Collaging as Embodied Method: The Use of Collage in a Study of American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreters' Experiences

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Abstract

This methodological essay describes the generativity of collaborative collaging in a qualitative inquiry project with American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters who serve D/deaf students within a public university. Sign language interpreting is a demanding profession requiring physical endurance, creativity, and quick mental processing to switch between spoken and sign language. Interpreters' visual communicative culture aligns conceptually with the embodied arts-based, visual, and tactile research technique of collaging. We first introduce collaging scholarship to ground our discussion of using collaging as a method within this case study of ASL interpreters. We then provide an overview of ASL interpreter research and our case study to situate the collaging method used alongside other approaches, asking, "How was collaging a productive method for exploring interpreters' understanding of their work experiences?" We describe the use of the method and the productivity of interpreters' collaging for surfacing embodied experiences, fueling collaborative meaning-making, and showing rather than telling aspects of interpreters' labor in another expressive language. We conclude by identifying the value of collaborative collaging in this case study and for other researchers, issues, and contexts.

Keywords

arts-based research, collaging methods, collaborative methods, sign language interpreting

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In this methodological essay we focus on the method of collaborative collaging used in a case study of American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters who serve D/deaf students at what we call a Primarily Hearing Institution (PHI). Collaging, an art practice rooted historically in the fine arts, is among diverse arts-based inquiry practices that have expanded in the last four decades of developments in the field of qualitative inquiry. Arts-based approaches continue to develop as new questions and projects unfold (Mulvihill & Swaminathan, 2021). For some interpretivist, critical, and feminist studies, arts-based research methods reflect and nurture diverse, even oppositional (Raaberg, 1998), ways of knowing. They can surface and express emotion (Chilton & Scotti, 2014). The use of collaging as an arts-based method in qualitative inquiry projects involves a researcher or participant/s identifying compelling images, words, scraps, textured materials, and fragments, extracting those materials from the original context, and rearranging them in new displays. Both the process of collaging and the images participants create are potentially evocative. Collaging is among the methods that resist and stretch the norms of inquiry by refusing orality or writing as the central anchors for inquiring and instead explore and communicate through creative methods in the journey to know and become.

Collaging can serve inquiry projects in varied ways whether alone or in combination with other methods (Mulvihill & Swaminathan, 2021). Gerstenblatt (2013) suggests that collaging, with other tools, encourages varied "linguistic and non-linguistic representations to articulate authentic lived experience" (p. 294). As researchers have noted of drawing methodologies (e.g., Kearney & Hyle, 2004), engaging in creative processes can surface

unexpected thoughts, emotions, and insights brimming beneath conscious cognitive and analytic processes. Some have thus used collaging as a site for conceptualizing aspects of the research and a form of memo-ing to deepen experiential and reflective dimensions of research (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010). Lahman et al. (2021), for example, used collaging with ten students to explore researcher identity in a course on the methodology of portraiture. The group engaged in collage to reflect on their identities as researchers, produced collage self-portraits, and wrote reflections about their processes. Together, their portraits captured a contingent group experience and moment of time in their development as researchers. Like written memos, processing through the tactile and visual engagement of collaging can open up insights, ideas, and relationships in the inquiry process to enable seeing, imagining, and knowing differently. In this sense, inquirers might conceive of collaging (and painting, drawing, and mapping) as an arts-based corollary to Laurel Richardson's conceptualization of writing *as* inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), a process of seeking, thinking, and discovery through creative forms rather than written words central to conventional research. Collaging invites a process of discovery and becoming through the process of engaging in it.

Collaging can also serve as a data source and method of data collection to accompany interviews and other forms of qualitative engagement. Participants might create collages as a way to begin reflecting on the topic of interest, to explore and represent their experiences, and to surface thoughts and insights through the process that can fuel the individual or group oral dialogue that might follow. The collaging process can also serve analysis and representation of discoveries in inquiry. Lahman et al. (2021), for instance, used collage both as process and product. Jongeward (2009) suggests collage enables "systematically identifying reoccurring themes and, in the process, gives form to ideas, intuitions, feelings, and insights that may escape rational thought processes" (Chilton & Scotti, 2014, p. 164). For Gerstenblatt (2013), collaging provides a way to both seek and represent meaning, reflecting postmodern thought which challenges a unidimensional or objective reality (p. 295). In her compelling study of her African American family's creation of an art installation about the loss of a family home, Gerstenblatt (2013) engaged in collaging as a key analytic and representational approach to visualize the narratives the family delivered orally. She drew from photographs and materials related to the project, some of which participants provided, to create the collages that blended participants' experiences with her interpretation and artistic intuition. As an artist, she found the approach enabled her to surface rich dimensions of the family's experiences.

Within turns to post-qualitative inquiry, inquirers have surfaced other avenues of engagement through using collaging as one of many practices equal to and alongside theory and writing as a way to wonder, pause, and ponder, to stir and brew ideas until new wonderings arise to spur additional paths of inquiry (Holbrook & Pourchier, 2014). Rather than conceptualizing arts-based practices as vehicles to surface emotion, or to reflect aspects of the real, post-qualitative inquirers might engage in art-making as a fragile, contingent creation and site of theorizing. For post inquiry lines of flight, collagers might embrace creative processes as constitutive of new materialist ontologies and sense-making beyond epistemological commitments to formal findings, discoveries, or meanings. They might conceptualize and experience the process of art-making as the inquiry and as part of an ongoing set of practices that co-constitute the inquirer, the questions, and the materials they use to enable new ways of seeing and being.

