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An Ethnographic Case Study of a Deaf Workforce Collective

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AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY OF A DEAF WORKFORCE COLLECTIVE

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY OF A DEAF WORKFORCE COLLECTIVE

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Rehabilitation

By

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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study seeks to increase our understanding of the individual and shared experiences of five members of a Deaf United States Postal Service (USPS) collective employment cohort in regards to their early learning experiences, how these experiences led to collective employment, and how the collective employment opportunity led them to establish a new Strong Deaf Community in Houston. The data collected through semi structured interviews will be used to increase our understanding about how Strong Deaf Communities form, and what purpose they serve for grassroots members.

This study also seeks to shed light on why it is critical for the field of VR to understand the collective aspect of Deaf culture, given our current high rates of Deaf unemployment. It is hoped that this study leads to a reevaluation of how the grassroots Deaf American population is served. This study may also provide guidance toward developing new theoretical plans of action for current rehabilitation professionals seeking to mediate the high rates of Deaf unemployment seen in the body of rehabilitation research. This ethnographic study utilizes a purposeful sample of Deaf career postal employees from Houston, to develop an in-depth understanding of their experiences with collective employment and how their experiences led them to establish a new collective Strong Deaf Community in Houston. The purpose of this study is to develop understandings of how grassroots Deaf workers successfully navigate the world of work, and how the collective aspect of Deaf culture influences the process.

This dissertation is approved for recommendation
to the Graduate Council.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family for their unwavering support in all my endeavors.

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Chapter One: The Problem

Statement of the Problem

A truism long held by Vocation Rehabilitation (VR) professionals; that workers with disabilities are the “*last to be hired and first to be let go,*” has recently found support in the rehabilitation literature. Koch and Rumrill (2003) in their discussion of new directions in rehabilitation research, pointed toward the economic downturn and its disproportionate affect on persons with disabilities in the workforce; a sentiment which recently found credence by Kaye (2010) who utilized the Current Population Survey (CPS) data (October 2008-June 2010) which showed that “job losses among workers with disabilities far exceeded those of workers without disabilities” (p. 19). This trend does not come as much of a surprise for seasoned rehabilitation professionals, or the populations they serve, but when coupled with a previously reported trend based on analyses of the Rehabilitation Service Administration report (RSA-911) data which showed a “consistent decline between 1989 and 1998 in the number of successfully rehabilitated consumers who were deaf or hard of hearing” (Anderson, Boone, & Watson, 2003, p. 316). These numbers, if consistent (the 2009 study was focused on all workers with disabilities, with a focus on the effects of the economic downturn during 2008-2009 vs. this study which only looked at deaf and hard of hearing workers from 1989-1998) could point to a consistent decline in Deaf employment that has spanned the last two decades.

Whatever the root causes may be, “this disturbing trend,” (of an increase in the prevalence rate of persons with hearing loss and the decrease of successful case closures) “prompted RSA to call for state agencies to examine their policies and procedures related to caseloads of consumers with hearing loss” (Capella, 2003, p. 25).

Evidence would suggest the RSA has cause for alarm, but if we attend to the historical patterns of the sociopolitical ebb and flow of Deaf collective employment opportunities, seen in Buchanan's (1999) work, which will be explored further in Chapter 2, we see the current situation as a prime opportunity to begin developing new Deaf collective employment relationships.

Complicating the matter of higher rates of Deaf unemployment and increases seen in the prevalence rate of hearing loss, the field of rehabilitation has become increasingly concerned with issues of diversity. While the field of rehabilitation is based on individualistic values of client empowerment, independence and autonomy (American, Euro-centric values) the revised new Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) Code of Ethics (2009) calls for Vocation Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs) "to develop and adapt interventions and services to incorporate consideration of cultural perspective of clients and recognition of barriers external to clients that may interfere with achieving effective rehabilitation outcomes," (p. 12) to "respect diversity," to "respect culture," (p. 24) to "consider cultural diversity issues in assessment," and to "aim for cultural competence" (p. 12). Yet, in the case of Deaf culture, VR has been rendered unable (in large part due to policy) to "practice what it preaches." Stone (2005) states;

Implicit in the U.S. rehabilitation system are individualistic values that uphold and encourage self-sufficiency, along with the use of technology or other adaptations to complete daily living tasks independently. Rehabilitation policies and practices including assessments, programs, supports, and success criteria are based on meeting these standards of independence. (p. 24)

Yet, we know not all persons with hearing loss are the same and as such, it becomes necessary to break down this enormous population into more manageable parts in the research to better serve the whole. With this understanding in mind, the focus of this study has centered on a specific segment of the Deaf community; the "grassroots Deaf" workers, who are defined both as

those for whom the “Deaf experience,” is a cultural one (not one of deficiency) and those who did not complete post secondary education (Andersson, 1992).

If our intention is to move toward more effective interventions that take into account cultural differences, we must first come to a solid understanding of what those differences are, how they have played out in the rehabilitation process, in the workforce and ultimately in the community. Unfortunately the one perspective rarely sought is the Deaf one. In part, this is due to the ongoing conflict between the American Deaf Community’s needs and those of the general disability population. Social progress, for others has come at great cost for Deaf Americans as both desegregation from the civil rights movement and deinstitutionalization from the disability rights movement have led to challenges that could lead to a great deal of conflict that might be averted if the field of rehabilitation gets involved now. Both of these movements push toward a system of integration that (from a Deaf perspective) places Deaf residential schools at risk of closure pushing more d/Deaf students in the mainstream at the cost of normal linguistic, intellectual and social development.

While there is a great deal of potential for further conflict on the horizon, it can be averted through discourse *with* Deaf populations instead of the traditional norm of engaging in discourse *about* Deaf populations from the traditional “outside looking in” perspective. With this in mind, a constructivist approach to conducting qualitative research within Deaf populations offers a framework which not only embraces this philosophy but also presents grassroots Deaf workers, who (by definition) did not complete post-secondary education (Andersson, 1992) with the opportunity to share their perspectives with the rehabilitation professional community and the general American public. The ethnographic approach to research also stresses the social construction of knowledge, which is seen to be

Built upon the premise that human behavior is a product of how people interpret their world, that meaning is socially constructed by individuals through interaction with the people and the objects around them, and that there are multiple ways of interpreting experiences. (Foster, 1998, p. 116)

Ethnographic studies allow us the opportunity to explore the lived experiences of others, to learn about people we may never come in contact with otherwise (through both formal and informal means). Ethnographic studies can be used to explore an endless number of persons, groups, and cultures, but this study seeks to explore one of the most misunderstood populations in the field of rehabilitation; the Deaf American working class.

Purpose of the Study

This ethnographic case study seeks to increase our understanding of the individual and shared experiences of four members of a Deaf United States Postal Service (USPS) collective employment cohort in regards to their early learning experiences, how these experiences led to collective employment, and how the collective employment opportunity led them to establish a new strong Deaf community in Houston, Texas. The data that will have been collected through semi structured interviews will be used to increase our understanding about how Strong Deaf Communities form and what purpose they serve for grassroots members.

This study also seeks to shed light on why it is critical for the field of rehabilitation to understand the collective aspect of Deaf culture, given our current high rates of Deaf unemployment. It is hoped that this study will lead to a reevaluation of how the grassroots Deaf American population is served. This study may also provide guidance toward developing new theoretical plans of action for current rehabilitation professionals seeking to mediate the high rates of Deaf unemployment seen in the body of rehabilitation research.

This ethnographic study will have utilized a purposeful sample of Deaf career postal employees from Houston to develop an in-depth understanding of their experiences with collective employment and how their experiences led them to establish a new collective strong Deaf community in Houston. Ladd (2009) encapsulates the Deaf perspective.

Deaf communities contend that without a knowledge or understanding of the existence of this collective sense of *Deaf Weltanschauung*, all the pieces of paper, medals, or white coats one might possess are not only worthless, but actively dangerous. (p. 4)

Stone (2005) describes collectivism as a cultural orientation that values the group over the individual, with the very existence of members being tied to that of the family/community where the self interests of the individual are sacrificed for the interests of the family and/or community, where the group's activities are seen as dominant over those of the individual (p. 24).

This shift in focus from the individual Deaf rehabilitation consumer to the Deaf collective community, centered on promoting the development of local, Deaf communities, should lead to the development of culturally appropriate services within the field of rehabilitation and improved outcomes as the strength of the individual Deaf worker may come from their involvement in the collective Deaf community. Becker (1987) in her discussion of utilizing the Deaf peer group as a resource in counseling Deaf individuals explained;

While groups of deaf peers are in the community, not every deaf person may be linked to them, indeed, persons who require considerable intervention by professionals may be those very persons who are isolated from the peer group and the deaf community. (p. 77)

In seeking to understand the sheer magnitude of how underserved this population is in regards to Deaf mental health services, it is estimated that only 2% of d/Deaf Americans who are in need of mental health services receive them (Vernon, 1983). This estimate however, it should

be noted, does not include any indication toward the level of quality of the limited services that are received. Arguing in support of a need for service providers to understand the influence of Deaf culture on the individual, Duffy (1999) argues;

It is imperative that service providers understand the dynamics of the community and cultural group that they serve, and the impact that Deaf Culture may have in relation to the culture of the individual client who is deaf. (p. 331)

Deaf Americans, as a traditionally underserved population (Duffy, 1999) have developed their own means of support from within their collective communities. A stronger local Deaf community leads to increased quality/availability of services, interpreters, Deaf-centered activities, spiritual growth, and quality of life (QOL) but most of all it serves as the foundation of a system of social support for its members. Becker (1987) offers this example of the level of social support experienced by members of the Deaf community;

During the time I was carrying out research on older people, there were numerous muggings of deaf persons in one urban area. In each case, deaf elders responded immediately with a shower of attention and a display of group solidarity. If a person had been an integral member of the group for many years, he or she could count on this kind of support from peers. It takes a lifetime to develop group-wide solidarity, but as its momentum builds, such ongoing support from the peer group reinforces deaf identity and is a sustaining force that helps individuals to cope with the realities of daily life. (p. 73)

While this study will have been focused on one cohort of grassroots Deaf workers (which is but a segment of the ADC) a strong, central core of a Deaf collective community also leads to improved conditions and services for persons with all levels of hearing loss. A strong Deaf core also assists those persons who are members of the community, but hear (e.g., hearing children of Deaf adults who are called CODAs in the literature, professionals who work within Deaf populations, interpreters and the Hearing parents of deaf children). What happens at the core of this community sends a ripple effect throughout the entire local population and possibly beyond.

While the findings that will have been collected in this study cannot be generalized to all Deaf workers, all Deaf USPS workers, or their respective, localized, collective communities, it may provide a means by which to develop new courses of action for Vocation Rehabilitation Counselors (DVRCs) working within Deaf populations to mediate the current high rates of unemployment and provide guidance for professionals in various fields of Deaf related services seeking multicultural competency. This study could also lead to a deeper appreciation of the vast number of potential benefits from an increase in the quality of rehabilitation outcomes and an increased QOL for Deaf consumers by shifting the focus from the individual consumer to the collective community in which they live and work. While it has often been pointed out that Deaf Americans are traditionally underserved (Duffy, 1999); what has not been explored in a rehabilitation context, is how Deaf individuals within Deaf collective communities utilize the strengths of various members of the community as a means of informal community services. This interdependency of Deaf Americans has yet to be explored, even though it holds the key to understanding how best to serve this population. How this interdependency influences the Deaf world of work experience can be seen in the historical patterns of collective employment seen in Buchanan (1999), which will be further explored in Chapter 2.

While Buchanan (1999) explored collective employment migrations for Deaf workers of industry from 1850-1950, no one has ever actually interviewed Deaf workers who took part in collective employment opportunities, to better understand how Deaf workers successfully navigate the world of work.

Research Questions

This study asks the following research questions; What are the individual and shared experiences of five grassroots Deaf workers who took part in a collective employment

opportunity with the USPS in Houston, entering postal employment during the late 1960's- early 1970's; How did the informants' early experiences lead them to choose to pursue the collective employment opportunity for Deaf workers with the USPS in Houston; How did this collective employment opportunity lead to the development of a new Strong Deaf Community in Houston? The purpose of the research questions listed is to develop an understanding of how grassroots Deaf workers successfully navigate the world of work, and to add to our understanding of how the collective aspect of Deaf culture influences the process.

Significance of the Study

A few of the defining characteristics of this particular Deaf community that makes the Deaf postal worker experience in Houston worthy of investigation are; once support for Deaf postal workers waned, these four Deaf men were not only able to remain in the postal workforce but all were successful in achieving tenure; while the Deaf collective community they helped to establish continues to flourish and grow today. In past collective employment movements, once labor shortages were mediated, Deaf workers were subsequently let go, and the "Silent Colonies" (or SDCs) they established, disappeared.

Delimitations

While Deaf workers were hired en masse in locations across the country (during the same period the informants entered postal employment), the results from this study cannot be generalized to all Deaf postal workers, or all Deaf Americans. There is evidence to support the assertion that Deaf postal workers were able to enter into different positions with the USPS in different locations, depending in large part, upon the postal administrators in the city, state and region they were employed in. The informants in this study were all limited to positions as postal clerks for the duration of their respective careers. Also, while this Deaf community

exhibited the characteristics of an insular SDC, the findings related to this community cannot be generalized to all Deaf communities.

Researcher's Relationship to the Problem

The concept of researcher-as-instrument is a central tenet of ethnographic methods. This concept marks a sharp break from quantitative methods of aiming for objectivity and the removal of researcher bias from the research process. Hatch (2002) explains this central role as being the end result of the understanding that not only is the researcher the primary gatherer of the data, but that “data take on no significance until they are processed using the human intelligence of the researcher” (p. 7).

The Deaf community that will have been studied is the one in which I was born and raised. My father recently retired after over forty years of honorable service with the USPS (hence my original interest in this topic). The four men chosen, who it is hoped will participate in this study as informants, were all known to me from childhood, primarily through our interactions at church, but as a collective community, these men and their families are more like an extended kinship network in which all are considered family. The informants served as strong male role models for me from a very early age (since birth).

