

## Best Practices

### Anxiety as a Tool for Critical Disability Studies Fieldwork

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**Abstract:** In this article, I consider the role of emotional response and anxiety in fieldwork by drawing on an incident where I was called a “fake deafie” by informants and a follow up interview transcript about this episode. I use emotions and particularly the tracking of anxiety as a tool to productively explore the subjective and intersubjective dynamics that give shape to encounters in fieldwork. This focus on affect in fieldwork allows me to productively attend to the ethical and methodological dilemmas that materialized as a bicultural, or an in-between, ethnographer (Valente, 2011, 2014a, in review). Importantly, attending to affect in fieldwork also allows me to draw attention to an integral component of conducting critical disability studies fieldwork, that is, the affective dimensions. I conclude by arguing for the need for researchers in critical disability studies to have a theory of anxiety. This theory of anxiety needs to be a part of the critical disability studies researcher’s reflexivity toolkit.

**Keywords:** fieldwork, anxiety, deaf culture, psychoanalytic ethnography

## Introduction

While I was conducting fieldwork and interviews in France as part of the Kindergartens for the Deaf in Three Countries: Japan, France, and the United States study funded by The Spencer Foundation, I carried out the worst focus group interviewing work I have ever done in all my years of research. This disastrous interview, to no real credit of my own, somehow miraculously morphed into a really compelling discussion about the film we came to interview our deaf teacher informants about. I draw on the vignette that follows this introduction and a transcript of this event to address my so-called “fake deafie” anxiety and to consider the role of emotional response and anxiety in fieldwork, where emotions and particularly the tracking of anxiety is used as a signal and tool to productively explore and mediate between the intrapsychic and intersubjective dynamics that give shape to encounters in fieldwork. This focus on affect in fieldwork allows me to productively attend to the ethical and methodological dilemmas that materialized as a bicultural or as I prefer, an in-between, ethnographer (Valente, 2011, 2014a, 2015).

Importantly, attending to affect in fieldwork also allows me to draw attention to an integral component of conducting critical disability studies fieldwork, that is, the affective dimensions. Crapanzano (2003), a psychoanalytic anthropologist, argues that we have an ethical responsibility to present these messy events in our work as part of the reflexive ethnographic project to allow us to be more thoughtful and honest about how to deal with these issues in future projects. These messy events, such as the following “fake deafie” story, present to the audience the ethical issues that emerge in the course of conducting fieldwork

and allow us to think about how they might affect our findings and our writing.

### **A “Fake Deafie” in Southern France**

When the school day ended on Wednesday, June 13, 2012, my host Agnès Campredon, the director of the preschool École Maternelle Gabriel Sajus, hurried our small research team—Patrick Graham, Adeline Lebeaux, and me—through rush hour traffic the six kilometers from Sajus to the public elementary school École Jean-Jaurès, located in Ramonville on the outskirts of the historic southern capitol Toulouse, France. We were set to meet with Marie-Paule Kellerhals, the coordinator for the preschool and primary grade class LSF, bilingual classes in French and French sign language (LSF - Langue des Signes Française) serving two- to five-year-old deaf children. Kellerhals would then bring us to the eleven classe LSF teachers she rounded up from the area preschool and elementary schools for a focus group interview. We were there to interview the teachers about a video we filmed during the previous summer of a typical day in a kindergarten class LSF. Subsequently we collaboratively edited and collapsed about twenty hours of film footage from two video-cameras into a 29-minute film, with the lead kindergarten teacher Vanessa Andrieu and her supervisor Marie-Paule.

When we arrived in the parking lot, Marie-Paule, who is deaf, greeted Agnès and our team in spoken French. Marie-Paule then switches to LSF and Adeline, who as our English to French translator and English/French to LSF interpreter, translates what Marie-Paule signs from LSF into French (for Agnès) and then LSF into English for Patrick and me. Because both Patrick and I are deaf, we read Adeline’s lips to understand. As Marie-Paule directs us through the school entrance, main lobby, and up a flight of stairs to the classroom where the focus group will be held, Adeline deftly positions herself next to Marie-Paule so she has everyone in eyesight so she can translate and interpret. As we make our way to the classroom, Marie-Paule continues to sign in LSF an update to our team on what is ahead and then a side discussion ensues in spoken French between Agnès and Marie-Paule, who reads her lips, about plans for dinner post-interview. Adeline translates this discussion from French into English for Patrick and me.