Despite the promise of collaging and other arts-based methods for a variety of inquiries, we did not identify any scholarship using arts-based methods with interpreters. With these developments in qualitative collaging as our backdrop, we describe the process of using collaging as a method in a case study involving ASL interpreters who serve D/deaf students in a university context (Woodall-Greene, 2021) and our continuing reflections on its value long after the study. Rather than conceptualizing visual and creative methods as "alternative"

qualitative approaches, as some describe arts-based tools, we underscore that researchers must conceptually align and contextualize varied approaches for the research focus and for the participants under study. Collaging methods transcend verbal engagements to embrace overtly embodied and collaborative dimensions valuable for those working within visual D/deaf cultures in a dominant hearing world. Having engaged in a meaningful process of collaborative collaging together in a pedagogical environment years ago, we were drawn to its promise as a research method with ASL interpreters who use visuals, signals, and team-based approaches to communicate in their daily work. We were interested in the ways the visual, embodied, and tactile components of the method as well as collaborative collaging might be generative for a study of professionals who engage daily in aural and visual work to communicate and support D/deaf equity.

In this manuscript, we detail our experience working with and theorizing a collaging method for research and our continuing reflections on its value. Our goal is to describe the role of collaging within a qualitative case study to demonstrate the rationale, processes, and productivity of the method, the types of data it generated, and its potential usefulness for this and other studies. We provide the context of ASL interpreter research to situate the collaging method we used in the case study alongside other approaches, asking, "How was collaging a productive method for exploring interpreters' understanding of their work experiences?" We detail the importance of research on ASL interpreters' labor to contextualize our choice in collaging as a key method. We describe using the method and the productivity of interpreters' collaging experiences for surfacing emotion, taking stock of experiences, fueling collaborative meaning-making, and showing rather than solely telling aspects of interpreters' labor through an expressive, embodied, non-oral vehicle of communication. We conclude by identifying the value of collaborative collaging in the case study and for other researchers, issues, and contexts.

The Case Study in Which We Used Collaging: ASL Interpreters' Experiences in a University Context

This descriptive case study using collaging focused on ASL interpreters' experiences working in one university context in the United States. Our experience with the embodied and reflexive nature of collaging in a classroom made the method particularly compelling for a study on interpreters' experiences. Little research focuses on ASL interpreters' embodied experiences and labor within the field of higher education (Pirone et al., 2018; Powell, 2013). Yet the ASL interpreting profession involves nuanced physical and cognitive skills developed over many years with additional specialized skills necessary for legal, medical, and university contexts. This female-dominated caring profession has demanding physical requirements that necessitate dexterity, speed, and endurance. Physically producing and mentally processing the language through hand and finger signs, facial expressions, and full body movements are strenuous activities. When interpreting for spoken languages, the translating process reflects an alternating method in which one person speaks at a time. The speakers use a pause in the language processing for the translation to occur. In contrast, with sign language, translation happens almost simultaneously; as a hearing person speaks, the interpreter signs. As the D/deaf person signs, the hearing interpreter will voice what he, she, or they sign. The labor is intense: an interpreter in the case study noted the challenge of processing visual, aural, and motor functions all at once. In an interview, she emphasized the layers of this work. She said, interpreters "are processing information while giving new information while receiving other information… it's mentally so draining…" This process has direct implications for D/deaf access within dominant-hearing spaces. Because of the demands of interpreting, the standard practice in the field is working in teams of two and switching every 20 minutes to ensure communication quality. Without teams, the participant emphasized, "the quality goes down."

We emphasize the physical demands of the profession to situate our use of collage and qualitative inquiry because of the importance of understanding interpreters' experiences in a field with a high level of attrition costly for both the profession and for D/deaf educational access and equity. Research in other areas of ASL is extensive, and often experimental or quantitative. Scholarship focuses on ways to improve communication and accuracy (Delisle et al., 2005; Pirone et al., 2018), the complexities of interpreting for diverse groups and in varied contexts (Cogen & Cokely, 2015; Mindess, 2014), and the high turnover rates in the field causing a lack of interpreters (Cogen & Cokely, 2015; Dean & Pollard, 2001; Schwenke, 2015). Much of this research base is usefully technical as D/deaf studies scholars advance communicative justice and access for minoritized D/deaf people in aural cultures. Many, in fact, consider ASL interpreting a social justice profession (McCartney, 2017). Research has also focused on various stressors that lead to ASL interpreter burnout (Bower, 2015; Qin, et al., 2008; Schwenke, 2015), causing wide-scale attrition with serious implications for having sufficient skilled communicators to serve the D/deaf community in the diverse communicative contexts needed. The rate of interpreter attrition underscores the importance of amplifying ASL interpreters' voices and meaning-making of their labor in context, necessitating the use of qualitative inquiry.

