violence and brainstormed for controls on how to deal with the feelings and the colleagues, and it helped me to realize there are a lot of options for how to deal with that..." My emotional state after this session was documented as "really positive and hopeful," a stark contrast to the anger and worry that had characterized my experience four months earlier.

Figure 5 : *Trauma-to-Resolution Arc: Anonymous Incident Timeline*



Note. The timeline documents a four-month arc across three phases: trauma, intervention, and resolution. This arc illustrates the central finding that sustained harm resulted not from harmful feedback alone but from the absence of a structured response to it.

This four-month arc from trauma to intervention to resolution demonstrates a central finding: harmful feedback alone was not what caused sustained harm; it was the absence of a structured response to it. The intervention required more than just time; it required a process that provided language to name the experience (horizontal violence), community validation, and concrete tools for moving forward. The ANONYMOUS incident was not isolated. My Story Forms documented six out of twelve (50%) distinct experiences of horizontal violence or harmful feedback delivery between September 2024 and March 2025, creating a pattern of accumulating wounds and revealing its pervasiveness in my professional development. The long-term impacts manifested as persistent patterns rather than discrete events, and the immediate impacts on my confidence were severe and consistent across incidents.

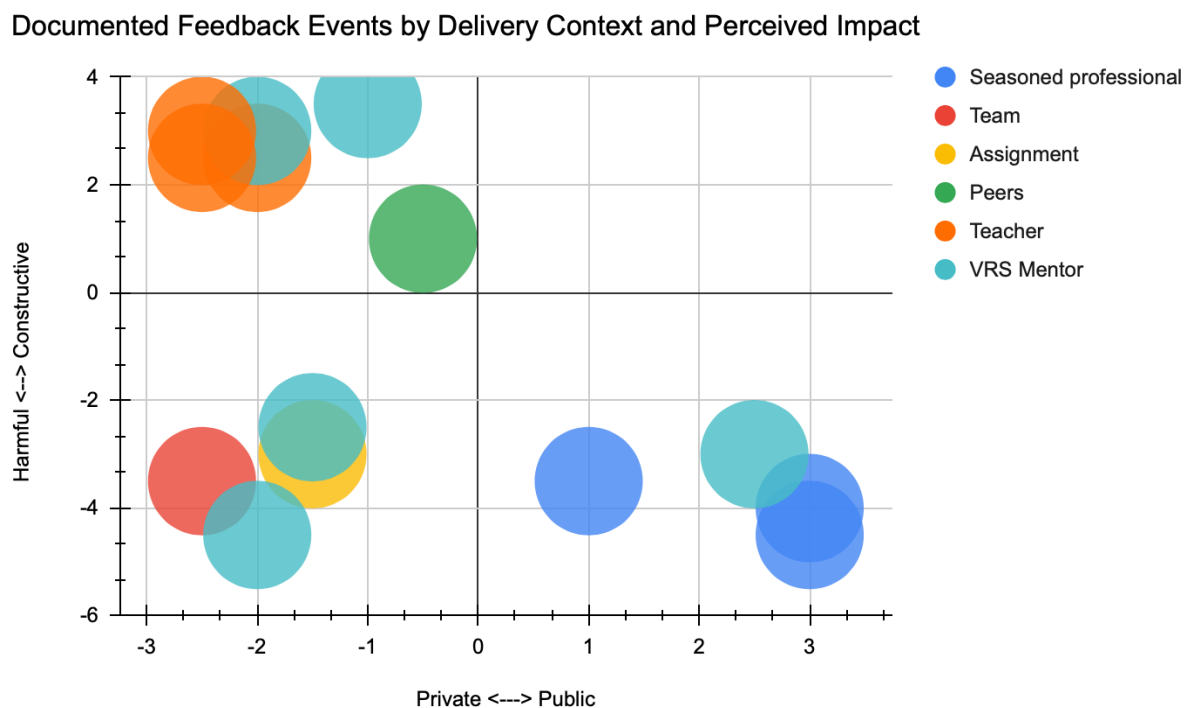
In October 2025, a VRS mentor repeatedly criticized sign choices that the Deaf consumer had understood perfectly, leading me to write: "Am I doing everything wrong? Why does every sign feel incorrect to her? Maybe I'm not cut out for this." By the end of that day, I requested to work with a different mentor, a boundary I set due to the conceptual framework that supervision had provided. In October 2024, a colleague publicly mimicked my interpretation style in front of peers during a performance interpreting practice session. My Story Form captured the humiliation, "When they mimicked me in front of others, I felt exposed and even humiliated, like my efforts weren't being taken seriously." My self-talk spiraled: "Why didn't I see that coming? Maybe I'm not cut out for this." Yet the Story Form also documented emerging resilience: "Instead of letting the experience diminish my confidence, it motivated me to keep refining my skills."

Each incident shared common characteristics that align with the literature on horizontal violence and harmful feedback. The delivery was often public or witnessed by others, amplifying

the shame. The tone was condescending or dismissive. The feedback frequently involved contradictory messages or nitpicking details while ignoring effective communication. And critically, each incident left me questioning not just my specific choices but my fundamental fitness for the profession.

Theme 1.2: The Public Performance of Shame

Figure 6: *Documented Feedback Events by Delivery Context and Perceived Impact*



Note. Each point represents a distinct documented feedback event ($n = 14$). Horizontal placement reflects delivery context, ranging from private (individual, one-on-one) to public (shared, group). Vertical placement reflects perceived impact on the participant, ranging from harmful (emotionally dysregulating, identity-threatening, or hostile in delivery) to constructive (growth-oriented, actionable, or professionally affirming). Point placement is based on qualitative coding of source data.

A distinct pattern emerged around the context in which feedback was delivered: public criticism created disproportionate harm compared to private feedback, even when the content was similar. My Story Forms explicitly named this pattern in April 2025: "This experience taught me that I am deeply affected by public feedback and that I prefer feedback to be delivered privately and constructively." Three incidents of public feedback or criticism stand out in the data. The first occurred during my VRS training in September 2025, documented in my Story Form as a moment when my mentor "laughed and told me I was 'nowhere near ready'" in response to my question about assessment timing. This laughter, witnessed by others in the training environment, added a layer of humiliation to an already confusing situation where I had received weeks of positive feedback followed by a sudden reversal.

Another incident, the October 2024 public mimicry during performance interpreting practice, was explicitly framed in my Story Form as more harmful because of its public nature. The colleague's exaggerated gestures, performed in front of the group, created what I described as feeling "exposed and even humiliated." The performance aspect, the theatrical mocking of my style while others watched, transformed feedback into spectacle.

The third incident occurred in October 2025 during VRS practice in a shared WeWork environment. When I made a decision not to voice profanity aloud due to the thin walls and nearby offices, I was told publicly that I "stole their autonomy" and that "we don't do that here." My Story Form reflected on the impact: "The feedback was given publicly, and I was told that I should not filter anything the Deaf consumer expresses. I understood their point, but the way it was delivered caught me off guard." In my Story Form processing the VRS incident, I identified that my internal dialogue during the public feedback was harshly self-critical: "I should have done better" and "I can't believe I messed that up in front of everyone." The presence of

witnesses transformed the feedback from a learning opportunity into a performance of my inadequacy.

The public/private distinction suggests that feedback culture in interpreting needs to attend not just to what is said but to the social context in which it is said. Even well-intentioned public feedback can trigger shame spirals that interfere with the very learning it is meant to promote.

Theme 1.3: When the Body Speaks, Physical Manifestations of Impostor Syndrome

One of the most striking patterns to emerge from the data was the persistent gap between my observable competence and my experienced confidence, a gap that manifested physically even as my cognitive understanding shifted. This pattern was most evident when I triangulated my feedback log with my Story Forms and my supervision data.