As we walked into the classroom, Patrick and I said quick “hellos” to the teachers, some of whom we know quite well from previous visits, and all of whom are sitting in chairs waiting for the interview to begin once a few more of their colleagues join us. We quickly set up the cameras to record the interviews and for later interpreting/translating into French and English. Adeline signs in LSF with some of the teachers as she also knows them, having interpreted for them in the past for school meetings.

Once Patrick and I finished setting up, Patrick, who is a fluent and regular user of American Sign Language and also had been studying LSF, signs with several of the waiting teachers. Patrick has a reputation for quickly picking up various sign languages, having traveled widely in deaf communities internationally. Nearby, I can make out Adeline talking

in French with Agnès.

I remember awkwardly standing next to the video camera, acting as if I was busily working to fine-tune the camera lens, and I watched as Patrick has an animated back-and-forth in LSF with the teachers, some of whom I occasionally notice were also trying out the ASL they knew from their own travels. I had only recently begun learning ASL, having been raised oral deaf (Valente, 2011a), and I was now overcome with anxiety that I could not adequately sign anything rudimentary in either LSF or ASL, nor could I speak French, so I stood by and watched. I realized everyone was engaged in conversation but me. I could feel the familiar shame of belonging nowhere—belonging “aneither” to the speaking or signing world (Wake, 1939; Valente, 2011a). I could also feel the enduring loneliness of being an in-betweener creep back into me. I’m not just deaf to the larger hearing world but I am sign-impaired in the deaf world (Valente, 2014a, 2014b).

At this point, I remember my mind shift to thinking about comments someone told me hushedly, that supposedly some in the group of teachers we were interviewing felt that I was a “fake deafie.” Mainly this was because I was mostly speaking English, rather than ASL, to conduct the interviews and socialize in general. I also, apparently, acted like a “hearing” person. These complaints hit a nerve because, in fact, if I did sign, it was to communicate only with Patrick, a graduate student at another university who was serving as a research assistant for me on the project and was also one of my closest friends. Patrick was one of the few people that I felt safe enough to sign with because he was so patient in his efforts to understand what I was trying to communicate. He knew that I was sensitive about the topic of coming late to learn ASL. Very rarely did I use ASL to communicate with Adeline, as it was easiest to communicate in English. Beyond a few words like “hello” and “thank you” and the like, I also did not know or use much LSF.

In short time, the teachers we had been waiting on finally joined us, and now I re-directed myself to thinking about a more pressing dilemma, that is, the reason why we are here now, which is because of the “failed” interview earlier on Monday due, in part, to having been postponed after several interruptions. To be precise, there was a surprise visit in the midst of the interview by an Inspector, a high-ranking education official from the Academy of Toulouse who oversaw the implementation of the French National Curriculum and administered the schools in the region.

Perhaps more scandalously, a confidante revealed to me there was another reason for the failed interview having to do with discussions amongst some teachers in the group that I—the “fake deafie”—was oppressing Patrick, because as the “real deafie” who signed fluently in ASL and was skilled in international sign languages, he ought to have been leading or co-leading the interviews. Plus, our original ASL interpreter backed out at the last minute and our backup ASL interpreters were unavailable on this day too. This had the unintended effect of making me—the project’s co-principal investigator—appear to the deaf teachers to be insensitive to Patrick’s communicative needs. To say that I was doing damage control

would have been an understatement.