“Deaf” to me has always been more of an ethnicity than a culture, as I come from a strong Deaf family, with ASL being my first language. Most of my father’s family is Deaf (including both of his parents), and all had been raised within Strong Deaf Communities, attending (and occasionally also working for) state residential schools for the Deaf. My parents met at Texas School for the Deaf (TSD) where my father excelled in sports, my great uncle was a well known football coach, and my mother was both homecoming queen and valedictorian of

her graduating class. As a result of my being born into this Deaf-World, and through my experiences with Deaf role models whom I still look up to, I never saw Deafness as a disability, but more so, as an ethnic minority; one which I take great pride in being part of. The informants in this study are my community elders and as such, I have learned a great deal from them. I extend that relationship into the methodology chosen for this study. Choosing a constructivist paradigm, allows me to continue this relationship, to explore it further, to set the stage for their respective roles as informants in this study, while furthering my role as both a student of the world and as interpreter/researcher to those who would benefit from a deeper understanding of Deaf perspectives.

While I am of this community under study (giving me an emic, or native perspective) and familiar with the stories of these men, my understanding is somewhat limited, as I was not present to witness, nor did I take part in the lived experiences of these men (which also gives me an etic, or outsider perspective as well). However, my experience with these men and my lifelong involvement in the community under study allows for a depth of understanding that will lead to greater accuracy in the interpretation of the data collected. As a child in this community who was born with the ability to hear, I have been interpreting and mediating between Deaf and Hearing people my whole life. I have also had many unique experiences as a member of this community, which led to varied research interests from persons outside the community, bringing me to develop my personal research interests at a very young age. The most prominent example of this, might best be described as the first attempt of creating an early form of a “Deaf reality television show,” where my family was filmed in our home for a show on PBS called “Signing with Cindy” when I was around 8 years old, in an attempt to show how Deaf families interacted in their daily lives.

Cindy was groundbreaking in her time, as MTV was just starting out and she had her own show (during the same time) signing in ASL, a few of the “top 40 hits” of the day. While the concept of making music accessible to Deaf persons was, as it continues to be, more of an aspiration from a Hearing perspective, to have ASL (again the most revered aspect of the Deaf-World) included on a public television show was, as it continues to be today, an honor worth tuning in for.

We met Cindy in church, where my mother spent a great deal of time working with Cindy on her signing skills as interpreting musical lyrics can often pose greater challenge for Hearing persons as these interpretations are based on conceptual accuracy, with the added complexity of creating a sense of visual harmony with the flow of the music. Our family was filmed at home and at the Houston City Zoo. While many community “outsiders” such as Cindy poked around with varied interests in our Deaf community, over the years, I too, developed a great deal of curiosity of these interested parties as well. I believe this is where my interests in research began but at the time, and for decades after, there was little to be seen in the mainstream media in regards to Deaf Americans. The history I not only witnessed, but took part in, by in large, disappeared from accessible historical record.

One of the strangest aspects of this personal journey was the realization that the rich, vibrant history I had unfettered access to my whole life had not been recorded and to see how much history we have lost, is nothing short of heart breaking. It falls to all of us to preserve this history, not just of our SDC, but the histories and experiences of all things “Deaf,” before they are lost with each passing generation. It is with hope that this study will lead other Deaf communities to be more vigilant in documenting their experiences in the future, not just for an

increased depth of understanding in both Deaf and Hearing populations, but to record for future generations, the great deeds of a silenced world.

Definitions and Indicators

When seeking to understand the experiences of Deaf Americans, there are an endless number of terms, definitions and labels that can lead to a great deal of confusion. An exhaustive list of all terms used in the literature would prove a rather daunting task and would ultimately only lead to a great deal of confusion for the reader. As such, the following indicators and definitions will be utilized in the present study.

Figure 1.1. Indicators

- Indicators to be used throughout the study:
The d/D and h/H indicators: Senghas and Monaghan (2002) stated that in 1972 James Woodward used in his writing the Deaf/deaf and d/Deaf to identify the distinction between addressing the pathological and cultural concepts of deafness. The lower case “d” identifies an actual audiological and physiological inability to hear or the lack of hearing. The capital ‘D’ is used for sociological and cultural references. The lower case “h” identifies the actual audiological ability to hear. The capital “H” is used to identify individuals with little or no affiliation with cultural aspects of the Deaf Community. They recommended using “deaf” and “hearing” to identify audiological issues, “Deaf” and “Hearing” to address the sociological and cultural aspects of the Deaf Community, and d/Deaf and h/Hearing “to denote and highlight the often inherently mixed nature of the audiological and sociocultural conditions. (Smith, 2005, p. 72)

The indicators listed above will have been used throughout this study, with the exception of direct quotations, pulled from other texts.

Figure 1.2. Definitions

- American Deaf Community (ADC):

In addition to Deaf Americans;

The deaf community includes deaf children of hearing parents, deaf children of deaf parents, hearing members who participate as parents of deaf children, marriage or life partners, siblings, extended family members, coworkers of deaf people, and hard-of-hearing as well as ‘oral deaf.’ (Andrews, Leigh, & Weiner, 2004, p. 16)

- American Sign Language (ASL):

The language of the American Deaf Community; “it is the visual-manual language of a visual people, Deaf people” where “nothing is more central to that (Deaf) culture and dearer to the hearts of Deaf people than their language” (Lane, Hoffmeister & Bahan, 1996, p.42).

- CODA:

Refers to the hearing Children Of Deaf Adults (Lane, et al., 1996, p.4).

- Cohort:

“[Treated as singular or plural] a group of people banded together or treated as a group” (Oxford online dictionary, Retrieved, February 2011 from: http://oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m_en_us1234301#m_en_us1234301.html).

- Collective Employment:

Based on the following two definitions; the Oxford Dictionary definition of

“collective,” and The Encyclopedia Britannica definition of “collective bargaining.”

- Collective:

1. adj. Taken as a whole; aggregate.

2. Noun that denotes a collection or number of individuals (Oxford American Dictionary, 1998, p. 111).

- Collective bargaining:

The ongoing process of negotiation between representatives of workers and employers to establish the conditions of employment. The collectively determined agreement may cover not only wages but hiring practices, layoffs, promotions, job functions, working conditions and hours, worker discipline and termination, and benefit programs.

(<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/125540/collective-bargaining.html>)

- Collectivism:

A cultural orientation which values the group over the individual. Within collectivist cultures; an individual's very existence is seen as tied to that of the family and community, the self-interests of the individual are sacrificed for the interests of the family and/or community, and the group's activities are seen as dominant (Stone, 2005, p.24, pulled from Table 2.4).

- Culture:

1. “A set of learned behaviors of a group of people who have their own language, values, rules for behaviors, and traditions” (Padden & Humphries,

1988, p. 4).

2. “broadly defined as a system of learned and shared standards for perceiving, interpreting, and behaving in interactions with others and with the environment” (Stone, 2005, p. 20-21; Jezewski, 1990).

- Deaf Community:

A group of people who live in a particular location, share the common goals of its members, and in various ways, work toward achieving those goals. A deaf community may include persons who are not themselves Deaf (i.e., culturally deaf, in which ASL is a basic element of the culture), but who actively support the goals of the community and work with deaf people to achieve them. (Higgins & Nash, 1987, p.152-153; Padden, 1980, p. 92)

- Deaf Club:

The Deaf Club can be both a facility and social organization. Often Deaf Communities elect a group of leaders (a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and other officers deemed necessary) to organize community affairs such as social events, political advocacy forums, and informational activities. Clubs play a significant role in keeping members networked and cohesive. Traditionally, community members would purchase a building to serve as the gathering place for most of their community events. (Smith, 2005, p. ix)

- Deaf of Deaf:

“This term is used to identify Deaf adults whose parents are Deaf, representing 10% of the American Deaf Community” (Wrigley, 1996; Smith, 2005, p. xii).

- Migration:

A “movement of people to a new area or country in order to find work or better living conditions”

(http://oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m_en_us1422970#m_en_us1422970)

.html).

- Ordinary/grassroots member of the Deaf Community:

Smith (1996) explained that a “grassroots” member “means ‘really Deaf’ linguistically and culturally, untouched by Hearing values and ideas” (p. 120). Andersson (1992) described this same segment as the majority of the ADC who entered occupations after high school and did not pursue or complete post-secondary education. (Smith, 2005, p. viii)

- Strong Deaf Community (SDC):

Strong-Deaf here refers to the ASL representation of this concept, more literally interpreted as “DEAF-STRONG,” and represents a Deaf community with a strong Deaf center. This concept is best described in this passage from Higgins & Nash (1987);

Sign language is the cement of the deaf community. Its appeal derives from the contrast it provides to the dominant language. However, as Groce (1980) has shown, signing alone may not be sufficient to produce a sign community. In her research on Martha’s Vineyard, she found that hearing and deaf people alike signed but a strong, distinctive ‘sign community’ apparently did not develop. Probably, other sociological factors like discrimination, social and geographic isolation are also necessary to the formation of a true ‘community.’ (p. 91)

The field of knowledge that will have been explored in this study centers on the lived experiences of four members of one collective strong Deaf community in Houston, Texas. As stated, this community is the one in which I was raised and four of these men are, as they have always been, my community elders. While this invites a biased position on my part as the primary research instrument, my bias is embraced here as a means by which to increase the accuracy of representation toward developing an understanding of the lived experiences of

members of a population that continues to prove elusive to those who seek to shed light on the Deaf-World experience.

While I am of this community under study and the field of knowledge this study explores, my understanding of this community has been heavily influenced by my lived experiences as well. Professionally, I have worked extensively as an interpreter and within Deaf Education classrooms for over ten years. My educational pursuits, include a Bachelors in Deaf Education, a Masters in Vocation Rehabilitation Counseling (Deaf focused), along with additional training in mental health counseling. I am presently working toward completion of a PhD in Vocation Rehabilitation Counseling, Education and Research. All of these experiences have greatly influenced my views, my understandings and my depth of knowledge as a student of the world. While it is important to understand my background and how these constructs can influence my interpretations as the primary research instrument, this study is not centered on my lived experience, but more so, this study focuses on the lived experiences of the four informants, which will be interpreted through the Deaf cultural lenses we share.

Summary

In summary, we now we know the problem, the research questions, the indicators and definitions to be used in this study. The context will be provided in Chapter 2, beginning with a review of Buchannan's work (as the line of inquiry this study follows), working through the traditional models of Deafness seen in the literature, to the specific context of Deaf postal worker migration to Houston; working from the general to the specific, to give the reader a deeper understanding of historical patterns of Deaf collective employment and how these collective employment opportunities can lead to the establishment of new Strong Deaf Communities.

Understanding the historical patterns of collective employment, the development of strong Deaf ties during early learning experiences, the employment experiences of grassroots Deaf workers, how these experiences lead Deaf Americans to migrate, congregate and develop a system of social support around these collective employment opportunities will ultimately lead a depth of understanding that has proven elusive to those who have sought to capture the Deaf world of work experience.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

General Background Information

This study seeks to increase our understanding of grassroots Deaf workers through an ethnographic interview study of one cohort of four Deaf men in regards to; early learning experiences; how these experiences led the informants in choosing to pursue collective employment with the USPS; how collective employment with USPS led to the establishment of a new collective strong Deaf community in Houston; and to understand not only how this strong Deaf community formed, but also what purpose it served for the informants. A purposeful sample of four Deaf postal workers will have been utilized to gain a deeper, more holistic appreciation of both the individual and shared experiences of Deaf men who directly took part in the last known industrial migration of Deaf workers into the United States Postal Service (USPS) which began in the late 1960's. While Buchanan (1999) published a detailed historical account of Deaf collective employment from 1850-1950, the phenomenon of Deaf collective employment with the USPS, which began in the late 1960's has not yet been explored. Considering the present study is in several ways, an extension of Buchanan's line of inquiry, a review of his work focusing on highlighted aspects which pertain to the present study will be discussed to give the reader a solid background in the development of a Deaf American working class, the historical patterns of Deaf collective employment, and how these collective employment opportunities naturally spurred the growth of new Strong Deaf Communities.

Deaf Workers of Industry: Review of: Buchannan's (1999) Illusions of Equality: Deaf Americans in School and Factory 1850-1950

Buchanan's (1999) work is the most extensive review of Deaf employment history to date. Buchanan's work is critical to the present study, as it outlines the historical patterns of

collective employment, the relationship these patterns exhibited during both World Wars, how these collective employment opportunities led to the establishment of new Strong Deaf Communities, and the history of the ongoing struggle of Deaf collective action in response to the world of work experience for Deaf Americans.

The patterns of collective employment seen in response to shortages in the availability of industrial laborers as men left their civilian posts to fight for “God and country” brought a level of prosperity most Deaf Americans had never experienced, enticing them to leave rural areas (where many were believed to have lived in largely solitary conditions), to seek out industrial employment opportunities in large urban areas. The prospect of camaraderie with other Deaf Americans was certainly a primary determinant for Deaf workers and the proclivity of Deaf American workers toward collective employment was nurtured by several industrial giants, with Henry Ford leading the way. The labor demands of American Industry when coupled with the very nature of Deaf Americans ultimately led to mutually beneficial Deaf employee/ industrial employer relationships that helped to support America’s role in the war effort in Europe. Unfortunately, Deaf Americans were unable to maintain wartime gains during the times of peace that followed, but not without significant efforts on the part of Deaf industrial workers and Deaf leaders of the day.

In the following three sections, we will review three critical aspects of Buchannan’s work as they relate to the study at hand. These three sections; the establishment of Deaf Americans as a working class, historical patterns of Deaf collective employment, and how these collective employment opportunities led Deaf workers to establish SDCs in new geographic locations. Given the created state of exclusion in the literature in regards to Deaf Americans and Deaf postal workers, discussion of these three themes pulled from Buchannan, will serve to fill in the

gaps when seeking to develop understandings of the Deaf informants' lived experiences. Each of the following three sections will begin with discussion of Buchannan's historical work, and then each topic will be tied to present day influences that tie directly back into the present study.