Beginning in April 2025 and continuing through December 2025, Anonymous Teacher consistently noted physical tension in their feedback on my interpretation work. On April 15, they observed: "I see quite a bit of tension in your body (micro-loading, pursed lips)" and asked, "Do you notice that? Does it come up at some times more than others?" Their December 12, 2025, feedback included: "I still see microloading in your sample. This makes you appear more tense and a little less confident. Did that match your feeling, or is this more of a habit?"

This microloading, the subtle but visible tension in my body, particularly in my shoulders and facial expressions, appeared consistently across multiple observations despite the fact that Anonymous Teacher's feedback also documented improving skills. In the same December feedback where they noted continued microloading, they also observed: "I see a distinct

difference in your approach here with decalage and waiting for full thoughts to interpret meaning," and "Clear use of space that provided equivalent meaning and visual cohesion."

What this data triangulation reveals is that impostor syndrome operates on multiple levels simultaneously. Intellectually, I could recognize that feedback about specific choices was not an indictment of my fundamental abilities. I was improving, the external feedback said so clearly. But my nervous system told a different story.

Interestingly, my Story Forms documented physical responses to emotional distress in the early months that decreased over time. I cried after three separate incidents between September 2024 and June 2025, following a job training failure, a difficult job interview, and a challenging ProTactile interpreting session. These acute emotional releases appeared to decrease as I developed more tools for processing difficult experiences through supervision. However, the chronic physical tension persisted, suggesting that while supervision could address the cognitive and emotional dimensions of impostor syndrome, the body operated on a different timeline.

Section 2: The Intervention: De-S Supervision In Action

Theme 2.1: "My Work Is Not My Worth": A Mantra Emerges and Evolves

One of the most significant patterns to emerge from the supervision data was the development and repetition of a specific cognitive reframe: the explicit separation of my work quality from my personal worth. This phrase, "my work is not my worth", appeared exclusively in my supervision documentation, never spontaneously in my feedback logs or Story Forms, suggesting it was something I learned through the supervision process rather than a natural conclusion I reached on my own.

Table 1: Documented Appearances of Recurring Self-Affirmational Language Across All Three Data Sources

MANTRA	DATE	SOURCE	SCORE	FUNCTION
<i>"My work is not my worth"</i>	Feb. 26, 2025	SUPERVISION	5.0	ASPIRATION
	May 22, 2025	SUPERVISION	5.0	TRANSITIONAL
	Nov. 20, 2025	SUPERVISION	5.0	CONSOLIDATION
<i>"Imposter syndrome is a liar"</i>	Feb. 26, 2025	SUPERVISION	5.0	ASPIRATION
	May 7, 2025	SUPERVISION	3.7	ASPIRATION
<i>"I am a professional and I know what I am doing"</i>	Oct. 24, 2025	SUPERVISION	5.0	CONSOLIDATION
	Nov. 13, 2025	SUPERVISION	5.0	CONSOLIDATION
	Nov. 20, 2025	SUPERVISION	5.0	CONSOLIDATION
<i>"Trust yourself / trust your judgement"</i>	Feb. 26, 2025	SUPERVISION	5.0	ASPIRATION
	Apr. 17, 2025	SUPERVISION	5.0	TRANSITIONAL
	Oct. 14, 2025	SUPERVISION	4.7	CONSOLIDATION
<i>"New settings mean new things to learn and it doesn't invalidate my professional strengths"</i>	Oct. 24, 2025	SUPERVISION	5.0	CONSOLIDATION
<i>"We are all still learning and growing"</i>	Feb. 14, 2025	SUPERVISION	5.0	ASPIRATION
<i>"Supervision works"</i>	Late Nov. 2025	SUPERVISION	5.0	CONSOLIDATION

BECOMING AN INTERPRETER

Note. Total appearances: 17. Mean supervision score at appearance: 4.87. Supervision scores reflect the composite perceived support score for the session in which the mantra appears.

Coding reflects whether the mantra operates as an aspirational declaration (reaching toward a not-yet-integrated belief), a transitional anchor (a belief present but still being tested), or a consolidation of an internalized position, based on contextual analysis of surrounding data.

Sources: Supervision Impact Assessment Form (16 appearances).

The mantra first appeared in my February 26, 2025, supervision session, one of the earliest sessions documented and one that scored 4.71 out of 5.00 (exceptional). When asked about the most valuable insight from that session, I wrote: "My work is not my worth. impostor syndrome is a liar!" The exclamation point captures the revelation quality of this insight; it felt like discovering a truth that countered a deeply held belief. This initial appearance of the work/worth separation came at a critical time.

Looking back at my Story Forms from the months leading up to this supervision session, I can see why this reframe was so necessary. In my September 2024 Story Form processing a job training failure, my self-talk was fusing work performance with personal identity. In my December 2024 Story Form about the ANONYMOUS incident, I treated any failure to receive feedback perfectly as a character flaw rather than a response to harmful delivery.

Most strikingly, my May 2025 Story Form documenting a difficult job interview captured perhaps the harshest self-talk in all my data: "You sound dumb... You're rambling... You blew it... They're not calling because you were the worst one... You're never going to be good enough." Each of these thoughts treats a single performance (or perceived poor performance) as evidence

of fundamental personal inadequacy. This is the cognitive distortion that the work/worth separation directly counters.

The mantra recurred across multiple subsequent sessions, appearing in November as both an implementation plan and a standalone insight, confirming that this was not a lesson learned once but a practice that required ongoing return. The supervision context provided a space in which this cognitive reframing could be practiced repeatedly, with community validation each time.

The supervision metric "Today's supervision helped me separate feedback about my work from my self-worth" averaged 3.67 out of 5.00 across all sessions, the lowest of all the impostor syndrome-related measures. This quantitative data confirms what the qualitative evidence suggests: the work/worth separation was difficult for me to achieve and maintain. It was something I could intellectually understand and verbally affirm in supervision sessions, but that remained challenging to embody in the moment when receiving feedback or evaluating my own performance.

What made this separation so difficult? My Story Forms provide clues. The interpreting work I was doing felt inherently personal. In my March 2025 Story Form about a DeafBlind conference, I wrote about navigating a situation where a consumer made racist comments to my Asian teammate. My self-talk included: "Was I complicit by not doing more?" This is not a question about technical skill; it's a question about my moral character, about the kind of person and professional I am. The work and the worth felt inseparable because the work involved making ethical decisions that felt like direct reflections of my values. The same pattern appeared

in personal moments of professional failure; shame was not just about the error, it was about what the error revealed about the kind of interpreter I was becoming.

The DC-S framework itself may have contributed to the challenge of separating work from worth. The DC-S emphasizes examining the demands of interpreting situations and the controls available to manage those demands. But one category of demands is "intrapersonal demands", the internal thoughts, feelings, and reactions that interpreters bring to their work. Examining these intrapersonal demands necessarily involves looking at oneself, at one's reactions and choices. The line between "what I did" and "who I am" can blur when the work requires such intimate self-examination.

The community context of supervision was crucial when I shared cases involving self-doubt or shame; other interpreters validated that they had similar experiences and similar struggles with self-worth. This normalization helped me see the work/worth fusion as a common professional hazard rather than a personal failing.

The evolution of the mantra is also significant. It moved from "impostor syndrome is a liar!" in February (a forceful rejection of impostor syndrome thoughts) to "My work is not my worth" repeated in November (a quieter, more established truth) to "I am a professional, and I know what I am doing" in October and November (a positive assertion of competence). This progression, from forceful rejection of impostor syndrome thoughts to quieter, more established truth, documents how a learned cognitive tool can gradually become an internalized professional stance.

Theme 2.2: From Victim to Agent, The Boundary-Setting Trajectory

The development of boundary-setting skills emerged as the highest-scoring outcome in my supervision data, with "Today's supervision helped me develop professional boundary-setting approaches" averaging 4.19 out of 5.00, tied for the highest of all measured outcomes. This quantitative finding is supported by a clear qualitative trajectory visible across my supervision sessions and Story Forms, showing how I moved from feeling victimized by harmful feedback dynamics to developing agency through strategic boundary-setting.