This institutional review board (IRB) approved case study (Woodall-Greene, 2021) involving collaging was carried out in a public university with a dominant hearing student body, staff, and faculty – a Primarily Hearing Institution (PHI). Case study methodology allows for an in-depth holistic and real-world perspective of a phenomenon in depth and detail (Stake, 1995). Multiple methods were used to gather data, including collaging, as part of a descriptive case study focused on the value of understanding a single phenomenon or case in its natural context and its insights for other contexts; in this case, the interpreters who worked in the setting (Stake, 1995). Given the context of the case, a descriptive case study seemed most appropriate to encompass the lived experiences of interpreters at the university. The research questions focused on (1) participants' lived experiences and perceptions of interpreting in their context and (2) the insights they reveal into the PHI culture. These questions reflected our interest in how interpreters experienced and navigated their jobs, the challenges of doing so, and how these experiences reflected the structure and culture of the context under study.

The institution in which this study took place serves a small number of D/deaf students in comparison to the hearing population but attracts a larger number of members of the D/deaf community than other institutions in the region. It serves the community through providing ASL courses, varied interpreters through the dis/ability service office, and some skilled interpreters that can communicate within diverse academic fields intrinsic to a university culture. These skills include interpreting for varied academic disciplines (e.g., from science to literature), levels of courses (introductory to graduate), and needs (medical communication versus social services). Ableism, which is the unspoken and entrenched norm that its stakeholders are able-bodied, shapes the culture and structure at the university. In terms of this case, the campus is fully oriented and designed to serve the majority *hearing* members of the community. Research on ASL interpreters is thus part of an important trajectory in inquiry that can surface the nuances of ableism in campus actions and understanding interpreters' critical and challenging work in providing educational access to D/deaf students.

The case focused on seven ASL interpreters who worked in the setting to explore the contours of their work life in depth and detail (Stake, 1995). All participants were women. Six identified as white and one identified as white and Native American. All the women are highly experienced interpreters ranging from five to 30 years of experience interpreting professionally as well as two interpreters with D/deaf parents who have a lifetime's worth of experience. Five of the seven interpreters are between the ages of 20 and 30, with the other two interpreters in the 40 to 50 age range. The second author, an interpreter, identified and recruited the

interpreters through the purposive sampling method common in qualitative inquiry that targets "information-rich" cases that by their nature "[illuminate] the inquiry question being investigated" (Patton, 2014, p. 264). We also used a time-location sampling technique (Patton, 2014) which samples participants from a specific population that is bounded by time and place. The study focused on interpreters currently employed at the university or who had worked there in the last two years, reaching out to potential participants using email and phone calls.

Case study methodologies allow for diverse forms of data gathering aligned with exploring the case in depth and detail (Stake, 1995), making it among the methodologies amenable to arts-based approaches such as collaging. The methods included individual interviews, a focus group with group collaging (which we describe at greater length below), observations of interpreting events on campus, and formal and informal institutional documents such as policies and interpreters' schedules to situate the case in context. These aspects of the case helped amplify attention to interpreters' varied interactions and forms of labor on a university campus. Both individual and focus group interviews were used because researchers have noted their value to deepen understanding by providing space for individual confidences as well as group meaning making (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). Individual interviews were conducted first, ranging in length from one to several hours each. The semi-structured and open-ended interviews focused on lived experiences working at the university. Questions and discussion topics focused on issues related to interpreters' work experiences and perceptions in their work contexts. Topics included the interpreters' relationships with the D/deaf community, their pathways to the interpreting profession, their workload, skills and background knowledge which help them in the field, rewards and recognition as workers, resources which help them succeed, and their work/life balance.

Collaging Methods in the Study

In this section we describe our collaging methods and data sources in detail. After completing the individual interviews, the second author used focus group interviews to fulfill the study's goal of using multiple forms of data gathering to help understand interpreters' experiences. We amplified the collaborative dialogic aim of the focus group through using collaging. The focus group collaging was divided into three steps, all of which occurred during one group meeting to accommodate busy schedules. The full session lasted two hours. The first part was a sustained focus group discussion about interpreters' work experiences, the second segment was engaging in collaborative collaging, and the third part involved discussing the collages. The focus group and collage session was audio recorded for oral dialogue, including the silences while working, and all attendees participated in making a collage.

Methodologically, focus groups provide "interactional data" as participants engage in discussion with one another to enhance depth and understanding in inquiry (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008, p. 229). When members of a group interact with one another through commenting, questioning, or remembering an experience that seems similar to theirs, these interactions can provide additional depth and nuance that expands the content of individual interviews (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008, p. 229). The focus groups also produce interactional data differently than individual interviewing in fueling collaborative meaning making. Aligned with the team-based process that interpreters often follow, the collaging focus group thus reflected a collective team-based orientation to methods aligned with interpreters' work. We also hoped collaging would provide a site of inquiry and vehicle for generating and expressing feelings of interpreters' embodied experiences to deepen or texture the spoken data, as Chilton and Scotti (2014) noted of participants in their study. While all research practices are embodied (e.g., Ellingson, 2017), collaging requires participants to intentionally use and become conscious of their bodies through sight, interaction, and tactile engagements.