Deaf Americans as a working class. The National Association of the Deaf (NAD) was established in 1880 in response to the Milan conference (which also took place in 1880). The year 1880 is a date which, as Ladd (2009) points out, is a date remembered in disgust in the Deaf World (with sentiments likened to those of Native Americans toward the year 1492). It was during this period that Alexander Graham Bell successfully advocated for international political support for the rise of oralism; which led to an international system of abuse and marginalization of Deaf populations with the expressed intent of eliminating deafness from the world's gene pool. This moment in history marked the end of the progress Deaf Americans had made up until this point in history and the beginning of the "disabling of the Deaf community" in the dominant discourse (for more information on how this was accomplished, see Harlan Lane, *Mask of Benevolence*, 1999). The strongest example of the present day relevance the 1880 Milan conference holds for Deaf persons was recently seen in response to a letter the current NAD President Beth Scoggins wrote, addressing the International Congress on the Education of the Deaf (the governing body of the Milan conference), "urging the ICED to formally reject their previous resolutions and embrace signed languages and deaf cultures" (<http://www.nad.org/news/2010/7/nad-elated-iced-rejection-1880-milan-congress-resolutions.html>, para. 1). The article released by the NAD states "on Monday, July 19, 2010 the International Congress on the Education of the Deaf (ICED) opened its 21st Congress with a historic announcement that it formally rejects the resolutions passed at its 2nd Congress

(commonly known as the 1880 Milan Congress) which discouraged the use of sign language in the education of the deaf” (para. 1).

This study however, is not about the experienced power struggles, but this point is noted because the threats to Deaf Americans’ collective well-being that stemmed from this event, led to the establishment of the NAD and the oppression (under what has since been proven to be a defunct oralist system) has shaped Deaf communities across the globe. The NAD was established to combat the attacks on the Deaf-Way of life, to preserve Deaf culture, encourage the acceptance of ASL, to promote Deaf values in the education of d/Deaf children and to promote the employment aspirations of d/Deaf Americans.

Deaf Americans as a separate working class evolved out of these historic events, from the establishment of state residential schools for the d/Deaf prior to the Milan conference, collective employment opportunities, and the establishment of NAD; yet one relationship above all other influences listed here, led to a solid, united, politically active class of Deaf workers. This tenuous relationship was between Deaf American workers of industry, and the United States Civil Service.

In the late 1800’s reports of Deaf applicants being denied the opportunity to apply with the Railway Mail Service alarmed Deaf leaders but the collective Deaf worker mentality precluded openly challenging employers for fear it could lead to the exclusion of all Deaf applicants (or the removal of Deaf workers already present in the employ of the United States Civil Service). This exclusionary ruling was not directly challenged by Deaf leaders until the civil service altered policy in 1906, barring all d/Deaf workers from taking the civil service entrance exam. In this ruling, the U.S. Civil Service Commissioners “added *total deafness* and

loss of speech to a list of more than ten conditions, including insanity and paralysis, that barred candidates from civil service examinations” (p. 37). This exclusionary ruling led to a united front of the Deaf American working class and Deaf leaders in collective action against the civil service ruling. The Deaf American workforce as a political force to be reckoned with was born. This fight spanned two years, and ended in 1908, when “deaf” was merely removed from the exclusionary ruling. Of note, this Deaf movement stopped short of advocating for affirmative action hiring policies in civil service employment as the Deaf collective mindset was (as it remains) against special treatment for Deaf workers (this was seen yet again when the U.S. government proposed legislation to allow Deaf Americans a tax free status, which was also flatly opposed by Deaf leaders). The Deaf objection was with being excluded from consideration and blocked from merely taking the entrance exam. The barriers to civil service employment were still left largely in place, but discretion was left to supervisor and/or managers as to the merit of each individual Deaf applicant. However, the lessons learned during this two year period, led to a more politically active Deaf community (p. 48).

This distinction is critical to the present study as the cities which saw Deaf workers swell in number, must have either had some high ranking postal administrator who supported the idea of hiring Deaf workers, or at the very least, there must have been a greater number of vacant positions in these specific areas which may have also influenced the postal administrator’s decision to hire Deaf workers. It is also highly likely that most (if not all) of these areas experienced both of these influences, to varying degrees, creating a greater need to fill the vacant positions. Given the lack of documentation of d/Deaf workers, the exact causes remain unknown.

Now that an understanding of the development of a Deaf American working class has been established, we will now move on to discuss the historical patterns of Deaf collective employment this class of workers has experienced, to better understand how the influences seen in previous migrations repeated in the early 1960's and ultimately spurred the migration under study.

Historical patterns of Deaf collective employment. Buchanan pointed to patterns seen during both World Wars, in which Deaf workers of Industry were tapped as a class of workers to mediate the industrial labor shortages brought about by war. These collective employment opportunities spurred growth of multiple SDCs, or Silent Colonies, where Deaf social life thrived, where unprecedented gains were made, only to be lost once labor shortages were mediated by the return of veterans. Deaf leaders, time and time again, attempted to preserve war time gains experienced by Deaf industrial workers, yet were repeatedly unsuccessful at doing so. This pattern of war and the labor shortages that result from civilians leaving their posts, repeated yet again during the Vietnam War era, leading to labor shortages in the USPS, creating a dire need to fill these vacancies with less traditional (white European male) options, creating increased opportunities for minority populations.

Now that we have established the historical patterns seen in Buchanan's *Illusions* and how they mirrored the USPS migration, we will now explore past collective employment migrations to better understand how these opportunities naturally spurred the establishment of new SDCs. While Buchanan and the Deaf workers who established these communities referred to them as Silent Colonies, in the present study we refer to them as SDCs. To better understand how the USPS Deaf collective employment opportunity led to the establishment of a new SDC in

Houston, we will now explore past migrations and the communities established as a result of increased employment opportunities for Deaf workers.

Strong Deaf Communities (SDC). Each of the Strong Deaf Communities, (dubbed "Silent Colonies" by the Deaf residents who established them around these collective employment opportunities) “developed a rich and diverse social and cultural life” (p. 67). Deaf leaders pushed for labor bureaus, to varying degrees of success in different states, as they were unable, time and time again to establish a national labor bureau for Deaf workers of industry. This lack of success at the national level during this period eventually led to a great deal of mistrust in American Deaf communities of larger, nationwide focused efforts and brought the focus of Deaf Americans to their local communities, as they quickly learned they could better influence through collective action. This local, state based focus is still seen throughout Deaf communities in the United States today, but this has been changing over the years, as Deaf Americans have become increasingly more connected. Deaf populations of the world are more connected now than they ever have been (on both national and international levels) due to the rise in communication technologies that have transformed how Deaf people maintain correspondence.

The SDC, which was established in Houston by the informants, came about naturally, as was seen in the past collective employment migrations discussed. How this SDC came about will have been explored further through the interviews of the men who established, developed, and maintained it.

Summary of Buchanan’s Illusions of Equality. In the previous sections, we reviewed Buchanan’s work, establishing the line of inquiry this study follows, the development of a

politically active Deaf American working class, the historical patterns of Deaf collective employment, and how these collective employment opportunities led Deaf workers to migrate, often resulting in the establishment of new Strong Deaf Communities in new geographic locations where job opportunities were plentiful for Deaf workers of industry. Buchanan's line of inquiry is critical to the present study but it also serves as an excellent example of Deaf centered discourse (in this case, in regards to the History of Deaf employment in American Industry from 1850-1950). This is an important distinction as it represents an exception, rather than the rule in reviewing the literature.

To understand Deaf Americans, Deaf History, and the literature that seeks to represent the Deaf-World experience, one must first come to an understanding of the often polarized, competing forces which shape the discourse. The interplay and conflict between these opposing models and the history behind the conflict is best represented by the work of Harlan Lane (1999). A solid understanding of the two competing models seen in the literature should assist the reader in developing an understanding of why the d/Deafness literature is seemingly bipolar in nature and why the discourse is often seen as contradictory to those who explore it. The following three sections will discuss these two traditional models, with a fourth section added at the end, in summary, and in assisting the reader to develop an understanding of how these two competing models play out in the d/Deafness discourse.

Traditional Models of Deafness

In seeking to understand the Deaf American experience, two traditional and competing models have dominated the discourse for over a century. One emanates from within the Medical Model, which sees deafness as a deficiency; the other being the focus of this study, the Deaf

Cultural Model; which sees Deaf Americans as belonging to a unique cultural and linguistic minority.

The Medical Model. The Medical Model, also called the Infirmity (or deficiency) Model (Lane, 1999, p. 13) in the literature, uses terms such as; *hearing impaired*, *disability*, *degree of loss*, and *communication disorder* to frame discussions on deafness. Under this model, deafness is seen as a disabling condition that demands mediation by medical means, through surgical procedures (the current technology being cochlear implants) and more traditional aural/oral methods. Lane (1999) describes an exchange between one Deaf leader and an otologist during a meeting in Boston, in 1991, which was funded by the Cochlear Corporation to promote implantation, where the Deaf leader asked whether or not ASL or Deaf culture entered into the discussion between doctors and the Hearing parents of deaf children, to which the otologist replied with unusual candor; “we tend to present things from our point of view” (p. 24). This exchange underscores the medical community’s view of deafness, in that they only see defect in a deaf child. By capitalizing on Hearing parents’ fears of the unknown future for their deaf child, coupled with the presentation of only the information they feel is pertinent (which means they only offer one real option: the medical one) to convince these Hearing parents (who share similar views based on the majority, Hearing-World perspective), that oralism and implantation are their only options. This is merely one of the many issues the Deaf community has with so called “experts on deafness,” who in contrast, see the Medical Model view as the traditional sociopolitical excuse for the abuse, marginalization and discrimination of all Deaf persons by those who hypocritically profess to “serve them.”

The Deaf Cultural Model. The Deaf Cultural Model sees Deafness as a natural human variation which requires no remedy save the collective interconnectedness experienced as a

member of the Deaf community and the acquisition of ASL, a manual/visual language uniquely suited for a visually oriented people. Every deaf child born is considered a precious gift (Ladd, 2009) and as such, even though 90% of deaf children are born to Hearing parents (as they have been historically), the Deaf community sees these children as their own. It should be noted, even though this is not well represented in the literature, Deaf individuals also welcome Hearing parents of deaf children into the Deaf community, embracing them as members of the community when these parents reach out to the Deaf-World to better understand the Deaf aspect of their deaf child, seeking to offer their child every option available (including their birthright in the Deaf community), to promote linguistic and intellectual development. The more "Hearing" a deaf child becomes, the further they move away from the collective consciousness of Deaf-World views, and the more laborious the conversionary process from a Hearing centered world view to a Deaf centered world view will be for the child later in life. This Deaf-World perspective, in stark contrast to the medical view of deafness represents what Lane (1999) called "a different center," seeks to understand Deaf individuals based on Deaf norms (from Deaf perspectives), as opposed to assessing them (as has been the case since the rise of oralism), based on comparisons to Hearing population norms, by utilizing assessment measures designed for the general population.

The two dominant models in the literature. Unfortunately the Medical Model is still dominant in the literature. As such, and as Lane (1999) points out, most of the funds made available for research in deafness fund medically oriented research (p. 3). While there are those who write from "Deaf-centered perspectives," it is still quite rare to have these projects funded (by any means) and these projects can often only be published outside the more traditional journals that still seek to promote a medical view of deafness.

The difference between these two competing models is evident in the deaf vs. Deaf distinction in the literature, which were covered in the indicators used in the present study (Figure 1.1) where “deaf” signifies audiological deafness (or a medically oriented view); while “Deaf” represents a cultural orientation. As stated previously, this study, and my personal bias as the primary research instrument are both oriented toward a cultural view of Deafness as this was the world into which I was born.

An understanding of these two main influences seen in the d/Deafness related literature is essential to making sense of both the history and the literature that surround this population. Knowing these two often polarized, competing models, the perspectives contained therein, and the nomenclature used in each, should assist the reader in making sense of the literature review as this study progresses. Now that an understanding of the two opposing forces between Hearing-World and Deaf-World perspectives has been established, we can now move toward discussion of Deaf American populations to better illustrate whom it is we seek to better understand.

The American Deaf Community

The American Deaf Community (ADC) is a broad, general, inclusive term which encompasses all Americans with hearing loss, including d/Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Children of Deaf Adults (CODAs) and hearing persons who either work in Deaf related professions, or have deaf children (Andrews, et al., 2004, p. 16). The exact numbers of those who constitute this community are problematic as prior to the 1930 U.S. Census, “Deaf” was eliminated (from 1830-1930 these numbers were kept) because “it was clear that the census was not getting reliable counts” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 112). The American Deaf Community, said to be comprised of

roughly 28.8 million Americans (Evans, 2003, para. 1) is growing exponentially as ASL becomes increasingly accepted in mainstream American society. While in the ADC definition given by Andrews et al. (2004) the authors included “oral deaf” Americans as members of the ADC, this sentiment is not widely accepted as most definitions of the ADC include the use and acceptance of ASL as a primary characteristic required for community membership.

Central to the ADC are the Deaf of Deaf (or DofD), who comprise the central core of all Deaf communities, and are the ascribed leaders (Smith, 2005). The DofD bear the responsibility of maintaining the history and the language, passing them on to the next generation from within the Deaf family, within the residential school setting (peer to peer) and in the community. DofD individuals are also the main catalysts in the establishment and maintenance of Deaf organizations. The DofD responsibilities are often passed from Deaf parents to their hearing children (CODAs) as well, though not all CODAs assume this role in the community.

Convert Deaf individuals are deaf persons who were raised in Hearing families, largely in the Hearing-World, and when they finally come in contact with Deaf individuals, they experience a conversionary process from a Hearing centered world view to a Deaf centered world view (Bechter, 2008). When this conversionary process takes place in the residential school setting at an early age, deaf children are exposed to Deaf culture, which is often the first cultural exposure the child has, and as such these individuals are not seen as converts, but more so as full members of the Deaf community. While other definitions exist, this study will be focused on offering a Deaf perspective and other definitions (competing or otherwise) will not be included here to avoid confusion.

The endless number of definitions and opinions has proven more confusing than helpful for many who seek to understand the Deaf-World. As such, it has become necessary to cease attempts toward universal, inclusive, stereotypical understandings until the pieces that make up the whole are further explored and understood. With this in mind, within the ADC, there are further divisions by region, state and local geographic locations that can be used to further delineate this population as they can and often do influence the members' experiences.

Local Deaf communities. Local Deaf communities have largely been ignored in the research as those within the field of Deaf Studies (a field in its infancy) have sought more universal truths, to define Deaf communities on national and international scales. While it is important to understand the phenomenon of how experienced oppression of Deaf persons on an international scale led to the unification of Deaf communities across the globe, the establishment of an international Deaf community, the establishment of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), the development of an International Sign Language (originally called Gestuno) to bridge the linguistic divide and even the establishment of the Deaf World Games (now called the Deaflympics); when it comes to the field of rehabilitation, the insular, interdependent, collective, local Deaf community is where we should focus our efforts when seeking to improve outcomes for Deaf consumers.