The trajectory began with the same March 6, 2025, supervision session that processed the ANONYMOUS horizontal violence incident. My implementation plan from that session was specific: "In the future, I will set boundaries with colleagues about how to receive feedback and when." This was the first time in any of my data that I articulated boundaries as a potential solution to the feedback problems I was experiencing.

The boundary work intensified through April and May 2025, with multiple supervision sessions explicitly focused on this theme. My April 17 session (scoring 4.64/5.00) captured the insight: " 'What does it mean to be a professional to me' was really impactful, so that I can reflect on what my boundaries are and how I can assert them." The how-it-helped section noted: "I have more options than I think I do. I have the ability to stand up, advocate, and set boundaries." My implementation plan reflected the complexity: "I will find the balance between professional, advocate, ally, and my own values."

This session reveals an important shift in how I was thinking about boundaries. Rather than seeing boundaries as defensive barriers (protecting myself from harm), I was beginning to see them as active expressions of professional identity (defining what kind of interpreter I want

to be). The question "What does it mean to be a professional to me?" reframes boundary-setting from self-protection to self-definition.

The May 2, 2025, session (scoring 4.71/5.00, exceptional) built on this foundation with the insight: "You can set boundaries with consumers (hearing and Deaf) and still be professional, you can stand up for yourself and others and still be professional." This represents a critical cognitive shift; boundaries do not undermine professionalism, they are an expression of it. My notes indicate: "I learned more about boundary setting and professionalism," and my implementation plan was: "I think I should have some scripts ready for certain situations that may arise so that I can be prepared when they do come up."

The idea of scripts is significant. It transforms the abstract concept of "setting boundaries" into concrete language I could prepare and practice. This practical application addresses a gap I had identified in earlier Story Forms, knowing I wanted to respond differently but not knowing what words to use or how to assert my needs without seeming unprofessional or difficult. Looking at the timeline, this represents four consecutive supervision sessions (March 6, April 17, May 2, May 15) where boundary-setting was either the primary focus or a significant theme. This intensive period of boundary work came directly after the months of accumulated harm documented in my Story Forms. The impact of this intensive boundary work became visible in the months that followed, as the assertiveness I was developing externally began to shape how I understood myself professionally, a shift documented fully in Section 3.

The progression from "I need to set boundaries" to "I am a professional" illustrates how boundary work contributed to the formation of professional identity. Boundaries were not just about limiting harm; they were about defining myself as a professional with legitimate needs,

preferences, and expertise. The assertiveness I was learning to apply to external relationships (colleagues, consumers, mentors) also applied internally (by trusting my judgment, valuing my preparation, and acknowledging my growth). In the DC-S framework, controls are the tools and strategies interpreters use to manage demands. Boundary-setting became my primary means of managing the interpersonal demands of delivering harmful feedback.

This theme demonstrates how DC-S supervision can address horizontal violence, not by preventing it (which may be impossible when working with difficult colleagues) but by providing tools to respond to it in ways that preserve professional identity and psychological well-being. The supervision context was crucial because it provided community validation that boundary-setting was legitimate and necessary, countering the fear that asserting boundaries would mark me as difficult or unprofessional.

Theme 2.3: Community Dissolves Shame, The Power of Shared Experience

Perhaps the most emotionally significant finding from the supervision data was the role of community in countering impostor syndrome and shame. The supervision sessions where I felt most supported and experienced the greatest impact were consistently those where I discovered my struggles were shared, where my individual shame was dissolved by collective recognition.

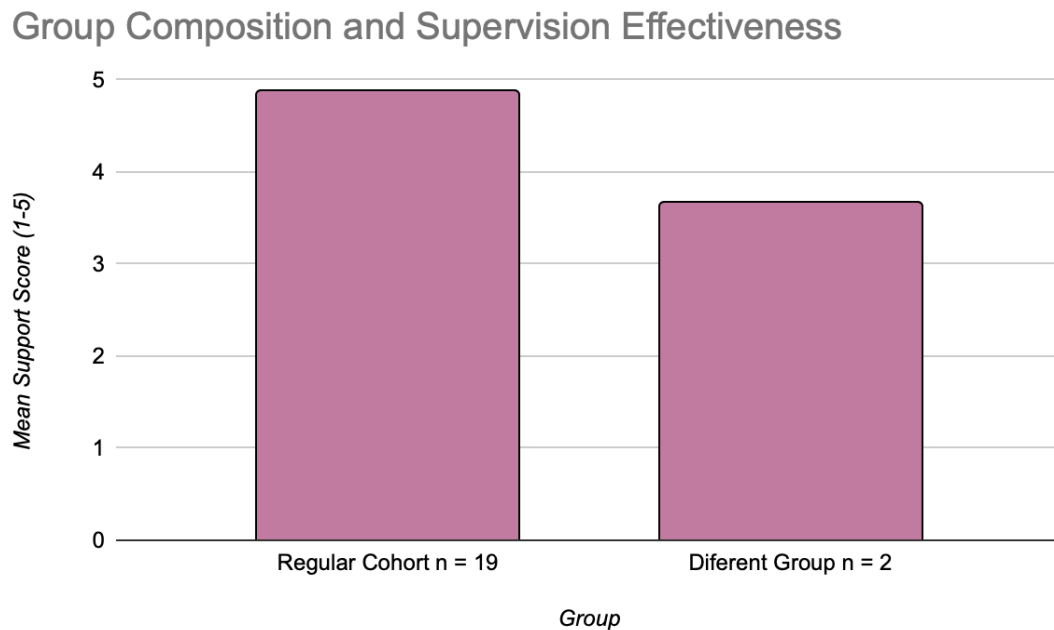
The quantitative data provide initial evidence: across all supervision sessions, I used the words "supported," "camaraderie," or "community" to describe my emotional state afterward in 66% of sessions. The supervision metric "I feel supported in my professional development journey from today's session" averaged 4.48 out of 5.00, while "Supervision supports my overall professional development" averaged 4.86 out of 5.00, both among the highest scores. But the qualitative data reveal the mechanism. My May 22, 2025, supervision session (scoring 4.86/5.00,

near perfect) captured the experience most completely. When asked about the most valuable insight, I wrote:

"The fact that everyone in the session had experienced what I was talking about, something I felt ashamed about and was beating myself up for, and they all gave me grace, support, encouragement, and validation."

The how-it-helped entry explained: "I shared a case so I got a whole document of controls for something I really struggle with." My implementation plan included: "I plan to use the controls listed; I like writing a list of my strengths or compliments I have received. And also just give myself some grace, man, it's unrealistic to strive for perfection." The additional thoughts section reveals the emotional intensity: "I shared a case. During the case, I almost cried because it was so vulnerable to me, but after, I felt so uplifted and supported; it was like a weight had been lifted. The camaraderie was a huge aspect." This entry captures the transformation that community validation enabled. I brought something I felt ashamed of and discovered that others had been there before. The shame I carried alone became a shared professional challenge when brought into the community. The vulnerability was intense, but the result was liberation.

Figure 7: *Group Composition and Perceived Support: Mean Composite Support Scores by Session Type*



Note. Bars represent mean composite perceived support scores by group composition type across 22 supervision sessions. The composite support score is the average of items 13–15 on the Supervision Impact Assessment Form: "I feel supported in my professional development journey from today's session," "Supervision provides practical solutions to professional challenges," and "Supervision supports my overall professional development" (1–5 scale). Session counts per group type are noted beneath each bar. Regular cohort sessions include all sessions held with the habitual peer group.

The contrast with sessions where I felt less connected to the group is stark. My May 7, 2025, session scored only 3.14/5.00, one of the lowest scores. When asked how it helped, I wrote simply: "It did not." My additional thoughts explained: "This was not with my usual group, and I did not feel very supported or learn much. It was with more seasoned professionals, and I felt more impostor syndrome crop up."