To begin the focus group, the researcher first focused on questions central to the inquiry, such as how the participants describe their working experiences and their perceptions of the institutional culture and contextual factors that shape their professional labor. Other questions focused on ways they felt supported and challenged in their environments. This sustained discussion surfaced varied aspects of interpreters' work experiences. The focus group conversation flowed far more robustly and freely than in the individual interviews. During the focus group, the facilitator hardly needed to ask questions to encourage conversation. The participants followed avenues of thought they felt were necessary. It was refreshing to see them take control in sharing their individual and group perspectives on interpreting, their work settings, and experiences in this unique field. Although all participants can sign, the focus group participants primarily spoke English during the group conversation. Yet, they occasionally used an ASL sign to convey or emphasize a point, which is common when interpreters gather to discuss their work. Like code switching in spoken language, conveying some concepts in ASL is sometimes easier than through English. However, the conversation primarily unfolded in English with ASL signs as a support when needed.

At the end of the focus group conversation, after a short break, the group began the collaging project. To initiate the collaborative collaging, the researcher provided snacks and refreshments, as well as magazines, cardstock papers, scissors, and glue for the collaging. Members interacted as they rummaged through the materials provided. She then verbally posed the question, "What does it feel like to be an interpreter?" Participants passed magazines back and forth around the big table for about 45 minutes, creating varied representations of their experiences. In the beginning, conversation among the women was sparse as they searched through magazines for images that appealed to them. After some time, conversation started, and the topics included occasionally focusing on work, such as asking for advice on handling scenarios with D/deaf and hearing community members. Other topics were the process of collaging. It was peaceful to sit in the room with fellow interpreters and witness them wrestling with the prompt and using the diverse resources to create visual responses.

In the third step of the collaborative focus group collaging method, interpreters discussed their collages. When discussing collages, interpreters shared their different thoughts, using emotional, serious, and matter-of-fact tones. The discussion also reflected both laughter and tears. The collages invited reflection about and produced a nonverbal representation from a situated moment in time of interpreters' felt experiences in their profession. The content consisted of a mix of pictures and words with some reflecting heavier use of words and phrases than others (see Figures below). Collage phrases included, "you forget everything," "I'm proud to be an interpreter," and "flexibility." The images include waterfalls, outlines of heads, coffee, and a tissue box, among other colorful visuals.

Collage's Generativity for ASL Research

Based on the importance of visuals to ASL work, we believe artistically representing interpreting labor aided in surfacing and further analyzing the embodied contours of their work as professionals. We discuss three particularly generative aspects of collaging that we continue to process long after the engagements (Woodall-Greene & Bailey, 2021). First, both the collaging process and resulting collages produced examples articulated in interviews and extended that information. We describe aspects of the collaging that reflected, distilled, or extended points gleaned from interviewing. Second, other experiential dimensions of the process surfaced. As other scholars who have used collage have experienced with their participants (e.g., Lahman, et al., 2014), the collaging process itself propelled a reflective process for interpreters in conceptualizing and creating meaning through the material production of collages, both individually and collaboratively. The collaborative power of the

method was, in fact, evident in their engagement with the process. The participants recounted the stories behind the pieces of their collages, remembering with laughter, tears, or pride as they presented their work. The emotional connection of understanding and support led all participants to describe the collaging experience as a "team building" endeavor and to state that they would enjoy doing this again.

Third, we see the embodied collaborative collaging process as another form of communication and language. Intentionally trying to create a collage of experiences required participants to grapple with representing their stories visually through this different medium (see also Kearney & Hyle, 2004). Collaging seems to foreground in data generation the embodied practices (Ellingson, 2017) of ASL interpreting in an overtly visual field. Ellingson (2017) notes how researchers ignore multi-sensory embodiment central to interactions in the field in favor of prioritizing the aural and spoken dimensions as "data." This collaging data went beyond oral and aural aspects of engagement in qualitative inquiry; it included the materiality and messages of the collages interpreters produced, the silence and engagement as they moved their hands and bodies to create the collages, and the laughter and commentary they shared in community around the table during and after the collaging. Differing from both oral and sign languages, the collaging process required them to intentionally use their hands, bodies, and materials to both create and communicate feelings and experiences as workers.

We provide examples of how the collaging process and collages enriched the other spoken expressions in the case study to teach lessons the women learned along their interpreting journeys. In responding to the collaging prompt focusing on feelings, they noted important embodied actions, like "thinking ahead" and "make eye contact," and conveyed work challenges and coping skills based on body demands, environment, and culture. For instance, one experienced interpreter discussed the range of feelings emerging from her collage:

> When you're mentally exhausted it's a lot physically, too. I mean… interpreting is a lot of mental work but it is a lot of physical [work] in terms of like your shoulders, your back, your arms. I mean I would have knots in my shoulder, like I didn't realize I carry the tension naturally there… I mean just like when you feel like, out. You feel delusional.

The themes in this interpreter's reflections are similar to other collages. Varied aspects collaboratively represent the physical and mental toll of interpreting. The fragments and snippets constituting the collages seemed to underscore fragmented bodily experiences. For instance, interpreters used images of a Tylenol Extra Strength product and a tissue box and word clippings of "thanking their bodies" and "Mind Games" to convey pain, emotion, gratitude, and labor. Like her descriptions of feeling "delusional" and "out of it," other interpreters represented the body being used, worn out, and needing care to recharge for the next assignment. The women included images representing the need for resources or recharging through coffee and breaks, holding warm coffee to ease pain, and using cool muscle cream on forearms throughout the day to cope with the muscle aches and fatigue signing requires. They discussed how interpreters need to focus and attend to appearance because they were always the focus of curiosity in classes as they interpreted for D/deaf students. They also described motivation to stay in the field. We briefly discuss each collage below.