Local Deaf communities, as previously stated, have not yet been explored in any great detail, but from what we do know, these local Deaf communities (outside of Martha's Vineyard) have historically been established around two main catalysts; the establishment of residential schools for the Deaf (Gannon, 1981), and collective employment opportunities which spurred Deaf employment migrations to new geographic locations (Buchanan, 1999). The former, historically, has been more stable, while the latter, has been dependent upon continued

employment and when Deaf collective employment opportunities faded, so too did the established Deaf communities. As stated, early Deaf communities based on Deaf collective employment opportunities, dubbed “Silent Colonies” by the Deaf residents who established them “developed a rich and diverse social and cultural life” (Buchanan, 1999, p. 67).

Other attempts have been made by Deaf persons in creating “a place of their own,” including a series of debates in the mid-1800’s, over a proposed “Deaf-state” likened to the Mormon plight in Utah, in response to “the frustrations of daily life in a hearing world” (Vickrey Van Cleve & Crouch, 1989). This Deaf aspiration has been seen a number of times over the years and the sentiment can still be seen today.

The most recent attempt in establishing a Deaf city occurred this past decade when a group of Deaf individuals established a “Deaf-friendly” city in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where collective employment opportunities for Deaf workers were factored into developmental plans. While the “Deaf city” was successfully established, the endeavor has been met with less than ideal results as a judge recently ruled against a lawsuit brought about by a group of parents with d/Deaf children who sued in an attempt to preserve the South Dakota School for the Deaf which faced closure (Associated Press, 2010). Whether or not the parents will appeal the court’s decision remains uncertain presently but given the current economic downturn, this legal battle will inevitably spread to other states, of which there are many (Texas School for the Deaf for example) where local Strong Deaf Communities will not tolerate any attempts in subverting their coveted state residential schools.

Texas has led the nation in regards to Deaf services in a variety of ways, not the least of which being the manner in which it has embraced their Deaf population, but I believe this is due,

in large part, to Texas History. Erastus Deaf Smith, Sam Houston's "right hand" in the war against Mexico (by Houston's own report), played a significant role, and as such, has been included in Texas History texts, (among other historical accounts) for decades (Gannon, 1981). The Texas Deaf Community has always been very strong and united in its construct.

Yet, not all states share the same sentiments toward their Deaf populations and some still resist formal acknowledgement of ASL as a true language. Many still believe (albeit erroneously) that ASL is merely a gestural form of English; an assertion proven false by the work of renowned linguist William Stokoe in the 1960's (Gannon, 1981). Unfortunately, misunderstandings persist with those in Deaf service professions, many of whom, said to be proficient in ASL, continue to think there is one "right way" to sign, when in fact there are many dialectical differences in ASL from region to region, state to state, between local Deaf communities, and further sign variations which emanate from within the home called "home signs." Differences seen by geographic region, state, city and community are exacerbated by the extreme heterogeneity within the population as well which cuts across ethnicity, race, and of course, gender.

Strong Deaf Communities. Strong Deaf Communities are local Deaf communities with a strong "Deaf center" (Higgins & Nash, 1987). This Deaf center, which sees "Deaf of Deaf" (or DofD, which represents 10% of the population, as the ascribed leaders of the community) is central to the whole of the Deaf community. In the SDC, Hearing people are seen to be the community "outsiders," and the quintessential "other," which is in direct opposition to the views of the dominant Hearing culture, which sees complete d/Deafness (hearing nothing and being forced to communicate through gestural language) as the most pitiful state of hearing loss (Lane, 1999). In the Deaf-World, and from a Deaf centered perspective; the more Hearing one is, the

more pitiful their state is seen as being. When a deaf individual adheres to a Hearing worldview, they are often seen as broken by those within Deaf culture, and some may refer to the individual as “Hearing-Impaired.”

[While “hearing impaired” is still considered to be an insult by Deaf persons, and as such is rarely used by Deaf individuals, the concept is used rather frequently but only when speaking about those oriented to a Hearing worldview. In ASL the sign for “Hearing” is represented by repeatedly using the sign for “say,” while exaggerating the repetitive motion, making larger circles to add emphasis. This is signed by using the index finger, horizontal to the chin, in a clock-wise motion, tapping the chin with each revolution of the index finger. This accentuates the deaf individual’s reliance on spoken language to communicate. When signing the concept of “Hearing-impaired,” the index finger follows the same repetitive motion but is moved upwards to the forehead, representing the understanding that the individual has a “Hearing brain,” or that the individual “thinks Hearing,” or is oriented to a Hearing worldview. From a Deaf perspective, the only deaf persons seen as disabled are those who think like Hearing people.]

Unfortunately the issues faced by Deaf communities today continue to pose threat to the Deaf way of life. Special interest groups still seeking to destroy aspects of Deaf culture, have created a dire need to explore *local* Deaf communities, documenting Deaf Americans’ lived experiences in both education and vocation, to ensure that whatever future changes we make, we do so with the inclusion of a Deaf perspective. The field of rehabilitation, focused on populations with varying degrees of ability, always operates with an end goal of employment. As such, this study further divides this population by using a cross section of members of the Deaf community with largest working class of Deaf Americans; the “ordinary” or “grassroots Deaf” workers (Andersson, 1992).

Ordinary/grassroots members of the Deaf community. Smith (2005) uses two definitions from the literature to characterize the target population under study, the first; from Smith (1996) who described a “grassroots” member of the Deaf community as one who is “‘really Deaf,’ linguistically and culturally, untouched by hearing values and ideas,” (p. 120). The second definition derived from Andersson (1992) who defined a grassroots member of the

Deaf community as being of the largest segment of the population, representing those who did not complete a post-secondary education. All four of the informants in this study fit both of these definitions.

As touched on previously, “convert Deaf” individuals, who are often referred to in the literature as members of the convert Deaf culture, are born into Hearing families, are often raised orally, are educated either in oral schools, or in the mainstream classroom with little to no contact with other d/Deaf individuals, but once contact with the Deaf community is made, they experience a “conversionary” process where they alter their Hearing-centered worldview from one of deficiency, based on a Medical Model/ Hearing-World orientation to deafness, to a Deaf-centered worldview, based on a Deaf cultural/linguistic minority worldview (Bechter, 2008). If a deaf child is born into a Hearing family but enters into a Deaf residential school setting at a young age, Deaf cultural values and norms are often acquired by the young deaf student socially, through peer to peer interaction with Deaf of Deaf peers and the conversionary process is a non-issue later in life.

Summary of the Deaf American population. To summarize what has been covered in this discussion of d/Deaf populations; the ADC is a broad, inclusive term which encompasses all Deaf Americans, their families, and individuals with all levels of hearing loss, including those who work within the professions of d/Deaf services who are seen as allies. Local Deaf communities are insular, tightly knit extended kinship networks in specific geographic locations which have been established historically around Deaf residential schools and collective employment opportunities for Deaf migrant workers.

Strong Deaf Communities (SDCs), found in local Deaf communities, are characterized by a Strong-Deaf center where DofD community members who form the core of the community, are considered to be the leaders of the SDC, and serve as the community elders. Grassroots members of the Deaf community are those who adhere to a Deaf worldview and by definition, did not complete a postsecondary education. Grassroots Deaf workers belong to the largest segment of the Deaf American working class.

The four informants in this study are all grassroots members of a local, Strong Deaf Community in Houston, Texas. The informants were all recruited by the USPS in the late 1960's-early 1970's through use of rehabilitation services, migrated to Houston to enter into postal employment, resulting in their establishment of a new, Strong Deaf Community. Now that we have established the Deaf American population parameters, the line of inquiry this study follows, the history behind Deaf Americans as a working class, the historical patterns of Deaf collective employment, and how these collective employment opportunities can lead Deaf workers to establish new local Strong Deaf Communities, we will now review what we know about the collective employment of Deaf workers.

The Collective Deaf Worker

The collective characteristics of Deaf Americans originate from their connection to the Deaf community and in particular, the Deaf of Deaf (DofD) community members who have traditionally passed on the core values, morals and ethics of all that is “Deaf,” either within Deaf families (generation to generation), or peer to peer (typically occurring in the residential school environment but also in the Deaf community at large). Historically, and in reference to the Deaf collective worker mentality, one trade above all other influences not only led to the majority of

what little Deaf American history has been preserved, but has also helped to serve as a moral compass for young Deaf workers of industry; the business and vocation of the printing trade.

The previous trade of choice in Deaf circles (prior to Deaf collective employment opportunities with the USPS, which began in the late 1960's), emanated from one specific vocational skill training program that was seen in most (if not all) Deaf residential schools; was that of the printing trade. Deaf leaders used this medium to advocate for Deaf workers, seeking to counteract the negative stereotypes created in the dominant discourse that sought to further marginalize Deaf Americans. But this was not the original intent.

Residential schools stated from the outset that their Little Papers would serve multiple purposes. One of these always was to teach printing, but the others were broader, such as to inform patrons of the school's activities, to assist students in literary studies, to teach reading, and to keep the general public abreast of the school's programs and goals. The most important function in terms of the deaf community's viability, however, was to exchange news about deaf individuals and groups and to provide cultural guidelines for deaf people. (Vickrey Van Cleve & Crouch, 1989, p. 100)

Deaf periodicals served many purposes from the acknowledgment of Deaf employment successes, alerting Deaf workers of "Deaf friendly" employment opportunities, to connecting community members across the country but these Little Papers as they were affectionately called, also served to transmit both Deaf cultural values, and what I've termed "the Deaf collective work ethic." Little papers amplified the Deaf-World understanding that even the solitary Deaf worker served as a model of representation for *all Deaf workers*. The successes and/or failures of a single Deaf worker were not limited to the reputation of that singular, solitary Deaf worker but affected the collective reputation of all Deaf workers as a class.

While some disruptions within Deaf communities (as with any community) are both expected and tolerated; when one Deaf person reflects badly upon the whole of the Deaf

collective community in the workplace, the individual invites a sharp, heavy handed response from Deaf community leaders. Deaf periodicals have historically served numerous purposes but they are still (as they always have been), a central aspect of the American Deaf Community and can still be seen today from local community flyers to the largest nationwide Deaf periodical still in print, “SIGNews.”

Over the years, Little Papers have served to document what little Deaf History we have, and the historical data contained therein, has been preserved in large part through the Gallaudet University Archives. While I was able to locate multiple articles in reference to Deaf postal workers through the Gallaudet University Archives online, including evidence that Deaf postal workers had been a part of the USPS since the time of the Railway Mail Service, that there have been multiple Deaf postmasters and even one article in reference to a Deaf postmistress, most of the articles were from the 1800’s to the early 1900’s timeframe and fall outside the timeframe understudy, which again, began in the late 1960’s (http://archives.gallaudet.edu/Deaf_Library_Collections_and_Archives/Collections.html).

These Little Papers, and the references to the articles they contain, tend to disappear almost as fast as they are published online (if published at all) making it difficult at times to locate and cite them. Indeed, some of the articles I found during the early stages of my research into this topic have since disappeared. One such article, sent to me by a community member, entitled “The Incredible Shrinking Clerks” (Plilar, 2002) discusses the experiences of Houston based Deaf postal employees, and will be included in the presentation of the research findings in Chapter 4. This article states there were once over 200 Deaf postal employees in the Houston area alone (a number that has since dwindled to the current number of Deaf postal workers in Houston, which is said to be less than 20).

Deaf postal workers. In seeking information about postal workers in general, one would naturally begin online searching the vast number of articles documenting the USPS as an integral part of our nation's history (<http://npm.si.edu/exhibits/index.html>). A quick search on the National Postal Museum's official website for "*deaf*" however, yields no results. When searching other minority groups, multiple results are produced. A search for "*Women*" yields 403 results; "*African American*" 201; "*Black*" 1070; "*Negro*" 27; "*Hispanic*" 46; "*Latino*" 21; but not one result was found for "*deaf*," until I substituted "*hearing impaired*" for "*deaf*" ("*hearing impaired*" being the label created by the medical community and considered an insult by Deaf individuals). This search yielded two results; one having nothing to do with the topic and the other; a statement of ADA compliance, should a "*hearing impaired*" individual choose to visit the Smithsonian National Postal Museum in Washington, D.C., in person.

The histories of other minorities within the USPS however, have gained the industrial giant recognition and recently, an award from Black Enterprise Magazine (July, 2010) which rated the post office among one of the 40 best companies for workforce diversity. A Postal News article online, which notified workers of this award states that 40% of their employees are minorities (compared with 32.8% in other federal agencies); 15% of executives as African American, with a total of approximately 124,000 African- Americans; 52,000 Hispanics; 50,000 Asians; 1,300 native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders; and nearly 4,000 American Indian/Alaskan Natives (Saunders, 2010).

While this is admittedly an impressive breakdown of workforce diversity, this article (as was seen in reference to the National Postal Museum archives) fails to mention ever having hired d/Deaf workers. Unfortunately this is common to the Deaf experience, even though Deaf history is culturally rich, and linguistically unique. Deaf Americans have heavily influenced mainstream

American history, yet no one would know how, or to what degree, absent historical recognition. To know anything of Deaf American history and the people who continue to preserve it, then to learn of how this history continues to be suppressed, is disappointing at best.

One example offered by Ladd (2009) in reference to an attempt in 1993 by the Smithsonian to document Deaf American History ended due to a lawsuit brought about by oralists and the Alexander Graham Bell Society (AGBS) which claimed the historical exhibits were not representative of the deaf American experience as most deaf Americans did not belong to a deaf community or culture (p. 38). The aversion to the proposed exhibit was, as Ladd points out, not due misrepresentation, but more so the central theme of oralism as an abusive system (a fact neither the medical community nor those who continue to push an ineffective oralist agenda want to see documented in any medium). While the general public's understanding of this ongoing conflict has proven elusive, as Lane (1999) points out; if Deaf Americans and American Sign Language were broadly accepted by the general American public, then there would no longer be anything left for the medical community to purport to "fix," weakening the position of the medical community, invariably leading to a sharp decline in profits.