### **The Reflexive Dilemmas of Critical Disability Studies Researchers**

After engaging my informants about the “fake deafie” comment tangentially but with much emotion in the interview that followed this opening scene, I learned this all had little to do with deaf politics, as I believed going into the interview. That is, I believed after learning of the “fake deafie” criticism that I was dealing with the kind of insider/outsider politics related to skill with sign that can sometimes create hierarchies and positionings within deaf communities. However, it turns out that the struggles of that day actually had more to do with issues that are much more mundane in the daily life of teachers and parents. These reflexive dilemmas that materialized during and even more so after these interviews, resulted in compelling me to confront the dilemmas of what LeVine (1982) calls the bicultural researcher (p. x). By bicultural, LeVine is referring to the fact that the ethnographer – all ethnographers – are tasked with participating as quasi-community members as well as performing the role of an observer. LeVine is addressing more traditional fieldwork in which the researcher is not already a member of the community being researched. When he describes a quasi-community member, he is referring to the fact that insiders accommodate you in a way that allows you to take on a partial membership. The researcher struggles with the anxieties of “getting it right” as an emerging but inexperienced member in the community. For many researchers, this gives rise to anxiety and the desire to “get it right.”

These issues of the anxieties of being a clumsy initiate and wanting badly to get it right are present in heightened ways in my research. As a critical disability studies researcher, I am highly sensitive to the empowering and emancipatory projects of representing the insider perspective on disability. In addition, representing deaf ethnicity, as opposed to deaf disability, draws from a long anthropological and linguistic tradition that is largely underreported and often ignored by mainstream special education and deaf education researchers whose models are drawn from a cultural and linguistic deficit perspective (Valente, 2016). The stakes in demonstrating the cultural and linguistic strengths and competencies of my informants are high. Likewise, I am deeply committed to research as a means for improving the lives of deaf and “disabled” children. Finally, I am keenly aware of my personal investment, created through years of my own struggling as a mainstreamed deaf child denied access to sign language, in moving forward an understanding of deaf people as not disabled but a language minority. At the start of this study, my role as what I have described in my previous writings as an in-betweener (Valente, 2011a, 2014a, 2014b) – neither a full member of the sign or spoken language communities – was complicated by the fact that the image I had of myself as taking on a deaf identity was very clearly impacting the way I was interpreting what was happening during this fieldwork and interviews.

### **George Devereux and Emotional Responses to Fieldwork**

This quintessential dilemma that all fieldworkers face – our emotional responses to

experiences of being insiders/outside, or in-between — has historically been addressed by psychoanalytic ethnography through examining transference and countertransference in fieldwork and attending to the intrapsychic and intersubjective dynamics that materialize (Devereux, 1967; LeVine, 1982; Heald and Deluz, 1994; Valente, 2015). As I have written about previously (e.g. Valente, 2014a, 2014b), before postmodernists concerned themselves with the pitfalls of representation and problems of reflexivity in research, anthropologist George Devereux borrowed from psychoanalytic techniques to analyze empirically emotional responses to fieldwork, particularly attending to feelings of anxiety. Devereux's 1967 classic, *From Anxiety to Method in the Behavioral Sciences*, addressed anxiety in fieldwork by borrowing from psychoanalytic techniques for systematically attending to transference and countertransference in therapy. An important feature of this strategy was to explore the consequences of emic and etic perspectives that materialized before, during, and after fieldwork. What made Devereux unusual was his emphasis on not only attending to the emotional and affective dimensions of fieldwork but also attending to these dynamics in the writing up of the such descriptions. At the time, Devereux called attention to the fact that it was an unquestionable norm in the social sciences to be "objective" and de-emotionalized observers and recorders of events. In simple terms, Devereux argued for the need for researchers to consider that emotions and "anxiety [were] not something to be avoided but is the driving force which propels our intellectual questings" (p. 12). Spiro (1969) writing of Devereux's book, says:

"Any investigation of other human beings is necessarily, Devereux argues, a self-investigation as well, because the beliefs and behavior of his subjects arouse in the investigator his own unconscious (and usually infantile) fears, wishes, and fantasies. This countertransference phenomenon—the term, of course, is borrowed from psychoanalytic therapy—evoking, as it does, much anxiety, is, extremely painful."

Thinking about Devereux's axiom and back on what transpired that June day in 2012, I now know that though I experienced what I interpreted to be an attack on my "deaf credibility" as an individual, the more complicated story is that this is also about the collective anxiety of all researchers and especially important for those whom are researchers, participants, and/or collaborators in critical disability studies research, where the stakes are high because of our common commitment to empowering and emancipatory projects.