Figure A
"Agent of Change"

The first collage (Figure A), which the participant labeled "Agent of Change," includes a potted plant, a Tylenol advertisement, a picture of coffee, and a picture of a brain. Words and phrases are also scattered across the page which include, "What I learned from," "*from* the heart," "Agent of Change," and "I have no regrets." The references to the Tylenol and the large word "Pain" reflect the pain the interpreter often felt while at work. She would use the medication to dull the pain and to give her the strength to finish the day.

While her comment is experiential, responding to the prompt, it also points to structural and cultural issues shaping the setting that strain the professionals within it (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Scholarship reflects many instances of physical fatigue which interpreters experience (Bower, 2015; Schwenke, 2015) as individual but are in fact collective. Having sufficient teams, breaks, skilled interpreters, and resources are structural rather than individual issues. The common feelings represented in collages effectively underscore, through a visual collective portrait, issues shaping the interpreting field more broadly. The images also amplify points shared in interviews. Similarly, literature cites mental fatigue as a pressing factor in turnover (Crezee et al., 2015). By referencing the picture of the brain, this interpreter shows her mental fatigue through the demands of processing information in this role. The colors in this collage are primarily dull and dark. She notes, "a lot of us we're talking about like what it mentally takes to do this [here in this image I'm]…trying to connect the mental with the physical because it is one entity." She links cognitive processing with the ability to communicate effectively.

The second collage (Figure B) is labeled as "I was meant to do it" because the interpreter intentionally created this phrase. Unlike the other collages, this collage primarily

consists of phrases. The portion "I was meant to" is found as one piece and "Do" and "IT" are created from separate pages of the magazine. The interpreter felt inspired by the initial phrase of "I was meant to" and found her own way to complete her thought. The remainder of the page is filled with words or phrases. The only picture found on the page is that of a tissue box.

Figure B
"I was meant to do it"

      Unlike the majority of collages and interviews, the phrases in this collage mostly provide pieces of advice on how to succeed in the field. This interpreter has many years of experience and has native fluency of ASL because of her D/deaf family members. The angle she took through her collage reflects the stage of her career as a mentor rather than mentee, a teacher rather than student. Her knowledge and experience with the language provides access to both of her communities (family and work), and is evidenced in the words she chose for her collage. Some phrases act as tips that are inspired through her teaching side of the profession. Several capture interpreters' expectations of professionalism through presentation of self in the role. These phrases include, "Call for backup," "Act Natural," "Game Face," "Know the Rules," "Always Discreet," "Pay Attention to Get Attention," and "Don't Wait for People to Read Your Mind." This is what she would say is needed to survive, even thrive, in this field. As if speaking to a student, this interpreter swiftly reminded all of us the actions, work, and commitment necessary to remain effective. A point that echoed the interviews was the pressing needs of the field. The "Recently Discovered" phrase emphasized, "[the field] is constantly

[changing]. There's new things that they're learning, new things coming out. It's constantly changing new vocabulary," and interpreters have to keep up with their skills.

As with any creative work, the interpreter's use of succinct phrases rather than images reflect her preferences in representing her experiences. Because data generation through collaging manifests from personal choices, contingencies, and context, the choice of short excerpts and fragments rather than colorful visuals might reflect her investment in this research exchange in conveying core points directly and succinctly to the facilitator, other interpreters in the room, and the eventual research audience. These summative points, laid out cleanly on the white background, seem to distill essential points about interpreting as a field that long transcripts might have buried. This interpreter's distilling collaging work aligns with her emphasis on the importance of the ASL *profession,* as her comments about her collage describe. Her wording remains focused on embodiment and comportment, holding and managing the body, as part of the professional role, even though she notes front and center in her collage, "behind closed doors it's tense." She lingered on her discussion of the "Power for Good" phrase and its layered meanings for the field. She reflected,

> In what we do there's a lot of power in it and we can really screw up people's lives and take advantage, too, from different things that we get exposed to or know about and learn about. If we aren't ethical.

Her words and tone conveyed a cautionary emphasis, even a warning, as if she was reminding those in the room and research readers that interpreters are engaged in vital ethical work. This form of power can be misused. In this example, the collage seemed to serve both as a form of data distilling key points and a form of elicitation propelling her to expand the significance of her short excerpts orally. Reflecting another professional need in the field, she advocates for mentors to teach ethics and discuss how to handle difficult situations in their roles. By explicitly folding these reminders into her collage and discussion, she adds material absent from her individual interview.

The sole image on the piece, the tissue box, symbolically reflects the emotional and physical aspects of her labor. The investment of time, energy, and effort all coalesce into a strong commitment to the profession and community. Interpreters are intimately aware of the struggles the D/deaf community faces to be heard and recognized (McCartney, 2017). This interpreter has dedicated her life to accessibility through this profession and she is communicating to the viewers the work involves both heartache and joy. The tissues convey her passion and dedication to a field vital to her family and the words written across the top of the pink square saying, "I Was Meant to Do IT."