This session reveals that not all supervision contexts provide the same sense of safety and community. With seasoned professionals rather than my usual peer group, the hierarchical

dynamic triggered impostor syndrome rather than relieving it. The community that dissolved shame required some degree of equality or shared struggle; I needed to be with people who "had experienced what I was talking about," not people whose expertise might judge my struggles as evidence of inadequacy.

These contrasts illuminate what made the supervision community effective. It required:

1. Peer-level participation (not hierarchical expertise that triggers IS)
2. Active voice (being able to share, not just observe)
3. Shared struggle (discovering others have similar experiences)
4. Emotional safety (vulnerability met with grace, not judgment)
5. Consistent membership (the "usual group" that built trust over time)

The supervision community provided what I could not provide for myself: external validation that these experiences were real, harmful, and not unique to me. My February 14 session (4.07/5.00), one of the earliest documented, captured this: "My peers and I are in the same place where we are recognizing retrospectively that we wish we had used different controls, but that means we are all growing... I feel a sense of camaraderie." This collective struggle does not diminish individual accountability, but it removes the shame that comes from believing you are uniquely inadequate.

The progression in my supervision notes shows increasing comfort with vulnerability over time. Early sessions focused on learning from others' cases. Middle sessions included leading cases or providing feedback. Later sessions involved sharing my own difficult experiences. By late 2025, I had moved from attending supervision as a recipient of support to being specifically sought out for my contributions, a role reversal documented in Theme 3.2.

Section 3: The Success Formula

Theme 3.1: Proactive Coping, Scheduling Supervision Before the Crisis

One of the most significant findings emerged not from what happened during supervision but from when I sought it. My February 2025 Story Form documenting my first paid freelance interpreting job revealed a critical shift in how I used supervision:

"It was my first paid interpreting gig! I did lots of prep work, including researching the topic and familiarizing myself with key terminology. I also scheduled a supervision session beforehand to work through the impostor syndrome I was feeling."

This represents a fundamental change from reactive to proactive coping. In the earlier months documented in my data, I experienced harmful feedback or difficult situations and then (sometimes months later) processed them through supervision if I happened to have a session scheduled. The Story Form describes the anticipatory anxiety in my Week 7 entry:

"As I prepare for my first freelance interpreting assignment, I find myself overwhelmed by the logistics... While I know I've been trained for this, a nagging voice in the back of my mind keeps asking, Am I really ready?"

Rather than letting this anxiety spiral, I brought it to supervision before the assignment. This normalized the nervousness, helping me recognize it as reasonable rather than evidence of incompetence, and gave me space to work through specific fears before they could undermine my performance. The success of this approach is evident in the contrast between my Week 7 self-talk ("What if they realize I don't belong here? What if I mess up something critical?") and my Week 9 self-talk after completing the job:

Before: "What if I mess up? Am I really ready?"

During: "Just focus on the message. You've prepared for this. Breathe."

After: "I did it! And it went well! I AM CAPABLE."

The Story Form explicitly connected the positive outcome to the multifaceted preparation: "This experience helped shift my perspective on my role as an interpreter. It reinforced that preparation and support systems are essential to my success. It also showed me that, despite my self-doubt, I am capable of providing meaningful access. Receiving direct positive feedback from a Deaf consumer made me feel seen and validated in my work." The supervision component was foundational; it's what allowed me to approach the assignment with managed anxiety rather than spiraling impostor syndrome.

The timing suggests that this proactive use of supervision was something I learned over the course of the supervision experience rather than something I knew how to do initially. My early supervision sessions (February through May) were processing past trauma and learning new frameworks (work/worth separation, boundary-setting). By September, I had internalized enough of these tools that I could apply them prospectively, I could recognize an upcoming challenge, anticipate my likely emotional response, and seek support before rather than after the crisis.

Theme 3.2: "I Am a Professional": Professional Identity Consolidation

The final months of data collection (October through December 2025) documented a shift in my self-concept from struggling novice to establishing professional. This shift appeared most

clearly in my supervision insights and my final Story Forms, where statements of competence and professional identity became more frequent and more confident.

My October 24, 2025, supervision session scored a perfect 5.00 out of 5.00, the only session to achieve this. The most valuable insight was: "New settings mean new things to learn, and it doesn't invalidate my professional strengths." When asked how the session helped, I wrote: "I don't have to take feedback personally and can feel confident in my choices as a professional." My implementation plan was equally significant: "To embrace the fact that I am a professional and I know what I am doing." The verb "embrace" is telling; it suggests acceptance of something already true rather than aspiration toward something not yet achieved. This is identity consolidation: not just learning to separate work from worth, but actively claiming a professional identity I had earned and struggled to own.

The November 28 session (4.79/5.00) added another dimension. My most valuable insight was: "Supervision works! Someone brought back a case they had previously shared, and we ran through the resulting demands and consequences, and they had a more positive experience because of the controls generated during supervision." My note at the end captured my emotional state: "First non-required supervision, all alumni and working professionals, were asked to be there by peers for my value in controls. Felt really nice to support my community." This represents a role transformation. I was no longer just receiving support from the community; I was contributing to it. This external validation of my professional growth provided evidence that countered impostor syndrome's insistence that I was faking competence; people with real expertise don't get invited to contribute their insights.

My Story Forms show this professional identity consolidation playing out in real situations. My December 2024 Story Form about the wedding interpretation documents a mistake (unconsciously rolling my eyes at repeated feedback) but frames it within professional growth rather than fundamental inadequacy:

"This experience taught me that I still struggle with managing perfectionism and shame when I fall short of my own expectations. It showed me that while I can accept feedback intellectually, my body sometimes reacts defensively before I even realize it. I also learned that I am capable of being honest and accountable, even when I feel exposed or uncomfortable. My ability to reflect and seek repair afterward is a strength I'm proud of."

What distinguishes this reflection from earlier Story Forms is not the absence of self-criticism but its reframing; mistakes are positioned as part of growth rather than proof of inadequacy.

The concluding reflection in this Story Form captures the integration:

"Being an interpreter isn't just about linguistic skill; it's also about emotional regulation, navigating interpersonal dynamics, and staying grounded in unpredictable environments. This experience reminded me that our work is deeply human, and that includes making mistakes, repairing them, and continuing to grow. It also emphasized the importance of respecting the preferences of Deaf consumers, even when the feedback is difficult to hear or implement in real time. Interpretation is as much about connection and humility as it is about accuracy."

The feedback log from this same period provides external validation of this emerging professional identity. Anonymous Teacher's December 12 feedback noted: "I see a distinct

difference in your approach here" and "Clarity in interpreting section about aligning attitudes and behavior." While she still observed microloading, her overall assessment was positive, concluding: "I think that a less 'conduit' paradigm will feel more natural for you and play into your strengths more, and I'm really excited to see what's next for you."

This suggests that professional identity consolidation for someone with impostor syndrome is not a linear progression to a finished state of unwavering confidence. Rather, it's the development of a more stable sense of professional self that can weather moments of self-doubt without collapsing into shame. It's learning to hold both "I made a mistake" and "I am capable" as simultaneously true. It's building enough evidence of competence that individual setbacks can be integrated as learning rather than disproving all previous growth. Professional identity consolidation appears in this data not as arriving at a destination but as developing the resources and resilience to keep moving forward despite ongoing challenges.

Section 4: The Confidence Paradox

Theme 4.1: Competence Without Conviction, The Persistent Gap

One of the most puzzling patterns in the data emerged from triangulating external feedback about my competence with my internal experience of confidence. The evidence showed clearly that I was developing interpreting skills and performing adequately, yet my self-reported confidence remained inconsistent, and my body continued to manifest anxiety.