Regardless of whether or not documented, or known to the general public, Deaf workers are not included in this award discussion because; while the Deaf-World sees Deafness as an ethnicity, a culture, and a linguistic minority; these sentiments are still not widely accepted by the general public, or the U.S. government; even though the ethnic origins of Deaf Americans, can be traced back prior to the first English Colony in North America; with the earliest known record from early European explorers being noted by Giovanni da Verrazzano in 1524 (Groce, 1985). In fact, Lane, Pillard, and Hedberg (2010) recently explored Deaf American genealogy,

effectively tracing American Deaf Culture back 300 years, making the first solid case for Deaf as an ethnicity (sometimes referred to in the literature as “*Deafnicity*”).

While other minority groups have seen a great deal of progress since the civil rights movement of the 1960’s, Deaf Americans continue to face new threats to the well-being of their people and it could be argued that in many respects; one being allowed input in how they should be served; Deaf Americans fared better 150 years ago than they do today as they continue to face new challenges from those who claim to serve them while consistently denying them input.

[Oddly, the disability rights movement has also marginalized a Deaf cultural perspective in their movement as it did not coincide with their agenda, even though the American Disability Act (ADA) would never have passed, were it not for the Deaf President Now movement at Gallaudet in 1988, during the time in which the ADA was set to die in committee. The Deaf culture view (which does not see d/Deafness as a disability); sought protection under civil rights laws, but the Deaf view was drowned out yet again by the masses.]

To better understand how strong Deaf Americans once were and how they were “disabled” through the control of the dominant discourse, one only need study the work of Harlan Lane; *Mask of Benevolence* (1999); where Lane, drawing heavily from the work of Foucault, outlined the parallels between how Deaf Americans were “disabled” through control of the dominant discourse and the methods used in the colonization of African communities (p.31). While control over the nomenclature used to frame this discourse is still seen in the literature; yet another method of control over the discourse is based on that which is not seen (or omitted by design). This can be seen in the lack of representation of Deaf perspectives in discourse in a wide array of fields but is slowly changing as Deaf perspectives have begun to emerge and as professionals in various fields have come to realize the full weight of the growing need to understand Deaf perspectives if they are to be effective in working within Deaf populations.

Unfortunately, this series of professional revelations have yet to penetrate the dominant

historical institutions in America (as was seen in the complete lack of Deaf representation in both Smithsonian and National Postal Museum historical accounts). However, while these historical institutions remain silent in regards to Deaf postal workers, some references to Deaf postal workers can be found by searching the internet.

Additional internet searches for Deaf postal workers yielded a handful of relevant results. Moy (1993) discusses issues of diversity within the postal workforce, racial tensions and the crossing of racial divides due to the shared similarities of all postal workers in regards to childcare needs, yet fails to include Deaf postal employees in this discussion save one paragraph on the last page. Moy wrote;

The International did provide important support at two national conferences for deaf postal workers in 1991. Their effort was successful, in part, because the deaf culture, though ethnically diverse, is relatively homogenous and the group itself is not large. Wing, who helped organize the West Coast conference observes that as a result of the conference, deaf postal workers feel they finally have a place in the union and the Postal Service. There's also much greater respect among everyone for the struggles deaf workers go through just to live and work at the Post Office. (p. 90)

While it is heartening to see Deaf postal workers included in this discussion, d/Deaf populations are not “relatively homogenous” and not all deaf persons belong to (or see themselves as members of) Deaf culture. In fact, it could be argued that d/Deaf employees represent one of the most heterogenous populations in the postal workforce. The conferences Moy mentions here were the result of the establishment of the APWU (American Postal Workers Union) Deaf and Hard of Hearing Task Force in 1988 to resolve some of the issues faced by Deaf postal employees (<http://www.apwu.org/dhohtf/deafhoh-about.html>). This task force will have been explored further through the interview of a key informant who has worked extensively as a member of the task force for a number of years.

The APWU, in stark contrast to the USPS has worked diligently on behalf of Deaf postal workers to advocate for equity in the workplace. One article of use regarding the APWU was found in reference to the 1988 Deaf President Now (DPN) protests when Gallaudet University students and faculty protested the selection of yet another Hearing person to the University's presidency who had no prior knowledge or experience with Deafness, ASL, or the Deaf-World in general. The article pointed to the \$5,000.00 contribution from and the unwavering support of the APWU's then President, Moe Biller.

(http://www.gallaudet.edu/About_Gallaudet/History_of_the_University/DPN_Home/Issues/Week_of_DPN.html). Moe Biller was renowned for his unwavering support of all postal workers, but his passing was a particularly sharp blow to minority postal workers (Anonymous, 2003) including Deaf postal workers who lost a champion in the fight for fair and equitable treatment in the postal workplace.

[I was in high school when this protest occurred, and I distinctly remember (as it is something I will never forget) when Moe Biller addressed the crowd of Deaf student protesters closing his speech with the ASL "I love you" sign on national and international news. It should also be noted, a similar conflict arose, yet again in 2006, but the latest protest did not garner the international attention the previous movement received, and ultimately led to a probationary status under threat of a loss of accreditation for GU; yet another testament to the ongoing conflict between Deaf and Hearing populations. While politicians were unprepared for the first protest, it seems lessons learned from this experience, may have led to a preemptive plan for future protests, seeking to ensure control of media coverage. Both movements have been cast as Deaf rejection of a Hearing candidate, simply because they were hearing (not Deaf), and dismiss the truth behind these events, in that Deaf Americans were protesting not a Hearing person, but more so the Hearing dominance over and oppression of the Deaf-World by selecting a President that had absolutely no experience in Deafness.]

A Facebook page for Deaf postal workers page was found through the internet search that called into question whether or not the conferences for Deaf postal employees Moy mentions are still occurring

(<http://pa-in.facebook.com/group.php?gid=19051575742&v=wall.html>). This Facebook page is of interest as Deaf postal employees seem to also be using it as an informal bidding system for positions across the nation, mediating the communication barriers still evident in the postal workplace. Plilar (2002) points out how Deaf postal workers “cannot bid by phone,” (para. 2) as the postal bidding system was not made to be compatible with either the telephone relay system or the TTY, both of which are typical telecommunication devices utilized by Deaf Americans.

[Through my experiences with my father as a Deaf postal employee, I remember the frustrations he and others had with the USPS bidding system which was (and still is to the best of my knowledge) based on an automated system which has to be accessed by telephone. I remember this distinctly as I was asked to interpret in these situations. If my father had to call in sick, the process was similar. Every call was a struggle, as postal policy demanded the worker to personally make the call, and every time I interpreted for my father in this type of situation, I was berated by the operators for not following postal protocols. When I became older, I simply acted like I was my father, by lowering my voice to sound like an adult, to avoid these confrontations as postal administrators never addressed these issues.]

In searching the internet for information in regards to Deaf postal workers, one recent topic comes up rather frequently; the class action lawsuit brought against the USPS in the wake of the 2001 “Anthrax in the mail incidents.” This legal challenge was lost by the USPS, who was found to be in violation of the civil rights of d/Deaf postal workers by not making critical safety information (in regards to anthrax in the mail) accessible to Deaf postal workers when the USPS refused to hire certified interpreters for safety meetings (Decker, 2003). However, it should be noted; not all Deaf postal workers agreed with this lawsuit, as legal action against an employer (warranted or not) from the Deaf cultural perspective is seen as an action that would invariably do more harm than good.

[In a recent discussion with my father in reference to this lawsuit and his personal view, he expressed this same sentiment.]

Deaf postal workers in Houston. The only applicable article found, specific to the Deaf postal worker experience in Houston, given to me by a member of the community (as was

mentioned in the discussion of little papers) was the article entitled *The Incredible Shrinking Clerks* (Plilar, 2002). In this article, Plilar (2002) speaks to the prejudice, racism, discrimination and minority status of Deaf postal workers in Houston. As Plilar pointed out; “in 1973 there were over 200 deaf employees in the Houston Post Office” and “today there are less than thirty” (para. 2). This article was written in reference to the dramatic decrease in the number of Deaf postal workers specific to the Houston area alone and though I have not been able to locate formal documentation to support this assertion, it seems as though similar patterns of decline were seen in locations across the nation.

[This assertion is based on conversations held with Deaf postal workers].

If this is indeed the case, it would mean the USPS Deaf collective employment opportunities followed the same Deaf collective employment patterns seen during WWI and WWII in Buchanan’s work, with one exception. The current conflicts in the Middle East have not stimulated the United States economy and instead of yet another experienced labor shortage (which might have increased Deaf employment opportunities); we are currently experiencing higher rates of unemployment, which have not yet found relief.

Summary of the Deaf collective worker. In the previous three sections, we covered the available literature of what we know about the historical patterns of Deaf collective employment, Deaf postal workers and ending with discussion of Deaf postal workers specific to the Houston area. Now that we have covered what we know, pointing out the gaps in the available literature along the way, we will now move toward establishing the historical context for the present study.

Historical Context for the Present Study

The patterns of war and labor shortages leading to collective employment opportunities for Deaf Americans (seen during both World Wars) was repeated yet again in the late 1960's during the Vietnam War era. But for the first time, Deaf Americans found numerous collective employment opportunities within the ranks of the United States Postal Service. While this phenomenon has been documented by the National Postal Museum (in partnership with the Smithsonian) in regards to increased opportunities for other minority groups (e.g., women and African Americans) it has not been explored or documented in regards to the increased opportunities seen during the same period for the increase in collective employment opportunities afforded Deaf Americans. While scant evidence exists of Deaf postal workers in general, the histories of other minorities have been documented and afforded historical recognition through the Smithsonian National Postal Museum both online (<http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu/index.html>), and through multiple exhibits available for public viewing at The Smithsonian, in Washington D.C. Several minority groups were documented as having experienced increased employment opportunities during the same period Deaf workers were targeted for recruitment.

The USPS Deaf collective employment migration explored in this study was significant as it seemingly represents the first time the field of Vocation Rehabilitation played a critical role in securing collective employment opportunities for Deaf workers. The primary impetus for the inclusion of Deaf workers seems to be a traditional rehabilitation intervention study seeking to mediate the high rates of unemployment experienced by Deaf graduates from Gallaudet University in the Washington D.C. area during the Vietnam War era labor shortage. This one study seems to have ultimately spurred migrations of Deaf workers to locations across the United States (Manning & Stansbury, 1969). While the USPS offers no specific numbers at any given

point in history in regards to the thousands of Deaf workers who have entered the postal workforce, it seems safe to assume the ultimate result of this one rehabilitation study was that it led to the largest number of Deaf workers ever hired in one industry, in American history. Yet, like so many other Deaf stories, it has escaped the historical recognition it deserves.

Summary of the Literature Review

Summarily, in this chapter, we have reviewed the available literature in reference to the Deaf American postal worker experience. Beginning with a review of Buchanan's *Illusions* (1999), we established the primary line of inquiry this study follows, the historical patterns of Deaf collective employment, and the development of a Deaf American working class, which was seen to be tapped during times of war to mediate resultant labor shortages. We outlined the conflict between the two traditional models of d/Deafness seen in the literature (the Medical Model vs. the Cultural/Linguistic Minority Model). We established Deaf American population parameters from the largest American Deaf community, to the local collective Deaf community (some of which are considered to be Strong Deaf Communities when formed with a strong, Deaf center), to the grassroots Deaf members of the Deaf community. We then discussed the history behind the Deaf collective worker, ending with a discussion of what little we know about Deaf postal workers in general, and specifically within the Houston area. To end this discussion, we established the historical context for the present study.

While Buchanan (1999) has documented the phenomenon of Deaf collective industrial employment, establishing a solid line of inquiry and an increased depth of understanding of the Deaf world of work experience from 1850-1950, his work was historical and as such, Buchanan

was unable to include the personal experiences of Deaf workers who took part in previous collective employment migrations to better understand how these events influenced their lives.

By now, the reader should have developed an understanding of the historical influences behind the phenomena under study, including the historical context for the present study. However, questions remain about the individual and shared experiences of Deaf workers who take part in collective employment opportunities, migrate to new geographic locations, succeed in achieving tenure in competitive work environments, and in the process establish new collective Strong Deaf Communities.

While all people from the cradle to the grave are exposed to a myriad of influences that culminate in shaping their worldview, Deaf individuals can be dramatically affected if exposed to certain influences. A few of the many potential influences include, age at onset (of deafness), the individual's family of origin (whether it is primarily Hearing or Deaf, the family's view of d/Deafness, to what extent the family adheres to the Medical Model view of deafness, the family's expectations of their child and the culture of the family of origin). Other possible influences include; geographic location, socioeconomic status, where the d/Deaf child attends school, level of exposure to ASL, level of exposure to the Deaf community, and at what age the child was exposed to these influences. An exhaustive list of every single influence that possesses the potential to shape a person's life, even for one, singular, individual, would prove to be an exercise in futility, but for those who are d/Deaf, the list expands exponentially.

What We Seek to Understand

In seeking to understand the experiences that can shape the lived experiences of grassroots Deaf Americans, lead them to choose to pursue collective employment opportunities

and as a result, also lead them to establish new Strong Deaf Communities; the informants' stories will have been explored across three broad preset themes of; early learning experiences, vocational/ collective employment experiences, and experiences in the establishment/development of a new strong Deaf community in Houston. These three themes were chosen as they represent gaps seen in the Deafness literature due to a created state of exclusion through control over the dominant discourse, and a lack of data collected in reference to d/Deaf populations from childhood to the elimination of data once collected by the U.S. Census.

To make clear the answers we seek and to better understand how we will have achieved the end goal of discovery, a discussion of each of the three broad themes will follow, in the next three sections along with operational definitions of these three terms as they will have been used in this study. In each section, following the operational definitions, and the discussion, a description of how each theme ties in to the present study will be included.

Early learning experiences. Early learning experiences will have been explored as a means by which to better understand the informants' backgrounds from a Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) perspective, which breaks from more traditional models of career development (which adhere to specific ages and stages of "normal" development) in seeking to understand theoretical elements that either promote or stymie developmental tasks across the lifespan (Lent, 2005, p. 103). With the SCCT view of career development across the lifespan in mind, coupled with the underlying assumption of career success (all four informants in the present study were able to achieve tenure with the USPS); the informants' early learning experiences that promoted successful career development will have been explored to better understand what enabled them to succeed in a competitive work environment. This breaks from

more traditional approaches seen in the rehabilitation research, which have historically sought out areas of deficiency in the Deaf rehabilitation consumer as targets for future intervention.