The third collage (Figure C.) is titled "Proud to be an Interpreter" to reflect the creative form of the word "interpreter". The artist chose individual letters and taped them together to create the word. Creating the "interpreter" in this manner draws attention to the uniqueness of the word and multidimensional aspects of the profession; she could not locate the word in the magazines she scanned through, so she made her own word – much like the work of improvisation in signing. When specialized words in academic fields, for instance, don't have an established associated sign, the interpreter fashions through signing individual letters that convey the idea. It is the only word on the piece that takes this form, and it runs off the page, becoming a focal point of communication about her piece.

Complementing and extending experiences shared in interviews, other phrases and images refer to the interpreter's body, including "Treat with Love" and "I'd Like to Thank My…" and she found the word "body" to complete her phrase. She commented orally, "a lot of times interpreters aren't viewed as people like we talked about today." As scholars have noted, interpreters are often objectified as instruments to deliver language for others (Crezee,

et al., 2015; McCartney, 2017). She continued, "And so, I just wanted to remind myself to treat other interpreters with love and also treat myself with love… [I] don't give my body enough thanks. And I don't do enough self-care or self-love." Some other phrases produced through collaging focus on the character of the work itself, such as, "Energy," "Thinking Ahead," and "To Respond Lightening Fast." The embodied aspects of interpreting evident here are speed and planning.
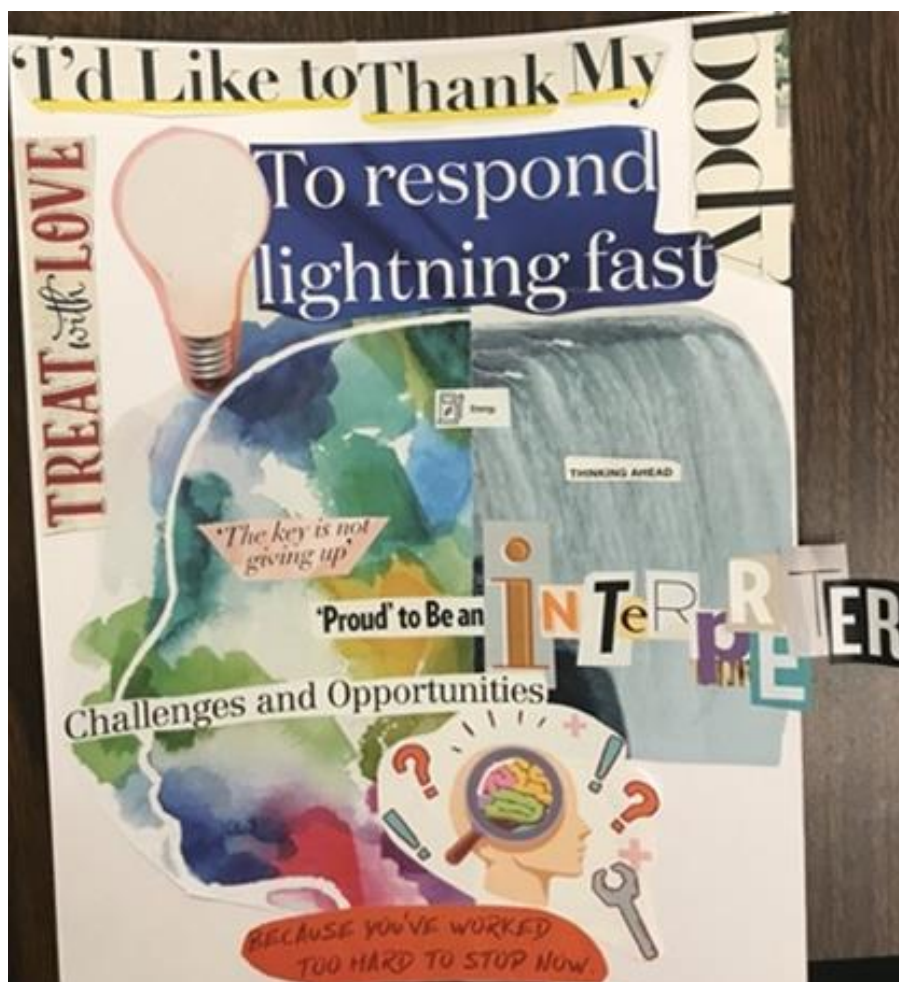

Figure C
"Proud to be an Interpreter"

Her collage notes the aftereffects of interpreting labor that stretch beyond a specific interpreting assignment as well. In referencing her collage, she describes: "my mind just feels overwhelmed or when I leave really any interpreting situation. I kind of feel like the back half and the front half are just falling away and I don't know how to control that really physically and emotionally." As Figure B also conveys, interpreters need to adopt a professional demeanor in their work that includes how they manage and dress their bodies, so their movements and clothing do not distract from the work of communicating the language. In contrast to being "all smiles for the camera" (Figure B) when one is on the job, as an embodied worker at day's end, the interpreter draws attention to the body, such as the head and waterfall behind it, and she reflects, "this is how I feel … after a day of work." The head communicates the mental toll of interpreting and the waterfall represents the draining of physical and emotional strength. There is gratitude for the body as well, which did not emerge in interviews.