### **Critical Disability Studies: An Intersubjective Turn**

My work has taken an intersubjective turn (Valente, 2014b), moving away from a focus on my anxieties as an individual symptom. Emotionally, I could not look at these interview transcripts until I got to a point where I came to understand the intersubjective dynamics that were at play that June day. This is how I came to find critical disability studies to be reparative and generative (Valente, 2015). Critical disability studies presupposes that differences, rather than being solely the property of the individual, emerges also in the group

and consequently requires a collective response. As Goodley (2013) writes, “Critical disability studies start with disability but never end with it; disability is the space from which to think through a host of political, theoretical and practical issues that are relevant to all” (p. 632). Through critical disability studies, I am able to decenter my own subjectivity to imagine I am a part of something bigger than me—a group subject—that is and is not personal, and is and is not structural, historic, regional, cultural and institutional (Valente, 2015; Boldt and Valente, 2016).

That is, even though I experienced this as an individual with my own complicated deaf identity still-becoming, this is all part and parcel of the dilemmas with identity theory and politics of identity that many are now writing about (e.g., Muñoz, 1999; Puar, 2005; Zingsheim, 2010, 2011). Roets and Braidotti argue against an individualistic and dualistic “us/them” or “insider/outsider” perspective. They reconceptualize impairment and disability not as an individual attribute but as a form of intersubjectivity, that is, as always emerging, taking shape and changing as something produced in the collective. To write about this, both emotionally and intellectually, I had to shift to an impersonal and intersubjective reading to grasp what lay beneath the surface of what transpired within me and the group that day. When I write about the impersonal, I am not suggesting that I do not experience these events in personal ways but that an individualistic and dualistic “us/them” or “insider/outsider” perspective has its limitations in terms of understanding and engaging with fieldwork phenomena (Roets and Braidotti, 2012; Valente, 2014a).

I now use critical disability studies to work with stories such as the “fake deafie” in a less personal way. Each story is a part of the material that makes up the fieldwork encounter. Such a perspective reminds me to think of how much I or my interlocutors can control or understand what we are ultimately responsible for—that is, our ways of relating to one another. Rather than reading this “fake deafie” narrative as merely oppression, I am able to imagine it instead to be as a creative force seeking to connect with multiple bodies (Valente, 2015).

Thinking about this now from an intersubjective point of view, I can understand my anxiety as signaling something that was important to attend to as a researcher. My beginner’s interpretation of experiences in American deaf politics led me to jump to conclusions about the possible meanings of our difficult prior interview. When it was suggested to me that the difficulties were a result of my inadequacies both with sign and with my sensitivities to Patrick’s language needs, I jumped on what I refer to as “deaf-on-deaf crime”—when deaf people oppress other deaf people for real and/or perceived differences to deaf cultural or signing norms—rather than using it as a signal that something intersubjectively interesting was happening. As I will describe in more detail below, from a psychoanalytic interviewing perspective, I missed an opportunity to use my anxiety as a signal and a tool.

Before visiting with the transcript, it is important to note that what follows is a block transcript that readers may find to be somewhat lengthy; however, I ask readers to read this in



its entirety because it demonstrates how the cascading of anxieties fed into one another and overwhelmed my capacity to think clearly. When I think back on this “fake deafie” episode now, I understand more clearly that I transferred my own anxieties about belonging to the deaf, signing community onto what it was that I thought was happening in this interview. These accounts of my worst interview are productive for forays into understanding how my anxieties about identity and my role as an in-betweener ethnographer became muddled. I should also add that this written account reflects my attempt to organize my anxieties about expected criticisms about my failures as a researcher.