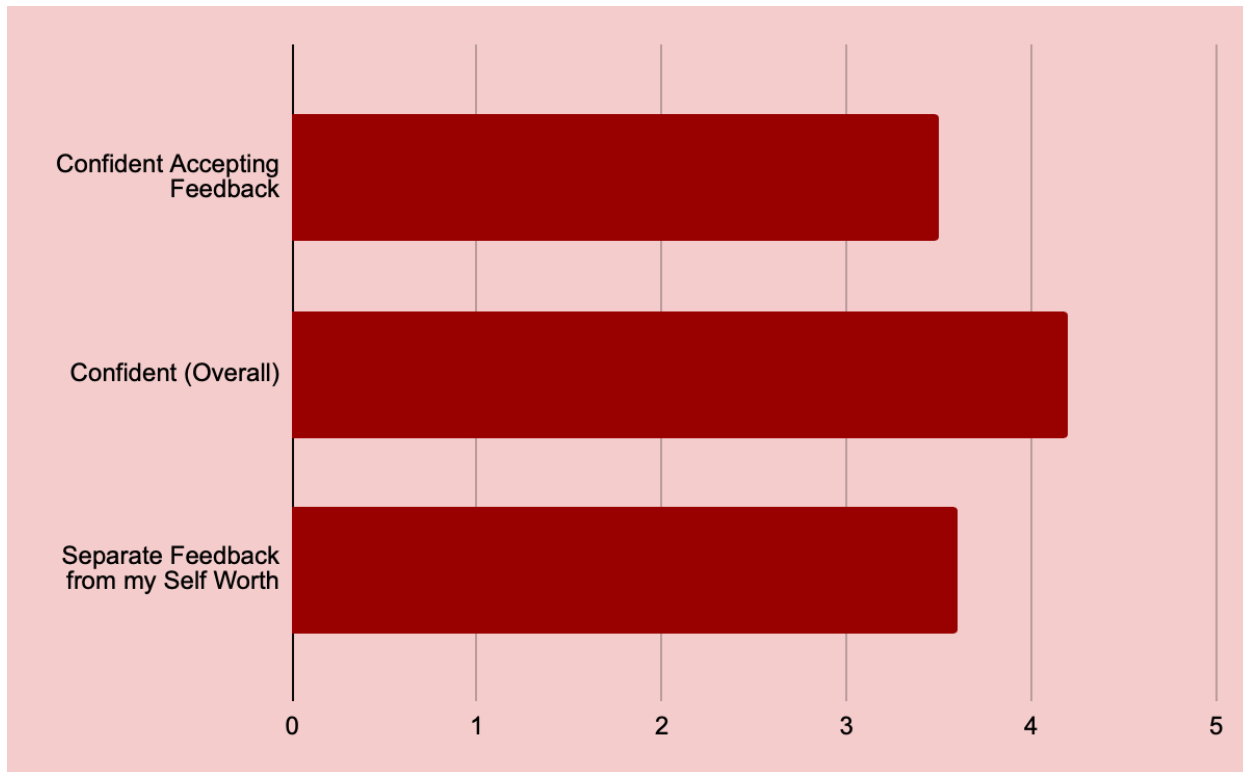
The feedback log documents steady improvement across multiple contexts. A peer's March 9, 2025, feedback confirmed that my interpretations were "clear and succinct" and that the

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register and tone matched the occasion. The October 20, 2025, VRS feedback noted "great smile, clear signs, good customer service" with only minor areas for development.

Anonymous Teacher's feedback across multiple months confirmed skill development. On November 12, 2025, they noted: "I can see the influence the training was having on your work, and I am excited for you to branch out into other areas... Your signing is clear, and your sentences sound natural. The warmth of your tone matched the signer well." On December 12, 2025, they observed: "I see a distinct difference in your approach here with decalage and waiting for full thoughts to interpret meaning... Clear use of space that provided equivalent meaning and visual cohesion... Clarity in interpreting the section about aligning attitudes and behavior."

Figure 8: *Confidence Paradox: Mean Scores on Three Confidence-Related Supervision Impact Assessment Items.*



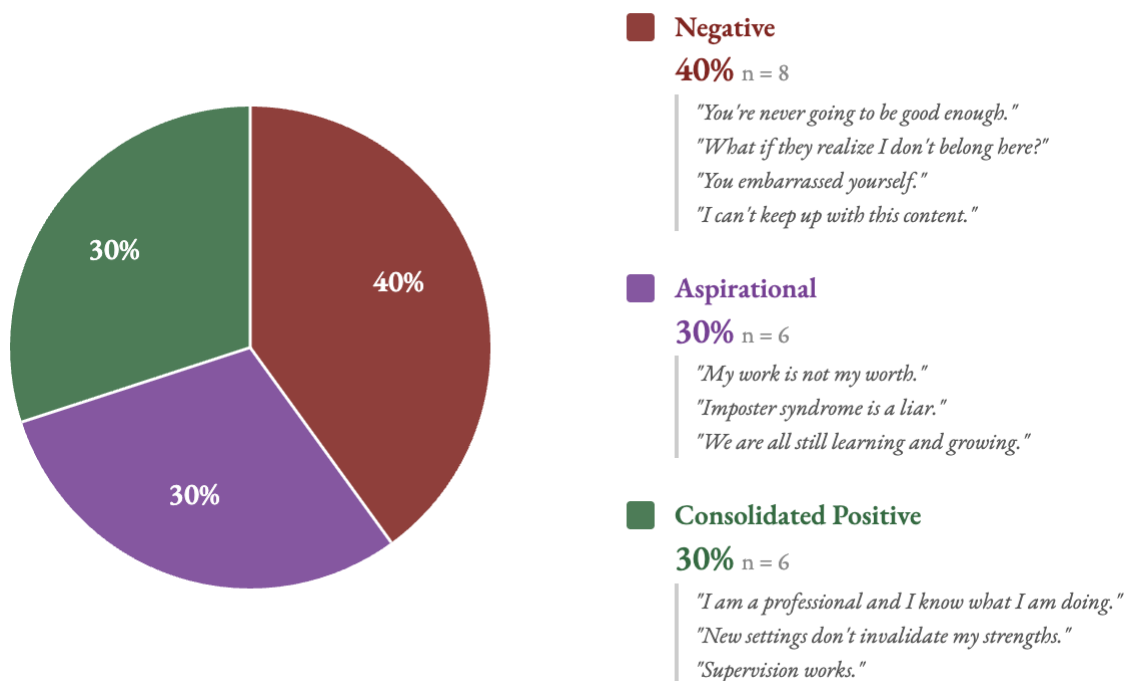
Note. Bars represent mean scores on three items from the Supervision Impact Assessment Form ($n = 22$ sessions; 1–5 scale): Confident Accepting Feedback, Confident (Overall), and Separate Feedback from My Self-Worth. The gap between overall confidence ($M = 4.20$) and confidence in accepting feedback ($M = 3.50$) illustrates the persistence of feedback-specific difficulty despite broader gains in professional self-concept, consistent with the confidence paradox described in Theme 4.1.

Yet the supervision data reveals a more complicated picture. While "feel more confident overall" averaged 4.19/5.00 and "recognize and appreciate my professional strengths" averaged 4.19/5.00, "confident receiving constructive feedback" dropped to only 3.57, the lowest of all impostor syndrome-related metrics. Even more telling, "separate feedback about my work from my self-worth" averaged 3.67, despite this being an explicit focus of the supervision work. I could affirm the work/worth separation intellectually in supervision, but the 0.62-point gap

between general confidence and feedback confidence shows how difficult it was to maintain that separation when feedback actually arrived.

My Story Forms provide insight into this gap by documenting my internal dialogue during stressful moments. Even in June 2025, after months of supervision and documented skill development, my self-talk during a wedding interpretation included: "I'm not good at this," "I'm messing this up," and "Why can't I keep up?" These thoughts directly contradict both the external feedback documenting my competence and my supervision scores, suggesting confidence.