Within this theme, we seek to understand how the informants' early learning experiences led to the development of primary vocational goals, each informant pursued upon leaving TSD. This study also seeks to understand how the informants' early learning experiences influenced their respective decisions in choosing to enter into collective employment with the USPS and how these early learning experiences led them to establish a new strong Deaf community.

Employment/vocational experiences. “Collective employment,” as it will have been used in the present study, is based on two definitions. The first definition is derived from the Oxford American Dictionary definition of collective as “a collection, or number of individuals” (1998, p. 111). The second definition comes from the Encyclopedia Britannica definition of collective bargaining; specifically in reference to the relationship of negotiations between the Deaf American class of workers and American Industry, in regards to “not only wages but hiring practices, layoffs, promotions, job functions, working conditions and hours, worker discipline, and termination and benefit programs”

(<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/125540/collective-bargaining.html>). While employee/employer relations will be touched on, “collective employment” will be used in the present study to represent historical eras where significant changes in the hiring practices of corporate entities in response to wartime labor shortages where Deaf workers in large number were recruited, and hired, leading to the establishment of new Deaf communities. Within the confines of this study, collective employment will have been used to represent the active recruitment of Deaf workers by the USPS in an attempt to mediate the experienced labor shortages brought about by the United State’s role in the Vietnam War. This study also seeks to

understand how the USPS Deaf collective employment opportunity led to the establishment of a new SDC in Houston.

Strong Deaf Communities. The use of “Strong Deaf Communities” (SDCs) refers to Deaf communities, established by the Deaf people, for the Deaf, characterized as having a strong-Deaf center. Groce (1980) discusses this topic in regards to Martha’s Vineyard and pointed out, there did not seem to be an insular signing community because all the island’s inhabitants (Deaf and Hearing) could sign. She surmised that a SDC did not develop and attributed this to a lack of experienced discrimination based on deafness (defined in the Deafness literature as “audism”). In Buchanan (1999) these SDCs were said to have been established in geographic locations where Deaf workers were recruited for collective employment and were referred to as Silent Colonies.

The present study will have explored the SDC the informants helped to establish for several reasons. The first is to better understand how collective behaviors in Deaf culture, formed early on during early learning experiences, carry over into adulthood, influencing the Deaf individual in the world of work. The second is to develop an understanding of how Deaf individuals utilize the collective community for support across the lifespan as it is hoped that this understanding will lead to improved methods of rehabilitation services that take Deaf cultural behaviors into consideration in their development. Yet another reason to explore this SDC is that while most SDCs seen in past collective employment migrations dissipated after employment opportunities dwindled, this Houston based SDC continues to evolve and flourish, though support for Deaf postal workers waned. The informants’ involvement in the SDC they helped to create may hold the key to understanding how they were able to achieve tenure in a competitive

work environment and in assisting DVRCs in developing interventions that focus on job retention strategies.

How We Will Gain the Understandings We Seek

The three broad themes listed will have been explored in three corresponding “phases” of interview questions in Chapter 3, with one set of questions (or phase) for each theme.

Ethnographic methods will have been used within a constructivist paradigm to allow the informants to co-construct the realities of their lived experiences. The three broad preset themes were chosen as they correspond well to the lived experiences of the informants and because of the importance these constructs hold for the field of rehabilitation. As discussed previously, each of the three broad themes also correspond to tenets pulled from social cognitive career theory (SCCT), which will have been used in framing the research findings in the following chapters. How these influences and constructs will have been explored, documented and presented will be covered in Chapter 3 that follows.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Deaf Americans have historically answered the call when experienced labor shortages negatively affected the whole of the American Industrial labor force. While the historical patterns of wartime gains and peacetime losses by Deaf workers has been documented (Buchanan, 1999), the experiences of Deaf workers who took part in these collective employment migrations have not. The research questions of interest to this study are; what are the experiences of Deaf workers in relation to early learning, collective employment and in the establishment of a new strong-Deaf community? The purpose of this study is to increase our understanding of how grassroots Deaf workers of industry successfully navigate the world of work and to better understand how the collective aspect of Deaf culture influences the process. Since no documentation of these constructs or experiences from a Deaf centered perspective exist, a constructivist approach ensures the most accurate means by which to not only explore and document the lived experiences of these men, but also in “lending voice” to the historically silenced, creating the opportunity for the informants to assume a larger role in the present study through the use of co-constructed understandings, member checks and multiple methods of data triangulation.

This study seeks to increase our understanding of the lived experiences of four Deaf men who were all part of a collective employment cohort of Deaf postal workers that migrated to Houston in the late 1960’s and as a result, established a new strong Deaf community in Houston. The purpose of exploring the experiences of these men is to increase our understanding of how the collective aspect of Deaf culture influenced their behaviors in choosing to alter their original

vocational goal after high school to enter collective employment with the USPS and how these experiences led these men to establish a new strong Deaf community in Houston.

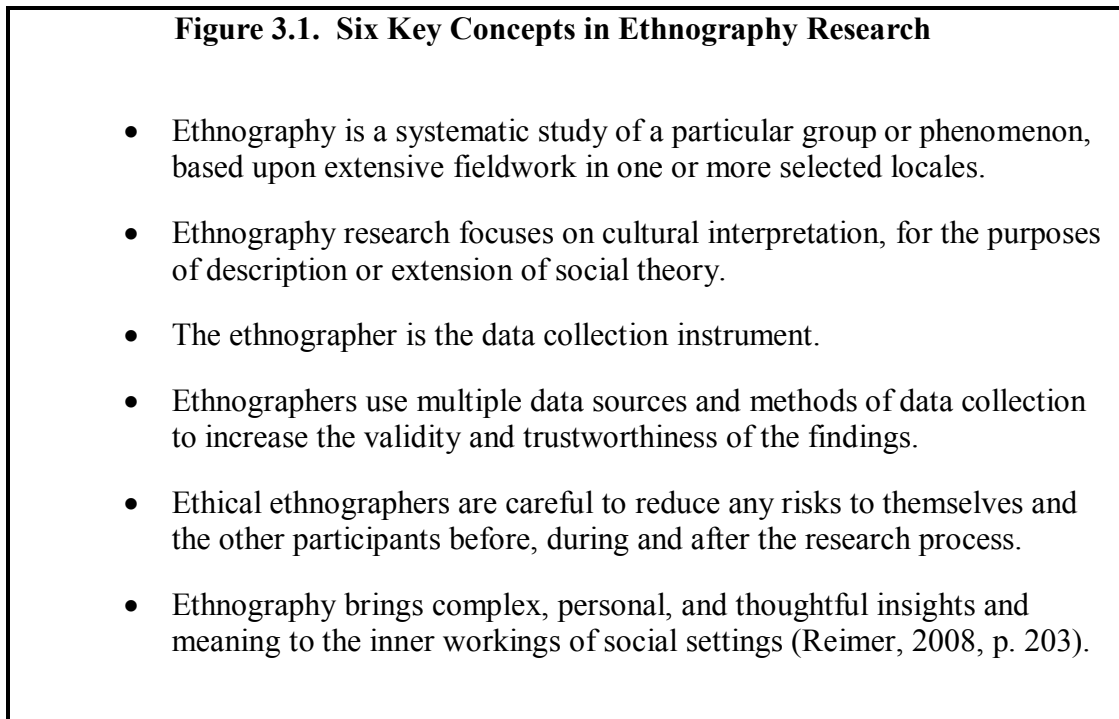
Paradigm Situation and Theoretical Orientation

Constructivists see the world, not as one reality out there to be captured, but as an infinite number of realities dependent upon knowledge which is seen to be the result of human/social construction; understandings as co-constructions which result from the interaction that takes place during the research process between informants (also referred to as research participants) and researchers (Hatch, 2002). This particular approach is best suited for the present study because, while I am a community member and these men are my community elders who have shared their stories with me for as long as I can remember (storytelling in ASL is highly valued in Deaf Culture), my emic (or insider) knowledge of their lived experiences is limited, as I was not there to bear witness (with the exception of my being raised in the Houston Deaf community being studied) to the full range of events under study. I extend my relationship with this collective community into the current study as a means by which to better represent one of the most misunderstood populations in the field of rehabilitation, and to show the ways in which the USPS collective employment opportunities for grassroots Deaf workers during the timeframe under study led to the establishment of our Deaf collective community.

Ethnographic Methods

Ethnography, one of the oldest forms of qualitative research has its roots planted firmly in the field of anthropology, and as a research methodology, is centered on the study of people, with a focus on cultural phenomena (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006).

Reimer (2008) identifies six key concepts involved in ethnography research. The six key concepts are listed below in Figure 3.1.



Fetterman (1998) defined ethnography as “the art and science of describing a group or culture” (p. 1). Ethnographic methods today are used in a wide array of various fields of study, yet all share the central tenet of seeking to describe a group or culture from an emic, or native view.

Ethnography is built upon the premise that human behavior is a product of how people interpret their world, that meaning is socially constructed by individuals through interactions with the people and objects around them, and that there are multiple ways of interpreting experiences. (Foster, 1998, p. 116)

However, the traditional ethnographic methods of developing an emic perspective of the people being studied those of; joining, building trust, participating in the group’s activities to better gain a native perspective will not have been seen in the present study because I am a

product of the community under study. My field observations, in this study will have been based on my lived experiences, my membership in the community under study, my professional experience, and my educational pursuits.

While ethnographies can be approached in an endless number of ways, Fairhurst and Good (1991) offer five steps involved in the planning of ethnographic case studies which will be used in the present study. These steps are listed in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2. Five Steps in Planning Ethnographic Case Studies

Step 1: Select general topic

Step 2: Select site and informant(s)

Step 3: Data collection through interviews

Step 4: Data collection through field observation

Step 5: Analysis and writing (Fairhurst & Good, 1991, pp. 16-17).

The general topic to have been explored in this proposed study is the grassroots Deaf workers' experiences in regards to early learning, employment and new strong Deaf community establishment. The site that will have been explored is one local Deaf collective community in Houston with four informants, where one of whom (my father), will serve as the key informant in this study. This study seeks to explore the individual and shared experiences of these men through use of semi structured interviews where member checks are built in to increase the trustworthiness of the data.

This study will also have included member checks in the development of the methodology chosen and in the development of the research questions, through constant conversations with my father to ensure accuracy of representation. While this study began as an historical investigation; as my research and understanding of the phenomena under study evolved, so too, did the research questions, bringing me to realize an ethnographic approach would better exemplify the informants' lived experiences.

Additional methods of triangulation will have been employed throughout the study and confirmation of research findings will have been compared to the literature for confirmation. Data collection through field observation in this study will break from more traditional methods seen in ethnographies, as my lived experience as a member of this community will serve as the bulk of my field observations. My thoughts and/or observations will have been bracketed throughout.

“Typical Ethnographic research employs three kinds of data collection: interviews, observation, and documents, resulting in one product: narrative description” (Genzuk, 2003, p. 2). Observation in ethnography is a central theme where the ethnographer is often expected to spend a great deal of time initially, building trust and rapport. This includes an expectation of ethnographer participation as a member of the community under study to deepen the experience. In the present study, my observations have accumulated over the course of my life as a member of this community. As stated, member checks will have been built into the study through the inclusion of multiple informants and by including my father as the key informant. My findings and/or interpretations will have been checked for accuracy through discussions with my father. If further information is needed from the informants, I will be able to schedule follow up interviews, or call via videophone for follow up questions.

The main documents of interest in this study consist of Buchanan's (1999) *Illusions of Equality*, one Gallaudet University study (Manning & Stansbury, 1969) which precipitated the hiring of Deaf workers en masse during the period of interest, and an article entitled *The Incredible Shrinking Clerks* (Plilar, 2002); which was sent to me by a community member. This study draws heavily from Buchanan's line of inquiry, which studied the employment of Deaf workers of industry from 1850-1950 ending with the last known collective employment opportunity for Deaf workers into the printing trade. The intervention study from Gallaudet may have been used for contextual and historical purposes as it may also be a critical piece of this narrative as it seems to have been the main catalyst (coupled with the experienced labor shortage during this period) for the postal opportunities for Deaf workers that followed. Other articles that may have been of interest will be included in the data analysis discussion that follows.

Participant Selection

This study will have required a specific, purposeful selection of Deaf men who identify as members of Deaf culture, utilize American Sign Language (ASL) as their primary mode of communication, were hired by the USPS during the period under study (beginning in the late 1960's-early 1970's), were consumers of rehabilitation services prior to entry, were able to achieve tenure with the USPS and were instrumental in the establishment of a strong-Deaf community in Houston, Texas that centered around a Deaf congregation established within a Hearing church. Four informants were chosen as a means by which to include multiple data sources to increase the validity and trustworthiness of the findings (Reimer, 2008). The sample of informants was limited to four to allow the space for more depth in each individual interview and as a means to manage the workload as these interviews will have the additional step of ASL to English interpretation.

This purposive selection of informants was implemented for several reasons including; choosing informants based on their individual experiences, by their level of involvement in the Deaf community, and my prior knowledge of each of the informants. My father (Informant 1) will serve as the key informant in this study as he is not only knowledgeable in the events under study, but also served as a deacon for the Deaf congregation established at Westbury Church of Christ at the heart of the SDC. He also recently stepped down from serving on the board for the Houston Deaf Senior Citizens organization

The second informant was chosen as he comes from a family where almost all members are Deaf and several (including his wife), also worked for the USPS. He was also included in this study because of his affiliation with the American Postal Worker's Union's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Task Force which was established in 1988 (<http://www.apwu.org/dhohtf/deafhoh-about.html>) to address some of the issues experienced with Deaf postal workers. His older brother (also Deaf), was present in the postal workforce prior to the migrations under study but left, returned to college, and became a DVRC in the Houston area. Informant 2 was also a member of the church congregation at Westbury.

Informant 3 was chosen because he has one of the strongest work ethics I have ever known. While growing up, I wondered if he ever slept, as he was known to have at least three jobs at any given time, and he was also a member of the church congregation. He (as was seen with Informant 2) also married a fellow Deaf postal worker.