### **An Excerpt from the Transcript of Focus Group Interviews**

[VALENTE/INTERVIEWER]: [In English] I want to start by thanking everyone for coming today. I appreciate you taking the time out of your busy schedules. For starters, I want to talk with you about our [Monday] interview. I think there's a sense of frustration...maybe this is a very American way about being sort of blunt, very open about what I think. When we came here we were trying to have an American Sign Language interpreter for Patrick. I think I explained to you the day that we met that we were trying very hard to do that and that we do have [ASL] interpreters [going forward]...Unfortunately the three different interpreters that we tried to bring here could not come and one of them told me at the very last minute. So Patrick and I had to make a decision—Should he come to [Ramonville] without an interpreter?—Patrick wanted to come, obviously, because he wanted to see [all of] you so we had to make a choice so he decided to come here because he sees you as friends and it's not easy finding ASL interpreters here in France [with very little notice]...So we had to make choices and maybe it was a good choice, maybe it was a bad choice, I don't know. So that's the first thing I want to say, the second thing I want to say is that I made a really bad mistake in my attempt to try to give Patrick some ASL to interpret for him, it was not what I planned because as you know I'm not fluent in ASL yet. I've learned a lot of ASL but I'm not an interpreter too, so even if I was fluent I'm not an interpreter. I'm also deaf and I can't hear everything too. So I'm trying to read lips and while [English-LSF interpreter] Adeline speaks good English, she still has an accent so I have to try to read her lips with an accent, then try to speak in English [while at the same time interpreting for Patrick in ASL]... I am not as eloquent in ASL as I am in English and that wasn't my choice and the one thing I feel as someone who's a deaf person is very sensitive about that, I didn't make the choice to choose what language I was taught when I was a kid. What I really worry about [with] the deaf community is how deaf people can oppress other deaf people and my research is not just about deaf children. My research is also about the experiences of deaf people meeting other deaf people, both how that's good but how that can also be bad. And I would say that deaf people can also oppress other deaf people as much as hearing people can oppress deaf people. But to me it's more a problem if deaf people oppress other deaf people because many of you know and share the same story...If you know sign language better than I do, you shouldn't be feeling like you're better than me. You should be feeling that I'm still trying to make that journey to where you are today. You should be supportive. This is not just about me, it's

about everyone. The deaf community could do a better job of trying to support deaf people like me who are trying to learn sign and become members of the deaf community... If I wasn't trying and I came back here and I didn't know any sign language, I think, you would have every right to be upset with me, but I spent a lot of time studying sign language and trying my hardest to learn the language that I did not have a chance to learn [as a kid because hearing adults in my world did not think sign language was a real language].

That's the one piece. As far as the [Monday] interview went I was trying to be [an ASL interpreter for Patrick] and read Adeline's lips at the same time and speak English while also carrying out the interview. So I understand why Marie-Paule [the supervisor overseeing the deaf teachers] feels pressured but I feel pressured too. So I understand that some of you may have felt that the interview we had on Monday didn't go the way we wanted to, but for me, the language pieces was missing completely. I was doing for everyone else but I wasn't doing for me, what I was doing—I thought—was pretty selfless. I'm not trying to make you feel bad, I'm trying to make sure you understand because doing an interview means that I have to think about the questions that I have to ask you so I at the end of the project can write a really good book about this. I have a heavy burden to make this book represent what you want it to represent. I can't make a mistake—I feel a heavy responsibility because you have given me so much time and you have been so supportive with this project and to me I have another responsibility to deaf children—if I fail at what I do—deaf children will keep experiencing the kind of education that I experienced, which is no access to sign language, which is being alone all the time [in mainstream settings without deaf peers], so we all share this burden together. I think I was carrying this burden alone but now I'm telling you I can't [carry this burden alone... I want to make sure that communication [between us] is clear [because your perspectives are important and unique].

So today I'm going to speak in English. I want to sign with you but [that will impede our project] as Adeline is still learning ASL too and it's not fair to her to sacrifice her ability to communicate to you and it's not okay to do some [pidgin-like] LSF [mixed] with ASL [as suggested by some] because that means we'll miss things that are important. We can do [a mix of LSF and ASL] when we socialize and spend time together at night, that's fine but during this time, this is real work we have to make sure that everyone is clear because what if we interpret something you say that you did not want to say? That would be horrible and I would feel terrible, that would be a very big burden for me. So when we're in here [doing interviews], I have will have to use the language that I know best—English—is that okay? Does anyone have anything to say?