Figure 9: *Distribution of Self-Talk Across the Data Collection Period.*

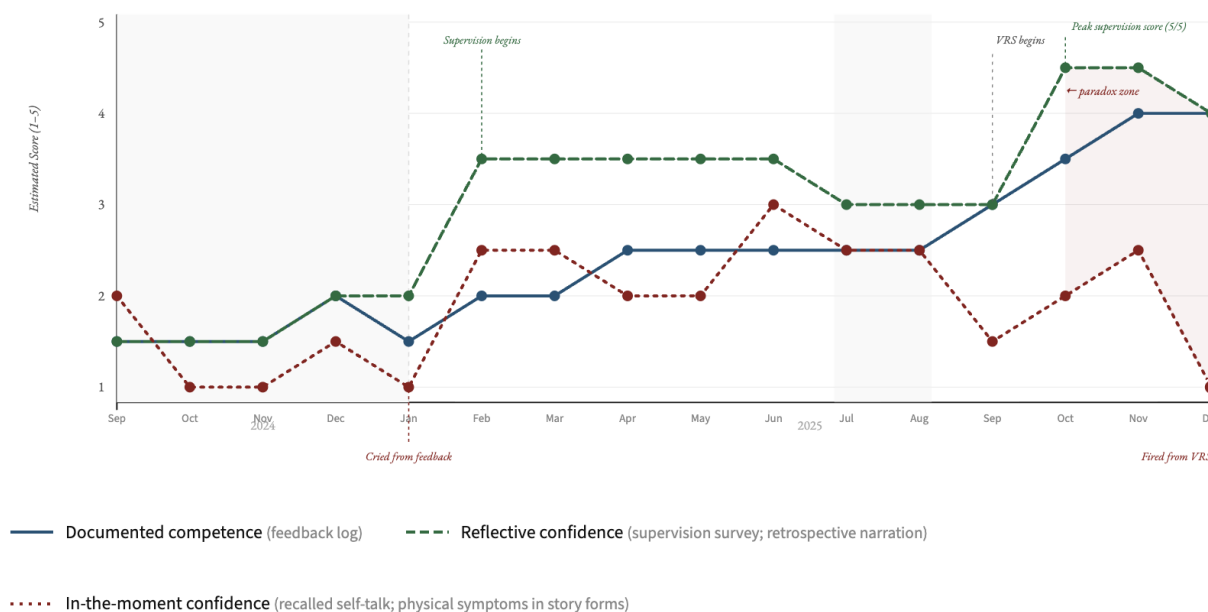


Note. Proportional distribution of 20 documented self-talk instances across three categories coded from Story Forms, supervision open-text responses, and feedback log entries. Negative self-talk includes harsh self-criticism, catastrophizing language, and expressions of imposter syndrome occurring during or immediately following interpreting events. Aspirational self-talk includes affirmational declarations present in the data but not yet fully integrated into felt experience at the time of utterance. Consolidated positive self-talk includes statements reflecting a settled professional identity, transmitted outward to peers, or enacted under pressure. Category

definitions are consistent with the coding applied in Table 1. Proportions are approximate due to the qualitative nature of the coding process.

The persistence of this harsh self-talk is evident throughout the timeline. In January 2025, interpreting in post-secondary settings: "I'm not doing this well enough," "I can't keep up with this content." In May 2025, during a job interview: "You sound dumb," "You're rambling," "You're never going to be good enough." In February 2025, before a freelance job: "What if they realize I don't belong here?" In June 2025, at a wedding: "You embarrassed yourself," "You're not ready for this."

Figure 10: *Estimated Trajectory of Three Confidence-Related Dimensions Across the Data Collection Period.*



Note. All values are qualitatively derived estimates on a common 1–5 scale intended to illustrate relative trajectory rather than precise measurement. Documented competence reflects the specificity and growth-orientation of externally received feedback. Reflective confidence reflects self-assessment in retrospective contexts (e.g., the Supervision Impact Assessment Form and the Story Form narration). In-the-moment confidence reflects the presence or absence of physical anxiety, impostor self-talk, and assertive language recalled within Story Form accounts of events as they occurred. Track scores are derived from thematic coding across all three data sources.

Table 2: *Scoring Rubric for Three Confidence Track Dimensions.*

TRACK	SCORE 1–2 (LOW)	SCORE 3 (MODERATE)	SCORE 4–5 (HIGH)	PRIMARY SOURCE
<i>Documented competence</i>	Hostile, vague, or absent feedback; harmful delivery obscures content	Feedback is present and somewhat specific; positive but non-actionable	Specific, technically nuanced, growth-oriented feedback from qualified sources	Feedback log
<i>Reflective confidence</i>	Retrospective narration dominated by shame, confusion, or self-doubt; low supervision legitimacy scores	Mixed retrospective narration; moderate supervision scores; emerging self-recognition	Clear retrospective recognition of growth and strengths; high supervision legitimacy/worth-separation scores; mentoring others	Supervision Impact Assessment Form
<i>In-the-moment confidence</i>	Physical distress symptoms (crying, tension); acute impostor language; felt unable to function or respond	Some anxiety present but manageable; mixed assertive and self-critical language recalled	Assertive, calm, or prideful language during the event; absence of acute distress; sense of competence accessed in real time	In-the-moment self-talk and physical experience recalled within story form accounts

Note. The table presents the scoring criteria for three confidence-related dimensions examined in Figure 10: Documented Competence, Reflective Confidence, and In-the-Moment Confidence. Scores 1–2 indicate low presence of the dimension, Score 3 indicates moderate or emerging presence, and Scores 4–5 indicate high or consolidated presence. The primary source column indicates the data instrument most informative for each track. All scores are qualitative estimates derived from thematic coding across three data sources.

The confidence paradox appears most starkly when comparing different types of self-assessment. In reflective moments (filling out supervision forms, writing Story Forms after the fact), I could recognize growth, identify strengths, and maintain a balanced perspective. But in the moment of actual interpreting work or feedback reception, the old patterns of harsh self-judgment returned. This gap between reflective confidence and in-the-moment confidence may explain the persistent microloading that Anonymous Teacher observed. The physical tension in my body reflected the anxiety I felt during interpreting, even when my reflective self could recognize that anxiety as disproportionate to the actual demands.

The supervision data provides one more piece of this puzzle: the significant variation in my confidence across group compositions (see Figure 7). Sessions with my usual supervision group averaged 4.21/5.00, while the session with seasoned professionals scored only 3.29/5.00, a 0.92-point drop (22% decrease in effectiveness). This sensitivity to hierarchical dynamics suggests that my confidence was contextual rather than stable. With peers at similar developmental stages, I could draw on the confidence I was building through supervision. With experienced professionals whose expertise might judge me, impostor syndrome surged back to the surface. This context-dependency indicates that my professional confidence, while growing, had not yet consolidated into a stable internal sense of competence that remained consistent across situations.

What this confidence paradox reveals is that impostor syndrome operates on multiple levels, with responses to intervention varying in rate. But the automatic responses, the immediate self-talk under stress, the physical tension, the anxiety triggered by hierarchical evaluation contexts, changed more slowly, representing deeper patterns perhaps connected to perfectionism

that predated my interpreting work. The supervision intervention was highly effective at the cognitive and reflective levels but hadn't yet fully reached the somatic and automatic levels.

The paradox also offers hope: I was functioning competently despite not feeling fully confident. The gap between competence and conviction was uncomfortable and created unnecessary suffering, but it didn't prevent me from doing good work. Impostor syndrome made the work harder than it needed to be, but it didn't make the work impossible.

Conclusion

Taken together, these findings document a nonlinear but directional arc of professional development across 15 months. The early data is characterized by accumulated harm, horizontal violence, public shame, and somatic distress operating on a novice interpreter with no framework yet for processing or responding to it. The middle period documents the arrival of that framework: DC-S supervision introducing cognitive reframes, boundary-setting tools, and community validation that began to shift how I understood both the harm and myself. The latter data show those tools taking root in proactive coping, professional identity consolidation, and a more stable sense of competence, while the confidence paradox reminds us that growth at the cognitive and reflective levels does not automatically translate into the body or the automatic responses shaped by years of perfectionism. What this study ultimately documents is not a story of recovery but of development: the slow, iterative, sometimes contradictory process of becoming a professional in a field that does not always make that easy.