The shared experiences of interpreters' labor and collaborative meaning-making is evident in the fourth collage (Figure D). This collage also indicates the ways collaging surfaced various parts of the body and feelings of embodiment interpreters connected to their labor. It shows similar images and phrasing as the previous collages. During the discussion, this interpreter made the connection immediately that three of the four collages had images of heads on them. Commenting on why she thought the collages had colorful heads as major focal points, she explained, "there's a lot going on up there. There's just a lot to think about. A lot to process a lot of the time." The representation surfaced a common experience that grounded the work in images of the body, particularly the head and brain. Having this physical representation of this aspect of interpreting speaks to the value of visual and creative methodologies for representing experience in ways that augment or extend interviewing. They can distill, highlight, and reveal. These collages collectively used a multi-dimensional and visual language to powerfully frame a sensory experience in their roles.
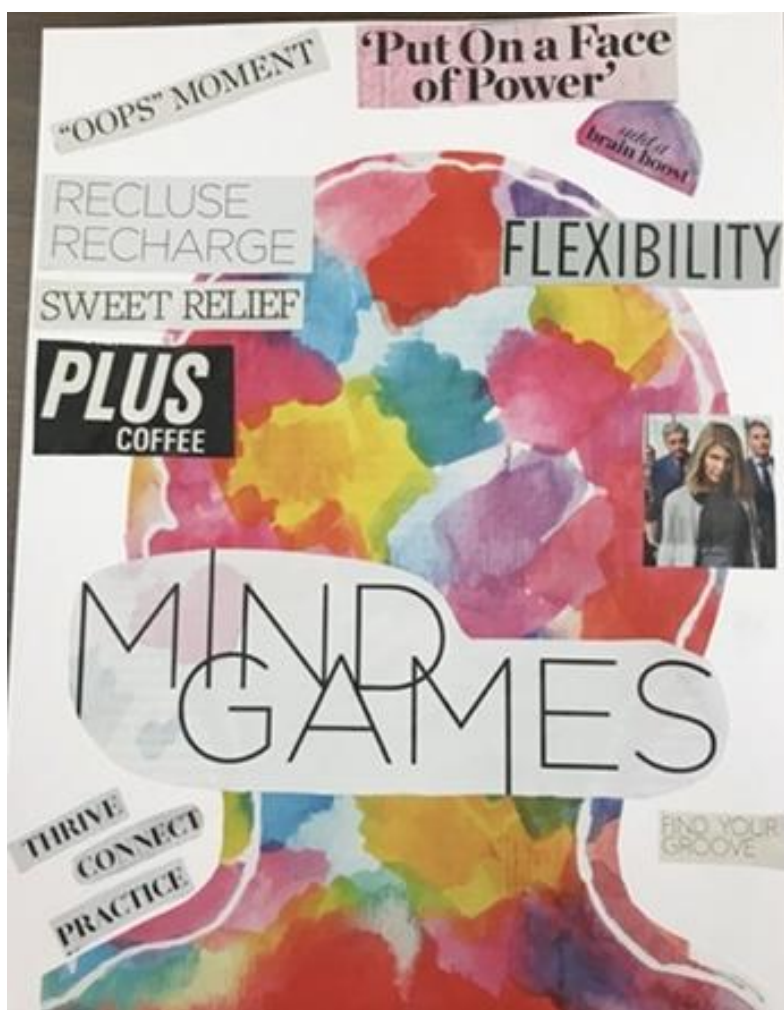

Figure D
"Thrive, Connect, Practice."

Items on this collage common to others and also evident in interviews are the need to intentionally take care of their bodies and minds. This interpreter spoke of her quote "Recluse and Recharge" as her tactic after interpreting assignments, as she explains that "most of the time I'm like, 'I gotta get out of here I got to recharge.'" The other collages connect this theme through images of coffee and makeup to freshen up after a challenging day. In the interviews,

the participants referred to feeling overwhelmed with insufficient self-care; the collages revealed small examples of squeezing in bodily care before or throughout their day.

Conclusion and Implications

This methodological essay draws from a qualitative descriptive case study (Stake, 1995) conducted with university sign language interpreters using collaborative collaging as a key method. We continued to reflect on the generativity of this method well after the study was complete because its rich methodological dimensions continued to unfold with further reflection, reading, and discussion. As Patton (2014) notes of qualitative inquiry, "the complete analysis – isn't." The collaging details, the approach to the method, and our reflections demonstrate how engaging in collaborative collaging in even a brief session of two hours duration is productive in varied ways. Here we focus on the productivity of the method for the women in the study, and the study purpose, and suggest its value for other contexts and topics. The collaging methods in this study complemented and extended interpreters' expressions of the embodied experiences in their jobs, offered an enjoyable, creative, and collective experience among interpreters, provided opportunities to reflect and process common experiences through a unique communicative medium, and importantly, conceptually aligned with the communicative culture central to ASL interpreting that primarily uses motions and visuals rather than speech, providing another avenue of communication.

The collaging approach underscored and extended the nuances of the embodied demands of interpreters' labor – the descriptions of the felt sensory dimensions of being in one's body in carrying out this specialized work. Vachelli (2018), too, discussed the embodied dimensions of collaging in her study with women who were refugees or migrants. Importantly, both the process of collaging and the discussion of collages involved and conveyed experiential dimensions of the field of this unique social justice role (McCartney, 2017). Yet collaging offered a process of embodied reflection and (re)creation, of (re)presenting felt experiences creatively, and an avenue for furthering awareness and dialogue about their work through showing rather than only telling. Collaging invites heterogeneity and multivocality (Vaughan, 2005); Extracting images from one context and displacing them into another generated multidimensional representations of phenomena aligned with their labor. Interpreters also recognized commonalities in their collages, such as representations of heads and bodily disassociation from fatigue.