Jerome: It's better for everyone [if you use English].

Catherine: It's true that Monday night was a bad day for everyone, we had other meetings, and other obligations... It's not at all against you or anything, it's that we had many things to do at the same time. And, for me, I was there on Monday night, on Tuesday night I came [for the parent interviews] as a parent and I am here again this morning so the



involvement to come is there but we all had other constraints. It's not against you at all but it's just the way it is, personally I had no other choice [to come as many times to be a participant in interviews].

Jerome: ...I agree with you [Catherine]. I must say it's June, end of the year, you [VALENTE] come here and we're all tired, children are tired. At the end of the year there are always many things to do, reports to write, preparing and readying for next year, everything is happening at the same time.

## The "Fake Deafie" Episode and the Interview Transcript

### Researcher Anxieties

I now cringe when I read this. What I see now is how I experienced the previous failed interview through the later "fake deafie" comment as an attack on my status as a member of the deaf community and responded by becoming defensive, scolding my interviewees. The "fake deafie" comment struck at the heart of unlimited anxieties about my inadequacies as a signer and newcomer to the deaf community back home in the United States as well as in France.

The decision to either raise or not directly raise the "fake deafie" comment to the group was complicated. Ultimately, my conscious decision not to address it was based on my fear that pushing the point on this hurtful phrase might jeopardize the project or infringe on French customs having to deal with this kind of tension. I believed I had already offended them and worried about offending them further with my anger in ways that would be counterproductive.

Re-reading my "monologue" in this transcript, I can pick out the four major points I was trying to make, all strung together by intense feelings, particularly of anxiety and defensiveness. First, at the opening of the interview, I explained that under the circumstances, we had to make a choice as to whether Patrick would or would not come on this trip to Ramonville given that no interpreters were available. I explained Patrick decided "yes" and I agreed with him. Next, I apologized for attempting to simultaneously interpret for Patrick while I was conducting the interview in English, then shifted to explaining my own difficulties being without an ASL interpreter and reading Adeline's lips to understand. After that, much to my on-going embarrassment, I simultaneously scold and plead with those in the group who I imagine called me a "fake deafie" by launching into a rant about "deaf-on-deaf crime."

When laying side-by-side my vignette "fake deafie" and the transcript, I can clearly see how my anxieties about being a newcomer to the deaf community makes me over-read everything as having something to do with deaf politics. I can now clearly see that I was mapping my own newcomer deaf identity and desire onto the scene. I was a newcomer not only to the American deaf signing community but, in this instance, also the southern French deaf signing community I was studying in Ramonville. Looking back now, I can also see how

I was mapping my own anxieties about how I understood American deaf identity politics as already excluding me in important ways onto this scene. My anxiety has been fueled by my sense of the inadequacy of my membership in all of these worlds. I was more than just a random anthropologist coming to some new village but instead was someone who was trying to make my way into deaf cultural communities –and in a decidedly non-anthropological way, I overlaid politics onto the scene.

This situation was complicated in two ways: I was a novice to deaf politics but also to French deaf politics. And, having two assistants more versed in navigating the signing and French scene made me also feel inadequate. Then there is also the issue of Patrick being a strong signer who knew not only how to navigate with ASL but also knew how to communicate across various international sign languages. Patrick was gifted in his use of sign and my attempt to interpret was not only for the benefit of Patrick but also was a way to perform to my informants my own new deaf, signing identity.

In response to my scolding, the informants took two tacks. Jerome responded that it's best for everyone that I speak in English, in essence telling me that they don't have any problem with my using the language most familiar to me. The teachers respond by telling me that the issue most pressing for them is something much more mundane—that the interview didn't go well because of work and family obligations competing for their time and because of being tired because of the long school day and school year. When the focus group teachers did not take up the “fake deafie” issue or my discussion of oppression but instead raised new issues unrelated to what I thought it had to do with, I was relieved as it seemed if there was any issue - it was settled.