Discussion

The Sustained Impact of Horizontal Violence

The data documents what the literature describes but rarely captures longitudinally: a single incident of horizontal violence creating sustained psychological distress that persisted for months without intervention. This finding aligns with Ott's (2012) research showing that horizontal violence "appears most damaging during periods of professional vulnerability, including but not limited to the transition from training to practice" (p. 28), and with Hill's (2018) documentation of how interpreters "internalize these negative interactions as personal failures rather than recognizing them as systemic issues" (p. 42). This also aligns with research on feedback delivery, which emphasizes that psychological safety is a prerequisite for productive feedback: when feedback is delivered publicly, the recipient must simultaneously manage the actual content, their emotional response, and their concerns about how they are being perceived by observers, and for someone already experiencing impostor syndrome—already hypervigilant about being exposed as a fraud—public feedback becomes confirmation of one's worst fears. The public nature of harmful feedback amplified its impact: three incidents involved criticism delivered in front of peers or colleagues, and all three created disproportionate shame compared to private feedback, extending the literature on feedback delivery (Jug et al., 2019; Witter-Merithew, 2001) by demonstrating that psychological safety is not just about the content and tone of feedback, but about the social context.

Community as Antidote to Isolation

The supervision data provide compelling evidence that community validation directly counters the isolation that both enables horizontal violence and exacerbates impostor syndrome.

Curtis's (2017) finding that supervision participants "cited feeling supported and validated by their colleagues" (p. 54) is confirmed and extended by my data, which shows the mechanism through which community validation operates.

However, the data also reveal that not all supervision contexts provide equal community benefit. The dramatic difference between usual group sessions (4.21/5.00 average) and the non-usual group session with seasoned professionals (3.29/5.00) demonstrates that the community requires specific conditions: peer-level participation, emotional safety, shared struggle, and consistent membership. This nuances Curtis's findings by suggesting that the benefits of supervision's collegial relationships depend on the group's specific composition and dynamics.

The Work/Worth Separation as Learned Practice

The emergence and evolution of "my work is not my worth" as a central mantra provides evidence that cognitive reframing can be taught through supervision, though maintaining the separation remains difficult. This finding speaks to Sakulku and Alexander's (2011) description of people with impostor syndrome as having difficulty internalizing accomplishments; my data shows this difficulty manifesting as the fusion of work quality with personal worth.

The low supervision scores for "separate feedback about my work from my self-worth" (3.67/5.00), despite explicit instruction in this separation confirms what Vascimini Protheroe (2024) suggested: impostor syndrome patterns are persistent and require sustained intervention.

The persistence of physical symptoms despite cognitive and emotional growth also suggests that addressing impostor syndrome may require interventions beyond cognitive

reframing. While DC-S supervision was highly effective at providing new ways of thinking about my work and my worth (as evidenced by the high supervision scores and the emergence of healthier self-talk), the body seemed to require more time, or perhaps different interventions, to release the held tension and learned anxiety responses.

Yet the mantras' evolution from "impostor syndrome is a liar!" to "My work is not my worth" to "I am a professional, and I know what I am doing" shows developmental progression. This mirrors the trajectory Vascimini Protheroe (2024) observed: "as my confidence grew, my feelings of impostor syndrome declined, as did my fear of accepting new opportunities." (p. 30).

Boundary-Setting as Professional Empowerment

The boundary-setting trajectory documented in my data operationalizes Hill's (2018) recommendation that interpreters need "tools to handle vulnerability and shame or interpersonal conflict" (p. 6). My progression from enduring or avoiding harmful feedback to proactively setting boundaries demonstrates how DC-S supervision can teach these tools systematically.

This finding extends the literature by showing boundary-setting as the highest-scoring supervision outcome (4.19/5.00) and documenting the concrete strategies I developed (scripts, lists of limits, and advanced communication about feedback preferences). This validates Dean and Pollard's (2013) DC-S framework, which positions supervision as a space for discussing your work with colleagues to develop controls for demands. My data shows this framework working in real time: horizontal violence identified as demand, boundary-setting developed as control.

The Confidence Paradox: Competence Without Conviction

The confidence paradox, the persistent gap between documented competence and experienced confidence, provides empirical support for what Sakulku and Alexander (2011) identify as impostor syndrome's defining characteristic.

The implication is significant: DC-S supervision, as I experienced it, was highly effective at cognitive and reflective levels but didn't fully address automatic and somatic responses. Addressing impostor syndrome comprehensively may require interventions beyond cognitive reframing and community validation, body-based practices, prolonged exposure to success experiences, or deeper work on perfectionism. Sherman's (2013) recommendation to share your insecurities with someone you trust was addressed through supervision and was helpful, but the persistent microloading suggests these approaches alone may not be sufficient.

This finding suggests important implications for addressing impostor syndrome in professional development. Cognitive reframing and community validation, the primary tools of DC-S supervision as I experienced it, can create significant change in how people think about and understand their work. But they may need to be supplemented with other interventions to address the embodied, automatic responses that persist despite cognitive shifts. Body-based practices, prolonged exposure to success experiences, or deeper work on perfectionism and self-compassion might be needed to fully bridge the competence-confidence gap.

The Success Formula: Proactive Supervision

The February 2025 freelance success provides a case study in how systematic supervision can help novice interpreters proactively manage impostor syndrome rather than react to it. This

finding operationalizes Vascimini Protheroe's (2024) observation that "as confidence grew, feelings of impostor syndrome declined" (p. 30), showing the mechanism: confidence grew through repeated experiences of successfully managing impostor feelings, enabled by the proactive use of supervision tools. The success wasn't simply the result of increased skill (though that helped); it was the result of better emotional preparation through supervision.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Summary

This autobiographical action research project examined how feedback dynamics, horizontal violence, and impostor syndrome intersect to shape the formation of professional identity in novice ASL-English interpreters. Grounded in Wenger's (1998) communities of practice framework, Schön's (1983) reflective practitioner model, and Ibarra's (1999) concept of provisional selves, the study sought to document and make sense of my personal experiences navigating the transition from student to practicing interpreter.

Data was collected over 15 months (September 2024 through December 2025) through three interconnected sources: a feedback log documenting external evaluations and interactions, self-reflection journals (Story Forms) capturing my internal experience, and supervision session assessments measuring the impact of DC-S supervision on my professional development. Thematic analysis across these three data sources revealed four major themes: the landscape of harm created by horizontal violence and harmful feedback delivery; DC-S supervision as an active intervention; a success formula built on proactive coping and professional identity consolidation; and the confidence paradox, the persistent gap between documented competence and experienced confidence.

Findings demonstrated that even a single incident of horizontal violence can create sustained psychological distress that interferes with professional development for months without intervention. Public feedback delivery amplified harm disproportionately compared to private feedback. DC-S supervision emerged as a powerful intervention, particularly through community validation, cognitive reframing, and the development of boundary-setting skills.

Despite significant growth over the 16-month period, impostor syndrome proved persistent, operating at cognitive, reflective, somatic, and automatic levels, with responses to intervention varying across these levels.

Significance of the Study

While the interpreting profession has produced a growing body of literature on horizontal violence and feedback practices, few studies have documented these phenomena longitudinally from within, tracking their interaction in real time over a sustained period of professional development. This study contributes an empirically grounded, autobiographical account of how these forces interact, offering specificity about mechanisms and timelines that previous research has identified theoretically but rarely documented in practice.

For novice interpreters, this study offers validation that the struggles of early professional life are real, common, and navigable. For interpreter educators and program coordinators, it provides evidence that structured supervision access during the transition from training to practice is not supplemental but essential. For the profession as a whole, it adds one carefully documented voice to the ongoing conversation about creating feedback cultures that support rather than harm developing practitioners.