We also suggest that collaging collectively about a shared professional role fostered embodied engagement for representing and discussing shared feelings of being misunderstood, unsupported, and weary, as well as committed to a worthy profession. As Boyd (2017) found in her feminist study using arts-based methods, collaborative creative projects can foster a sense of group belonging (p.72). Many do not see interpreters as skilled professionals; instead, some people outside the profession objectify interpreters' bodies as tools (Crezee et al., 2015; Powell, 2013; Watson, 1987), rather than skilled advocates who use their full bodies to foster educational access and equity in PHIs. The words in the collages hint to the felt dimensions of interpreting work they culled from other sources, from references to "pain" and Tylenol to putting on a "game face," to do one's work. One collager noted simply, "I'd like to thank my body." Discussions connected references to the body to the need to be understood and heard. Culture and politics shape the meaning and visibility of bodily movements in how bodies can speak back to educational and structural power, through dress, signing, movements, and micro-processes of resistance. The process of collaborative collaging created an environment where interpreters could participate equally while using art-making practices rather than vocal dialogue to create contingent representations of their experiences and to express themselves.

The collaging process underscored that interpreters are internally experiencing their work on many levels (Hunt, 2015; McCartney, 2017). We also observed another point important to emphasize about this method in the communal opportunity it provided to participants. Rather than seeing this activity as solely an enjoyable and strategic space of data collection, the collaging and focus group in tandem brought people together in community and camaraderie based on a shared identity, professional commitment, and embodied activity. They took the creative task seriously and enjoyed it. The process functioned as a collective comfort among similarly positioned people.

Collaging also provides another vehicle of communication for interpreters to portray aspects of their labor to others both inside and outside the field. The audience who observes these four collages can visually see connections and discontinuities between each image and consider other meanings as well. A viewer who is not in the field may not be able to fully grasp what processing two languages simultaneously means, but the images of heads, Tylenol, tissue boxes, and commitment may evoke glimmers of understanding of the embodied mental physical load and exhaustion to others who may have given interpreters' labor little thought. The point of this research was to gain understanding of the lived experiences of the interpreters, and we realized the method of collaborative collaging may provide an accessible medium for others to potentially get a glimpse of the sensory nature of these unique experiences.

We recognize the visual, tactile, and collaborative use of collaging might be generative for representing ineffable and embodied aspects of lived experience as well as studies with people and groups, such as D/deaf students, who engage in visual communicative cultures. Through our research and review of the literature, we are aware of the current issues of burnout and bodily fatigue interpreters face and their implications for the field (Bower, 2015; Dean & Pollard, 2001; Knodel, 2018; Qin et al., 2008; Schwenke, 2015; Wessling & Shaw, 2014). In the context of this study alone, by the completion of this project, two of the four active interpreters participating in the study quit interpreting. Representing "voice" in many forms and however contingently through this study may have provided some comfort. Other aspects of lived experience – loss and grief, change, identity, bodily trauma – have benefitted from such arts-based methods (e.g., Boyd, 2017; Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010; Davis, 2008; Gerstenblatt, 2013; Kearney & Hyle, 2004).

The use of collaborative collaging in research could also serve community-oriented research in engaging in new ways of meaning-making and knowing, as it is inherently dialogic, and dynamic, as participants must create images from experience in group settings around shared roles or identities, grapple with the language of collaging to capture their insights, explain their images in community, and connect ideas and themes themselves through observing others' images (Barone & Eisner, 2011; Chilton & Scotti, 2014; McNiff, 2011). It is also, as Kilgard (2009) reminds us, a contingent form of meaning-making, always unsettled (p. 4), never complete and secured (p.1). As we noted, it is perhaps a small but affirming value of the method that overworked interpreters found it engaging and comforting. Qualitative research is a relational field just as our meaning-making about collaging has been relational. The interpreters experienced their engagement with collaborative collaging and affirmed their relationships with each other, their profession, and themselves. The debriefing suggests that creative practices can nurture relationships through surfacing emotions and insights that words sometimes cannot (Kearney & Hyle, 2004). We suggest that collaging as a method adds value alongside other methods in research.

We believe interpreters' experiences using diverse visual and maker-based methods merit further research for varied reasons. We recognize the value of collaging as an approach that can intervene in those dominant hearing environments and research spaces which privilege spoken data. The use of arts-based tools might surface embodied experiences for interpreters during their training or early in their careers to aid them in raising critical consciousness as a

group about embodied demands and the need for structural care. It could serve as a balm and a joy as part of their team-building. Collaging with other interpreters, in sustained ways over time to create meaning, might surface even more embodied methodological insights into its value. We also considered how collaging could serve as a prompt for the interviewing process similar to using photo-elicitation or drawings, documents, and artifact prompts to ground and propel conversation. If collaging is conceptualized as a form of engagement equal to theorizing and writing in the process of inquiry (Holbrook & Pourchier, 2014), it offers still other possibilities, which we hope – and encourage others – to pursue in future.

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