In the days afterward, I did not address the “fake deafie” comment with the person who told me about it because they did not themselves raise the issue again. Later I learned whatever had been told to me about the “fake deafie” comment was surely either misinterpreted by me or by the person who told me. Apparently, there was conversation in the group of teachers about worrying Patrick would feel excluded, even as they understood he came knowing we could not secure an ASL interpreter. A while later, I learned that there was also discussion in the group outside the interviews indicating that informants were worried about me too at the time. Some in the group expressed empathy to me being a newcomer to the deaf, signing community. Because I was willing to be mollified by the responses that they were just tired and busy, I will never know whether in fact my informants had feelings about issues that in fact are important for understanding the internal politics of deaf communication norms and deaf differences.

### **The Anxiety of Interlocutors**

I have written about my own anxiety, but have said little about the possible anxiety of my informants. For the intersubjective fieldworker, to be methodologically reflexive means turning the gaze not only inward (as is exemplified by the “confessional turn” in ethnography) but also outward toward what Crapanzano (1992; 2010) calls “the Third” in the fieldwork. In

James Davies' introduction to the edited volume *Emotions in the Field* (2010), he describes Crapanzano's use of the Third:

“Whatever dominates, the Third will influence what and how things are experienced by all parties to the encounter. Emotions do not necessarily emerge only out of “self,” or even out of self in interaction with other (intersubjectivity); they may also emerge out of the structures that surreptitiously shape these intersubjective interactions” (p. 16).

Davies (2010) argues for the need to recover emotions from the margins of fieldwork methods. Davies explains that the primary task of the reflexive ethnographer is to ascertain how emotions that materialize in fieldwork can help us to meaningfully engage with interlocutors and the things that happen in or emerge from the field. A core historical critique of mainstream social science methodologies has been its lack of attention to emotions and sometimes outright rejection or devaluation of emotions. This traditional empiricist, rationalist stance “drew firm lines between the researching subject and the research subject” (Davies, 2010, p, 2).

Although I can't know, it is very possible that they were concerned about my capacity to do justice to something that was so critically important to them personally and politically. Most of the teachers themselves are deaf and some of them have children who are deaf. They all have a vested interest in deaf education. Those who are deaf were among the first deaf teachers to be certified by the French Ministry of Education. The *classe LSF* program was at that time an experimental bilingual education program under intense scrutiny by the Ministry and was just beginning to be held up as a national model for deaf bilingual education. At the same time, however, they were being asked to contribute time well beyond the parameters of the normal teaching day. Given that they were not able simply to use the French national curriculum but had to adapt it for their students, they were required to spend far more time than most teachers in preparation work. They also spent considerable time with the students' parents and families. The teachers understood the importance of the research that was being conducted, but felt stressed by the burdens of their responsibilities. The potential that I appeared in some ways to them as less than up to the task of representing their work may well have given rise to their own anxieties.

The response, “We were tired,” was doubtlessly true, but it might also be true that the informants had thoughts and feelings about the legitimacy of my deaf identity that could have added to the richness of the study's findings. At the same time, by exploring this in greater depth, I may have been able to get at some of the nuance of these kinds of responses. If there are in fact hierarchies in deaf belonging, what functions do those serve in the school and the community? Might they have anything to do with the kinds of pressures the teachers, parents and children experience? Given the commitment of all involved to improving the lives of deaf children, what kind of challenges do deaf communicative difference create and how might their responses to me have been reflective of legitimate frustrations. This takes me back to an

intersubjective approach to critical disability studies, wherein I can begin to imagine something at work that is bigger than me or my informants as individuals. In fact, when we shifted from my concerns into the actual interviewing material in that session, my informants were able to productively discuss our shared anxieties and burdens of doing and participating in this research project—both those anxieties and burdens as insiders to the deaf community tasked with giving rare, insider “voices” and those anxieties and burdens having to do with the mundane pressures of their daily lives.