The fourth informant chosen was also involved with the Houston Deaf Senior Citizens organization, along with Informant 1, but his post graduation vocational experiences in vocational training in the business of printing tie this study to Buchanan's (1999) line of inquiry,

where the last known collective employment opportunities were seen for Deaf workers of industry. His wife also works for the USPS and both still attend church services regularly, along with Informant 1 (at a sister church established after the Deaf congregation at Westbury folded). He also married a fellow Deaf postal worker (as was seen with Informant 2 and Informant 3).

Setting up the Interview Site. My goal in establishing the interview site is to create as natural an environment as possible to conduct the interviews. It is my intent to have created an environment for conducting the interviews that follows along the same lines as the conversations and stories we have shared with each other for decades. The interviews will have been conducted online and recorded via Skype. While I will be in Fayetteville, Arkansas, the informants will connect with me via the internet from my parents' house in Houston, Texas. The first interview I will have conducted will be with my father (the key informant), to work out any technical difficulties that may arise, and to set their office up to handle all the interviews in one place to avoid any technical issues.

Originally, I had planned to go to Houston to conduct face to face interviews but as I began fleshing out the methodology, I realized the set up I had planned leaned towards a more clinical and less natural setting, which felt as if it were moving the interviews away from purely ethnographic methods. After a great deal of thought, I came to consider the understanding that the Deaf have had use of video phone (often referred to as VP) technology for well over a decade, which has desensitized them to being on camera (in that specific medium). In line with the ethnographic stance of creating as natural an environment as possible to conduct the interviews, I decided this change was not a matter of convenience, but imperative in seeking to garner a higher level of quality data.

As a backup, two cameras will have been added, one on my end and one at my parent's house. The backup cameras will serve dual purposes. The first purpose of the two additional cameras is to serve as a backup for the continuity in the recording of the interviews on both ends in case the Skype technology fails to record, or if the file should be corrupted. The second purpose served is; if technical difficulties do arise (which is always a possibility when dealing with internet connections, or technology in general) the camera on the other end would continue to record. If the informants were to become frustrated with experienced technical difficulties, I would be made aware of it and would be able to make note of it in my written observations as this could influence the informants' answers. The main purpose in conducting the interviews at my parents' house is an attempt, on my part, in maintaining a sense of environmental "normalcy" in how we have always interacted. It is also imperative to remove any visual distractions on either end, in creating a comfortable space, and in ensuring the room is well lit by checking all bulbs to avoid flickers, as visual distractions like flickering bulbs, can interrupt the fluidity of visual based communication. I will also seek to avoid any influences that might create too much structure, making the interviews feel unnatural, rehearsed, and/or clinical. The goal is to make the informants feel as if the interview process is merely an extension of the endless number of conversations we have shared over the years. A set of guiding questions (added below) will be set off to the side of the monitor screen on my end, allowing me to glance occasionally to keep the interviews on track without distracting the informant by breaking eye contact.

Data Collection/ Interviews

Data will have been collected primarily via semi structured interviews, with one separate interview conducted for each of the four informants, interviewed in ASL, which should last no longer than 1.5 hours. All four interviews will be conducted over a two day period, with two

scheduled on the first day, and two the following. Between interviews, I will make note of any thoughts or considerations that should be documented, or issues that might need to be addressed later.

The videos will have been interpreted from ASL to English and transcribed simultaneously. Given that this will be a time consuming endeavor, with the added step of ASL to English interpretation, a Certified Deaf Interpreter (also a member of this community) will have been enlisted to transcribe in real time, for two main reasons; the first is due to my less than ideal typing skills, but also because it will have created yet another method toward greater community involvement and yet another member check. If my interpretation differs, or if there is an issue that “sticks out” in my mind, I will have made note of it in my field notes and will have followed up after the video has been transcribed. This method will not only save a great deal of time but it will also ensure greater accuracy and an increased level of community member involvement in the research process who might think of something important that I might have either missed or simply had not thought of.

This study seeks to gain depth of understanding across the three broad preset themes of; early learning experiences, vocational experiences, and the experienced process of taking part in the establishment/development of a strong Deaf community in Houston. In seeking to understand the early learning experiences of the informants, the interview will begin with open-ended questions to allow space for the informants to tell their stories. The questions below will guide the process. The following questions will have been strictly adhered to but space, and latitude will have been given to allow for follow up and new ideas. The space allowed for will have offered the informants time to follow their trains of thought. The interviews will also have

been partially tailored to the individual experiences of each of the informants only where their experiences in certain areas differ, seeking to add greater depth to the whole of the narrative.

The three broad preset themes of early learning, vocational and community based experiences will have been explored through three corresponding phases of the interview process. Phase I seeks to understand the informants' early learning experiences. Phase II explores their vocational experiences, while Phase III seeks to understand experiences within the community. In the three sections that follow, the questions that will have been used to gain the understandings we seek, will be presented with discussion of why each theme was chosen and why each theme is important from a social cognitive career perspective.

Phase I. The first phase of the interview process, seeking to understand the informants' early learning experiences, will begin with the following questions, listed below in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3. Phase I Early Learning Experiences

- Please describe your family background, including whether or not you have other Deaf family members.
- Please describe your early educational experiences including schools attended, and any extracurricular activities you participated in.
- What was it like growing up in this environment?
- What were your best subjects in school?
- What did you want to be when you grew up, and why?
- What experiences do you feel best prepared you for the world of work?
- Based on your knowledge and experience, has Deaf Education changed? If your answer is yes, how so?

Phase I of the interview process seeks to understand the informants' early learning experiences related to their families of origin, early educational experiences and in their preparation for the world of work. In Deaf populations, where one receives his education is critical as it may very well be the deciding factor in the development of his worldview. While the DoFD child is exposed to Deaf cultural values from within his family of origin, the deaf child born into a Hearing family is not, unless he enters the Deaf residential school setting at a young age. The four informants chosen for this study all attended Texas School for the Deaf (TSD) in Austin, Texas. The specific ages at entry and background information for every informant are not yet known.

Phase I of the interview process seeks to understand the informants' favorite subjects, extracurricular activities, vocational training and what experiences best prepared the informants for the world of work. In Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) the wide array of activities children are exposed to during early learning experiences, are seen as potential “harbingers of later career or leisure options” (Lent, 2005, p. 106) and are critical to the present study in seeking to understand how the informants' interests developed into the primary vocational goals they pursued upon leaving TSD. The informants' expression of primary vocational goals leads us into the next phase, which can be seen in Figure 3.4.

Phase II. The second phase of the interview process seeks to understand experiences related to the world of work. This phase begins with the informants' expressions of primary research goals developed from interests as students, prior to leaving TSD. Of particular interest in Phase II are the influences that led the informants to alter their primary vocational goals, encouraging them to seek out other options. The questions that will have been used in this phase to gain the understandings we seek, are listed in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4. Phase II Collective Employment/ Vocational Experiences

- What was your primary vocational goal after high school, and what steps had you taken toward reaching this goal?
- Please describe in detail, the process that led to your decision to enter into employment with the USPS.
- Did the opportunity to work with other Deaf people influence your decision? How so?
- What influenced your decision to turn a job with the USPS into a career?
- What do you feel was the greatest contributing factor to your career success?
- Based on your knowledge and experience, has the world of work changed for Deaf workers? If your answer is yes, how so?

Phase II of the interview process primarily seeks to develop understandings of the informants' employment related experiences and how these experiences ultimately led the informants to choose to enter into collective employment with the USPS. In SCCT, an individual's interests and vocational goals are seen to be subjected to constant revision through an ongoing environmental feedback loop, where the individual receives encouragement or discouragement to pursue certain options (Lent, 2005, p. 106).

Phase II also seeks to understand the influences that led the informants to seek to maintain their positions within the postal workforce, where they turned job opportunities into tenured careers. Persistence in SCCT "is considered a sign of performance adequacy because it is assumed that competent performers will persist (and be *allowed to persist*) longer, enabling attainment of educational milestones" and "job tenure" (Lent, 2005, p. 111). Phase II ends with a query of how (from the informants' perspectives) the world of work has changed for Deaf

workers as rehabilitation researchers have been unable to gain this information due to inefficient methods of data collection, and a lack of access to this population. This leads into Phase III of the interview process.

Phase III. The last phase of the interview process seeks to develop understandings of how this collective employment opportunity led to the establishment of a new collective Deaf community in Houston and what purpose this community served for the informants. The questions that will have been used to guide this final phase can be seen in Figure 3.5.

Figure 3.5. Phase III Experiences in the Establishment/Development of a New Strong Deaf Community

- When and why did you choose to move to Houston?
- What was life like when you first arrived, including where, how and with whom did you live?
- How has the Houston Deaf Community changed since your arrival?
- When was the Deaf congregation at Westbury Church of Christ established and why?
- How has the community you helped create influenced your life and career over the years?
- Are you currently involved with any Deaf organizations, and what is your level of involvement?

Social Cognitive Career Theory stresses the importance of the social aspect of career development from the development of interests (based on the encouragement or discouragement received from parents, teachers and peers, to pursue certain interests. The information received socially from the environment shapes the individual's outcome expectations, which in turn, can lead them to either sustain or modify their vocational goals. Interests and goals are subjected to

the ongoing feedback the individual receives from the environment throughout the lifespan (Lent, 2005). How SCCT will have been utilized in making sense of the data collected will, by in large, be dependent on the informants' responses.

Unfortunately the field of Deaf Studies (a field still in its infancy) has not yet developed a unified theoretical model to be used as a guide in this study. However, the work of various researchers seen in the Deafness and Deaf studies literature may be of use in making sense of the data collected, but that which will have been considered applicable, will also have hinged upon the data collected. Buchanan (1999) contained patterns of collective behaviors and pointed to the natural tendency of Deaf collective workers to establish SDCs, which he pointed out, were dubbed "Silent Colonies" by those who established them. His work sets the stage for this study in that the behaviors in the establishment of the SDC in Houston followed the same patterns exhibited in past collective employment migrations during both World Wars. Groce (1985) discussed the concept of a SDC, in her research of the Deaf community on Martha's Vineyard. Higgins and Nash (1987) sought to develop an understanding of Deaf Communities from a sociological perspective. As stated previously, how (and if) these various studies will be utilized will depend largely on the responses of the informants.

The interview process. Throughout the interviews, I will be using basic attending skills but because maintaining eye contact throughout the interview is critical for communication in ASL, I will not be able to take notes during the interviews.

[Breaking eye contact is also considered very rude in Deaf culture, and when eye contact is broken, it often leads to a loss of one's train of thought, creating an impediment to a fluid, conversational flow.]

However, throughout the research process and immediately following the interviews, I will journal my thoughts as field observations. If further information from an informant is

needed, I will be able to arrange a follow up interview to address any concerns that may arise. Once all four interviews have been conducted, the recorded video will have been interpreted and transcribed by a community member, who is also a Certified Deaf Interpreter. I will have monitored this process and made note of any discrepancies in the ASL to English interpretation.

Data Analysis

The data will have been compiled and analyzed using what Hatch (2002) has termed “Interpretive Analysis.” Consistent with the constructivist approach, interpretive analysis acknowledges there are multiple ways of interpreting the data, and that the researcher is an active player throughout the research process. Hatch (2002) identifies eight steps in interpretive analysis, listed in Figure 3.6.

Figure 3.6. Eight Steps in Interpretive Analysis

1. Read the data for a sense of the whole.
 2. Review impressions previously recorded in research journals and/or bracketed in protocols and record these in memos.
 3. Read the data, identify impressions, and record impressions in memos.
 4. Study memos for salient interpretations.
 5. Reread data, coding places where interpretations are supported or challenged.
 6. Write a draft summary.
 7. Review interpretations with participants.
 8. Write a revised summary and identify excerpts that support interpretations
- (Hatch, 2002, p. 81).

Once the data have been collected, interpreted and transcribed, I will read the transcripts to gain a solid sense of the whole, noting impressions in memos. While memos can be created in many forms, they are defined as “written notes to yourself about the thoughts you have about the data and your understanding about them” (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 166). I will then review all memos for salient interpretations, return to the data, rereading and coding the data in places where these interpretations are supported or challenged. I will then write a draft summary, review my interpretations with my father as key informant and if necessary, follow up with the other informants as well. Once informant feedback has been obtained, I will revise the summary, identifying excerpts that support the interpretations.

The data collected will have been evaluated through use of data triangulation as yet another means by which to increase the trustworthiness of the findings by comparing the data collected from each of the four interviews to the available research; point by point. Documents of interest that may be used in this comparison consist of Buchanan’s (1999) *Illusions of Equality*, the Gallaudet University study (Manning & Stansbury, 1969) and the article entitled *The Incredible Shrinking Clerks*, (Plilar, 2002). Other articles of interest could include; The Postal Reorganization Act (S. 3348, 1970), Moe Biller, Remembered (Anonymous, 2003), an article about the class action lawsuit filed by d/Deaf postal workers for civil rights violations (Decker, 2003), and the April 2009 edition of the USPS-NALC joint contract administration manual (Tulino & Rolando, 2009) which outlines USPS changes that were required as a result of the class action lawsuit.

Though the USPS, the Smithsonian and the National Postal Museum have not included Deaf postal workers in their discussions, the online archives may be used to show similar minority gains in postal employment during the same timeframe Deaf workers were recruited

due to the experienced labor shortage which resulted from strains on the American labor force due to the Vietnam War (http://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibits/2_exhibits.html). The interview of one informant who has worked for the APWU Deaf and Hard of Hearing Task Force should yield data in respect to Deaf postal workers' experiences with the American Postal Workers' Union (APWU). The task force website may have been used to triangulate the data from his interview (<http://www.apwu.org/dhohtf/deafhoh-about.html>). In regards to the broad categories of early learning experiences and employment, Social Cognitive Career Theory will have been utilized (Lent, 2005) in framing the discussion. Deaf specific data may have been explored through the use of the Deaf Studies literature, again depending on the data collected. The Gallaudet University Archives (http://archives.gallaudet.edu/Deaf_Library_Collections_and_Archives/Collections.html) may also be of use, though the articles I was able to locate in reference to Deaf postal workers were outside the time frame and scope of the present study.

Data Explication

Data will have been presented in narrative form, focusing on what Geertz (1973) called “thick description” (Jones, et. al., 2006 p. 57) consistent with traditional ethnographies. While both the individual and shared experiences will have been included in the narrative, the focus of the narrative results will seek to offer a more holistic representation of the phenomena under study. This holistic approach is supported by the assertion of Lincoln and Guba (1985) who stated “there are multiple constructed realities that can be studied only holistically” (pp. 37-38).