Conclusions

Several conclusions emerge from this study regarding myself as a single participant. First, horizontal violence seems to function as a weaponization of impostor syndrome; harmful feedback delivery may not merely hurt feelings but actively disrupts the professional identity formation process by causing novice interpreters to internalize systemic problems as personal

inadequacies. Second, community is both the wound and the medicine: the same professional relationships that enable horizontal violence may also be the site of the healing that supervision communities provide. Third, professional identity formation may be nonlinear and iterative, requiring repeated reinforcement of core reframes rather than single-instance learning. Fourth, impostor syndrome may operate on multiple levels simultaneously, cognitive, reflective, somatic, and automatic, and interventions that address only the cognitive level may produce incomplete results. Finally, proactive use of supervision, seeking support before anticipated challenges rather than only after crises, may represent a meaningful developmental milestone in a novice interpreter's growth.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations must be acknowledged. As a single-participant autobiographical study, these findings reflect my individual experience and may not generalize to other novice interpreters. My particular vulnerabilities to impostor syndrome, my responses to different types of feedback, and my receptiveness to supervision may differ significantly from others' experiences.

The data collection was naturalistic rather than controlled, meaning confounding variables, overall professional development, changing work contexts, and evolving supervision group dynamics cannot be fully isolated. The supervision data collection began in February 2025, several months after many of the most significant harmful feedback incidents, limiting the ability to make strong claims about the protective effects of supervision when implemented from the start.

The retrospective nature of some data introduces the possibility of recall bias, as interpretations of past events may be shaped by subsequent learning. Additionally, because my participation in supervision was required and personally valued, the findings may not apply to voluntary supervision contexts or to skeptical participants. Finally, the 16-month window captures only an early slice of professional development; longer-term follow-up would be needed to assess whether the growth documented here proves durable across new challenges and contexts.

Implications for Future Research

This study points to several directions for future inquiry. Longitudinal studies tracking novice interpreter development over multiple years would strengthen understanding of how impostor syndrome evolves and whether early access to effective supervision produces durable effects. Research examining the somatic dimensions of impostor syndrome, the embodied anxiety that persisted in this study despite cognitive growth, would help determine what complementary interventions, such as body-based practices or mindfulness, might address what DC-S supervision alone cannot. Comparative studies examining novice interpreters with and without structured supervision access from the beginning of their careers would provide stronger evidence for the protective effects of supervision. Finally, research examining how group composition in supervision affects outcomes, particularly the difference between peer-level and hierarchically mixed groups documented in this study, would help practitioners design more effective supervision communities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are offered. For interpreter education programs, early and sustained access to DC-S supervision should be integrated into training rather than treated as a post-graduation resource. Educating novice interpreters about horizontal violence before they encounter it in the field, including giving them language to name and contextualize harmful dynamics, can prevent the internalization of systemic problems as personal failures. For practicing interpreters, proactive use of supervision before anticipated high-stakes assignments, rather than only reactive processing after difficult experiences, represents a meaningful strategy for managing impostor syndrome.

For new interpreters entering the field, the most important recommendation I can offer is this: seek out supervision before you need it. Do not wait for a harmful experience to teach you what healthy feedback looks like. Find a peer group you trust and begin building that relationship early, even before you feel like you have enough to bring. The very act of showing up, of voicing what felt uncertain, what hurt, what confused you, is the practice. Give your work a name separate from your worth. When you receive feedback that stings, ask yourself: Is this about what I did, or is this about who I am? Most of the time, it is only the former. When it feels like the latter, name it, to yourself, to your peers, and, when safe, to the person delivering it. Build a small script for setting boundaries. Something as simple as “I receive feedback better in private” said before an assignment can change the entire dynamic. You do not have to endure harmful feedback as a rite of passage. The field gets better when you insist it be better.

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Appendix A

Field Experience Professional Identity Reflection Form

Name: _____ Week _____ of Field Experience

Reflect upon your working experience and how it informs your developing professional identity. You may wish to consider: Environmental, Interpersonal, Paralinguistic, and Intrapersonal demands you face; values you identify in yourself and others; expectations from yourself or others; experiences that have surprised you; and any other experiences you have had during Field Experience.

Part I: Storying & Analysis

Brief Narrative Description of a Specific Experience or Observation

Adapted from:
Corty, G. (2007). Emergence of professional identity for the pre-service teacher. *International Education Journal*, 8(2), 237-247. Shanon Research Press. ISSN 1443-1475 Retrieved from <https://ojs.amsnet.org/doi/10.1080/10834260701488114>

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What impact did this experience have on you?											
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What does this experience teach you about yourself?											
How does this experience inform your understanding of what it means to be an interpreter?											

Appendix B

DC-S Supervision Impact Assessment
3/16/26, 6:13 PM

DC-S Supervision Impact Assessment

Please rate your agreement with each statement on a scale of 1-5:
1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

- Date of Supervision**

Example: January 7, 2019
- Today's supervision helped me feel more confident receiving constructive feedback**
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Stro

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Strongly Agree
- Today's supervision helped me separate feedback about my work from my self-worth**
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Stro

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Strongly Agree

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Ndd9v0ueglzJWgeQLrIsH9Nm3Dp5UuGfO2wcl3NlUbi/printform>
Page 1 of 7

DC-S Supervision Impact Assessment
3/16/26, 6:13 PM

- Today's supervision helped me feel equipped to implement feedback in my practice**
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Stro

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Strongly Agree
- Today's supervision helped me feel legitimate in my role as an interpreter**
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Stro

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Strongly Agree
- Today's supervision helped me recognize and appreciate my professional strengths**
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Stro

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Strongly Agree
- Today's supervision helped me trust my decision-making process during interpretations**
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Stro

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Strongly Agree

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Ndd9v0ueglzJWgeQLrIsH9Nm3Dp5UuGfO2wcl3NlUbi/printform>
Page 2 of 7

DC-S Supervision Impact Assessment
3/16/26, 6:13 PM

- Today's supervision helped me to feel equipped to handle challenging interactions with colleagues**
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Stro

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Strongly Agree
- Today's supervision helped me develop professional boundary-setting approaches**
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Stro

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Strongly Agree
- Today's supervision gave me tools to address negative workplace dynamics**
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Stro

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Strongly Agree
- Today's supervision session helped me feel more confident**
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Stro

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Strongly Agree

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Ndd9v0ueglzJWgeQLrIsH9Nm3Dp5UuGfO2wcl3NlUbi/printform>
Page 3 of 7

BECOMING AN INTERPRETER

DC-S Supervision Impact Assessment	3/16/26, 6:13 PM	DC-S Supervision Impact Assessment	3/16/26, 6:13 PM
12. I gained useful strategies or insights from today's session Mark only one oval. 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Agree		16. What was the most valuable insight from today's supervision session? _____ _____ _____ _____	
13. I feel supported in my professional development journey from today's session Mark only one oval. 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Agree		17. How did today's supervision session specifically help address your challenges? _____ _____ _____ _____	
14. Supervision provides practical solutions to professional challenges Mark only one oval. 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Agree		18. How will you implement what you learned today in your practice? _____ _____ _____ _____	
15. Supervision supports my overall professional development Mark only one oval. 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Agree			
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1N6d8v0uegtzJWgeQLrshHnm30p5UeGfO2woI3NUbI/printform Page 4 of 7		https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1N6d8v0uegtzJWgeQLrshHnm30p5UeGfO2woI3NUbI/printform Page 5 of 7	

DC-S Supervision Impact Assessment	3/16/26, 6:13 PM	DC-S Supervision Impact Assessment	3/16/26, 6:13 PM
19. Record any additional thoughts, patterns, or observations: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____			
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https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1N6d8v0uegtzJWgeQLrshHnm30p5UeGfO2woI3NUbI/printform Page 6 of 7		https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1N6d8v0uegtzJWgeQLrshHnm30p5UeGfO2woI3NUbI/printform Page 7 of 7	