### **Conclusion: Anxiety as a Tool for Critical Disability Studies Fieldworkers**

The stakes are high in writing about disability or deaf cultural life and have great potential to provoke intersubjective dynamics that enunciate individual, collective, and cultural anxiety. Under- and mis-represented communities such as the disabled and deaf have for so long been marginalized in larger society and in research that so often makes them the subject of normative responses to difference. For everyone in Ramonville, as is often the case of those participating in insider research, it was so important to provide honest, affirmative, and sophisticated responses to deaf daily life.

Recognizing the anxiety of the community and of the researcher can give rise to opportunities for difficult discussions within the community, including discussions of how to represent the issues raised for the larger readership of the research. To raise the issue of the “fake deafie” or even experiences of “deaf-on-deaf crime” is sensitive, an airing of the dirty laundry, because it raises criticisms that the outside community can use against the deaf community. This legitimate concern makes it difficult for the deaf community to consider the ways that we fail to support one another, and especially those who are newcomers to the community and/or to sign language. In my research, exploring anxieties can also help to flush out important cultural differences in how different cultures respond to deaf children. This allows things that are seen as natural or inevitable in a given culture to come under question. I want to make these implicit assumptions explicit and therefore make it clear how they are political choices. My goal is to expand our understanding of what is possible for deaf children.

What is so remarkable about my account of anxiety in fieldwork is how such accounts are rarely reported yet are really unremarkable in fieldwork. Our emotional and affective responses to fieldwork—our anxieties, fantasies, boredoms, surprise, pain, loneliness, anger, fear, and so on—these experiences are common to all fieldworkers, though they are especially common to fieldworkers doing critical disability studies work. In this conclusion, I argue for the need for researchers in critical disability studies to have a theory of anxiety. I also want to argue that this theory of anxiety needs to be a part of the critical disability studies researcher’s reflexivity toolkit. In short, this is necessary because the stakes for those of us doing critical disability studies research are so high for everyone. So-called “disabled” or rather deaf researchers like Patrick and myself are good examples the complexities of reflexivity as

insiders to the deaf experience who are conducting research on deaf kindergartners. Subjective and intersubjective phenomena that emerged in my fieldwork are equally as worthy of intellectual scrutiny as so-called traditional fieldwork data. As is clear from this case in Ramonville, how fieldworkers perceive their own lifeworlds and the lifeworlds of their informants drives not only how we are affected by the fieldwork but also how the fieldwork and our interlocutors are affected by us (and, in turn, us by them).

An intersubjective lens on fieldwork counters traditionalist arguments that objectivity can and should be achieved and, by extension, the argument that subjectivity impedes the accumulation of productive knowledge and research. The marginalizing of emotion from research is evidenced by the fact that such a small number research taps into the potential of emotion in comparison to traditional social science research. Davies (2010) argues it is ironic that this empirical, rationalist agenda so actively conceals or under-reports emotions nor attends to the critical ways our emotional responses affect fieldworkers and, in turn, affect the fieldwork and our interlocutors. This is especially true since “true” empiricism is supposed to be based on facts. And, it is a fact that emotions, like they are in everyday life, will be present in and affect our fieldwork, whether or not we acknowledge them and use them as a tool. I too want to call for the need for attending to emotions in fieldwork.

However, I find that anxiety in particular is pertinent to any critical disability studies project. This has to do with the fact that as critical disability studies fieldworkers we are tasked with advancing the political project of critical disability studies that at its core is about naming and responding to ablesist ways of knowing and being which also gives rise to oppressive systems and the subjectification of individuals with disabilities and, in my case, deaf folks. Critical disability studies needs to have a theory of anxiety. This theory of anxiety could have methodological implications for reflexive critical disability studies fieldwork as it takes into account the intersubjective. Circling back to the opening of this article and Devereux’s (1967) assertion that, “anxiety was not something to be avoided but is the driving force which propels our intellectual questings,” through an intersubjective lens we can see this is about not only my anxiety but a collective anxiety made up of the teachers, parents, Inspector, principals, and researcher anxieties (p. 12). Rather than avoiding it, anxiety may turn out to be one of our most important tools for being in relationship with self, other, and our experience of self with other in fieldwork (Stern, 1985; Crapanzano, 2003; Valente, 2015).

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