In seeking to understand why the narrative form is critical in developing an understanding of Deaf populations, Ladd (2009) encapsulates this sentiment in his discussion of what he has called “*Deafhood*,” which he posits;

Affirms that how we have been these last 120 years is not all that we truly are. It affirms the existence of a Deaf sense of *being*, both within the individual and throughout the collective, which, like a river, surging against a dam, cannot rest until it can find a way through that will take it down to the sea of life, where all human souls are enabled both to find their fullest self expression and to interpenetrate each other.

Deaf communities contend that without a knowledge or understanding of the existence of this collective sense of Deaf *Weltanschauung*, all the pieces of paper, medals, or white coats one might possess are not only worthless, but actively dangerous.

Although none of this is news to Deaf peoples, a century of linguistic oppression has left very few of the communities able to (or inclined to) present their beliefs in written form, so it was very much my duty to present and structurally represent them to the rest of the world.” (p. 4)

This quote contains four points which are applicable to the methodology chosen for this study. The first point is that Deaf individuals and the Deaf community in general have always sought to be understood by the Hearing-World, yet all are keenly aware of how they have been misrepresented in the literature. The second point, is in regards to the collective sense of Deaf *Weltanschauung*, pointing to a need to study the Deaf American population in a holistic manner, which in the present study, will have been explored across the lifespan, beginning with the development of collective behaviors during the informants’ early learning experiences. The assertion of a need to explore Deaf populations holistically points back to the assertion of Lincoln and Guba (1985), that “there are multiple constructed realities that can be studied only holistically” (pp. 37-38).

The third point here is seen in regard to the "century of linguistic oppression" of Deaf populations of the world, as a result of the rise of oralism, which Ladd states resulted in Deaf

persons being rendered "unable," or "unwilling," to represent themselves in narrative form. The fourth and final point taken from this quote by Ladd is in reference to his personal feelings of responsibility, describing it as his "duty," to represent Deaf views to the world. This summarizes well, both my personal views as to why I endeavored to earn a doctoral degree in rehabilitation, but this passage also points to a shared responsibility in making these Deaf centered views known to the world.

While the manner in which the data will be presented breaks somewhat from the traditional ethnography, the methods that will have been employed in this study are still ethnographic and this difference in presentation is not without precedence. In breaking with traditional ethnographic methods in regards to writing conventions, Richardson & St. Pierre (2005) have developed a term of "Critical Analytical Process Ethnography." The authors explain "CAP ethnographies are not alternative or experimental; they are, in and of themselves, valid, and desirable representations of the social" (p. 962). Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) describe these "new 'species' of qualitative writing," as adaptations based on the complexities seen in society, stressing the need for researchers to accept that the "product cannot be separated from the producer, the mode of production, or the method of knowing" (pp. 962- 963). With this in mind, I will have bracketed my observations throughout the study, as per the recommendations of Richardson and St. Pierre (2005).

Discussion

As stated, this study breaks from the more traditional form of ethnography in several ways. Traditionally, ethnographic methods were employed by researchers seeking to understand the quintessential "other." Ethnographies typically involve journaling by the researcher during

the process of joining, establishing rapport and developing understandings of the “other” culture, through the researcher’s own cultural lens. This will not be seen in the present study as Deaf culture is my culture, these men were my male role models growing up and the community under study, is the one in which I was raised.

As an indigenous researcher, I share the informants’ Deaf cultural lens. As a member of this community, I was raised during the time in which the SDC was established. Some of my views will have been included in this study, though the bulk of this information will have been drawn from memory, and from the constant discussions with my father (the key informant) throughout the research process to ensure accuracy of representation.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

This ethnographic case study seeks to increase our understanding of the individual and shared experiences of grassroots Deaf postal workers who took part in the Deaf USPS collective employment migration, in regards to their early learning experiences, how these experiences led to collective employment with the USPS, and how the collective employment opportunity led them to establish a new Strong Deaf Community (SDC) in Houston. The data collected through semi structured interviews will be presented in this chapter (along with two additional interviews of professionals who played key roles in the Deaf/USPS phenomenon under study), to increase our understanding of how SDCs form, and what purpose they serve for the grassroots Deaf members who establish them in new geographic locations after migrating for collective employment. In this chapter, we will focus on the first, primary research question, while the remaining research questions will be explored in the discussion section at the beginning of Chapter 5.

Background Narrative

During the 1960's the United States labor force experienced a labor shortage, due in large part to the Vietnam War and the draft that resulted from the conflict. As civilians exited the workforce in large number, leaders of American industry (including the United States government), were forced to think outside the traditional white male employee box in seeking laborers to fill vacancies. The USPS sought to fill these vacancies with minority laborers. This phenomenon, which began in the 1960's, has been documented in relation to hiring of women and multiple minority groups through the National Postal Museum, in partnership with the Smithsonian (<http://npm.si.edu/exhibits/index.html>). While Deaf Americans were also targeted

for hire during this same time period, the USPS actively suppresses any and all information in regards to this population of Deaf postal workers.

Support for this assertion can be seen in two responses from Informant 2, in his discussion of the ongoing suppression of Deaf postal worker information, and in his response to the facebook page where he described the difference between websites established by Hearing vs. Deaf web pages, where the websites established by Deaf postal workers are often taken down shortly after being posted on the internet. Informant 2 also pointed out there were Deaf postal workers, present in the postal workforce prior to this migration but information about these Deaf men had been suppressed. Further evidence to support this assertion can be seen by the lack of documentation of Deaf Americans and Deaf postal workers through the National Postal Museum and the Smithsonian.

Deaf laborers were thought to have been added to the list of minorities targeted to fill out the postal ranks in large part due to a series of rehabilitation research studies from Gallaudet University which sought to understand why so many Gallaudet University graduates were either unemployed or underemployed (Manning & Stansbury, 1969). As the researchers were seeking job opportunities with the United States federal government (the largest employer in the Washington D.C. area) that best matched the skills and abilities of Deaf workers, the USPS quickly rose to the top of the list as the skills Deaf workers possessed at the time matched well the demands of the postal work environment. Support for the assertion that this one rehabilitation study led to the hiring of Deaf workers by the hundreds in postal locations across the country, including Houston, was found in the informants' responses as the exam process they described; which allowed for interpreters (a service provided by VR) for exam directions and to

ensure comprehension of directions, was also seen in Houston. The Gallaudet University study also singled out the positions of clerk and carrier as best suited for Deaf workers. All informants in this study were hired on as clerks, and all remained clerks for the duration of their careers. This study however, does not mention the LSM (Letter Sorting Machine) technology, and it is assumed this is because the LSM machines may not have been present in the USPS during the time this study was conducted. As a traditional rehabilitation study, this study was funded with federal dollars, with the expressed purpose of increasing Deaf employment outcomes (as this has always been the purpose of rehabilitation research).

Concurrently, the USPS was experiencing calamity of its own. The USPS was short on labor, disgruntled postal employees moved to strike against the USPS for unfair working conditions (in part due to the labor shortage), and the USPS was revamped in the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970. The USPS also started installing LSM units in large postal locations in some of the larger cities, and it seems as if the noise level contributed to it being one of the least desirable stations for Hearing postal workers. There may also have been a fear of future litigation against the USPS should Hearing postal employees suffer hearing losses resulting from excessive noise while on the job.

Deaf workers were also possibly hired because (at the time) many possessed more industrial/vocational based skills training and education in industrial employment than their Hearing counterparts, as was also seen in previous Deaf collective employment migrations during both World Wars (Buchanan, 1999). While there were many influences that led to the USPS decision to start hiring Deaf Americans, the impetus that led to this phenomenon might best be characterized as “a perfect storm of events.” While all the factors touched on above

contributed to this "perfect storm," possibly the greatest contributing factors were that the USPS had a labor need, which fit well the skills and abilities the Deaf American working class possessed.

As was also seen in previous Deaf collective employment migrations, one, maybe two Deaf workers were said to have entered the USPS in Houston first; setting the stage for more Deaf employment opportunities to Deaf workers to enter the postal workforce by exhibiting a solid Deaf collective work ethic and in the process, convincing postal administrators of the viability of Deaf candidates. By informant report, two Deaf postal workers had worked in the Houston area Post Office prior to the first cohort's entry. Informant 2, who was also the union steward, had an older brother (also Deaf), who was one of the two Deaf workers. This older brother, however left the Houston area postal position, returned to college and later became a DVRC.

This eventually led to the first collective group of twelve Deaf postal workers in Houston (plus one mistake). In 1969, thirteen men were hired in all, but one was a Veteran returning home from war, who by informant report, was mistakenly placed with this group of Deaf men. One informant surmised, this Veteran may have been placed in this cohort through rehabilitation services that may have mistaken him for "d/Deaf," but the cause of this error is unknown. Of this cohort of twelve, three of these Deaf men also served as informants for this study. One informant entered the USPS a year later than this original 12, in 1970. Informant 2, who entered the postal workforce in 1970, entered on his own without VR support. The next, much larger group, consisting of hundreds of Deaf workers, entered with VR support, in 1972.

In 1969, the first collective cohort of twelve Deaf men entered the postal workforce in Houston, seeking to establish high standards for Deaf workers and in the process, convince postal administrators of the worth of hiring Deaf. Informant 1 (included in this first cohort) also expressed that one of his main influences in choosing Houston was that the postmaster at the time was very welcoming of Deaf workers. These events, and the ongoing labor struggles experienced by the USPS at the time, led the USPS to hire d/Deaf workers en masse, as they mistakenly assumed that all d/Deaf workers were the same. Eventually, for the second and much larger cohort consisting of over two hundred d/Deaf workers, the USPS entry exams were waived altogether. All four informants expressed sentiments of this being a mistake, as this led to a great deal of issues, misunderstandings and conflict between postal administrators and Deaf postal workers.

This USPS/Deaf relationship, from increased opportunity to demise however, was not as unique as it might seem, as the phenomena under study mirrored those seen in past Deaf collective employment migrations during both World Wars. The patterns of Deaf collective employment outlined by Buchanan (1999) and discussed in the previous chapters, were repeated yet again during the 1960's when this story begins. Unfortunately, while we do have an historical understanding of these patterns from previous Deaf collective employment migrations, what have not yet been explored are the lived experiences of Deaf Americans who take part in them.

While it had been assumed, given the limited documentation of the events under study, the Gallaudet University rehabilitation study was the impetus that led to the USPS/Deaf working relationship, this was not the case. Two additional informants were added to help shed light on

these events. While the dominant discourse was found to be sorely lacking as a resource in the telling of this story, the Deaf (long said to be the keepers of their own history) yielded a number of useful contacts.

The first informant added was Sonnestrahl, a Deaf man, whose efforts during the 1950's to secure employment in the Washington D.C. area, led to a series of events that ultimately resulted in the development of the Deaf/USPS relationship this study seeks to understand. Sonnestrahl also worked closely with Anderson, who was a young DVRC in the Detroit area during the beginning of the development of the USPS/Deaf relationship. Anderson, a mentor of mine from my Master's studies in VR, gave me Sonnestrahl's contact information, telling me how he was a "key player." However, I had no idea how integral a role he played until I was able to gain university approval to make contact and interview him.

The second informant added to this study was Walton, the DVRC that was hired prior to the Houston postal migration. Walton was responsible for the recruitment, training and workplace support for all Deaf workers hired during the timeframe under study (including the informants). During the time in which I was seeking my committee's approval of my proposal, call it serendipity, or call it fate, but there was a funeral of a local, Deaf community elder from the Houston area, which brought together Deaf individuals from far and wide. My father happened to run into Walton at the funeral, which sparked a conversation between them about my efforts in the telling of this story. It was at this point that my father obtained Walton's updated contact information, as she expressed she would be glad to assist in any way possible.

These two additional interviews will be explored further in the discussion of the four Deaf postal workers' shared experiences, to offer insight and to serve as two additional sources for the purpose of further triangulation of the data collected. The two additional interviews have somewhat altered the original framework of this study, as they brought with them new dimensions of the events under study. These contributions could not be accounted for prior to conducting the interviews and certainly could not be ignored, as they unearthed data thought to be inaccessible prior to conducting this study. As such, the research questions have been divided, in part due to the nature of these findings but also due to the sizeable amount of data added, along with a newly developed need to offer a more holistic framework that would best suit its presentation, while maintaining the centrality of the original four informants' experiences as this study's primary focus. In the section that follows, we will explore how this new framework will be used to frame the discussion in this chapter.

The layout of the presentation of the research findings will follow the order in which the informants came forward to be interviewed. By utilizing this particular framework to present the data, I am attempting to lead the reader in a journey of discovery, similar to the one I experienced as the researcher and the primary research instrument in this study. While this study originally focused solely on the Deaf postal workers' lived experiences, these two additional interviews of professionals who played integral roles, offered means by which to further triangulate the data collected. The four primary informants were interviewed in the order in which they appear in this chapter. The interview of Sonnestrahl came next, with the final interview being the Houston area DVRC Walton, who was responsible for the hiring of all four

primary informants and was present during the time in which the migration (including both waves of Deaf workers) under study occurred.

Introduction to the Presentation of Research Findings

In the following two chapters we will explore the research findings using five driving research questions based on the original four. The only alteration to the research questions was separating the original two part question four, into two discrete questions (now research questions four and five). This change to question four was made, only because the amount of data collected warranted further division in seeking clarity and optimal organization in the explication of data.

Figure 4.1. Research Questions

1. What are the individual and shared experiences of the four informants?
2. How did the informants' early learning experiences lead them to choose to enter collective employment with the USPS?
3. How did this collective employment opportunity lead to the development of a new Strong Deaf Community in Houston?
4. How do Deaf workers successfully navigate the world of work?
5. How does the collective aspect of Deaf Culture influence the process?

The five research questions listed above, in Figure 4.1, will be divided between Chapters 4 and 5 for two main reasons. The first is based on the understanding that this study presents a more global perspective of the events under study than was originally intended. As such, a great deal of information has been included that if not presented with care and a newly developed framework, more befitting the whole of the data collected, it might lead to confusion for the reader. The second is due to the nature of the findings and how the research questions changed.

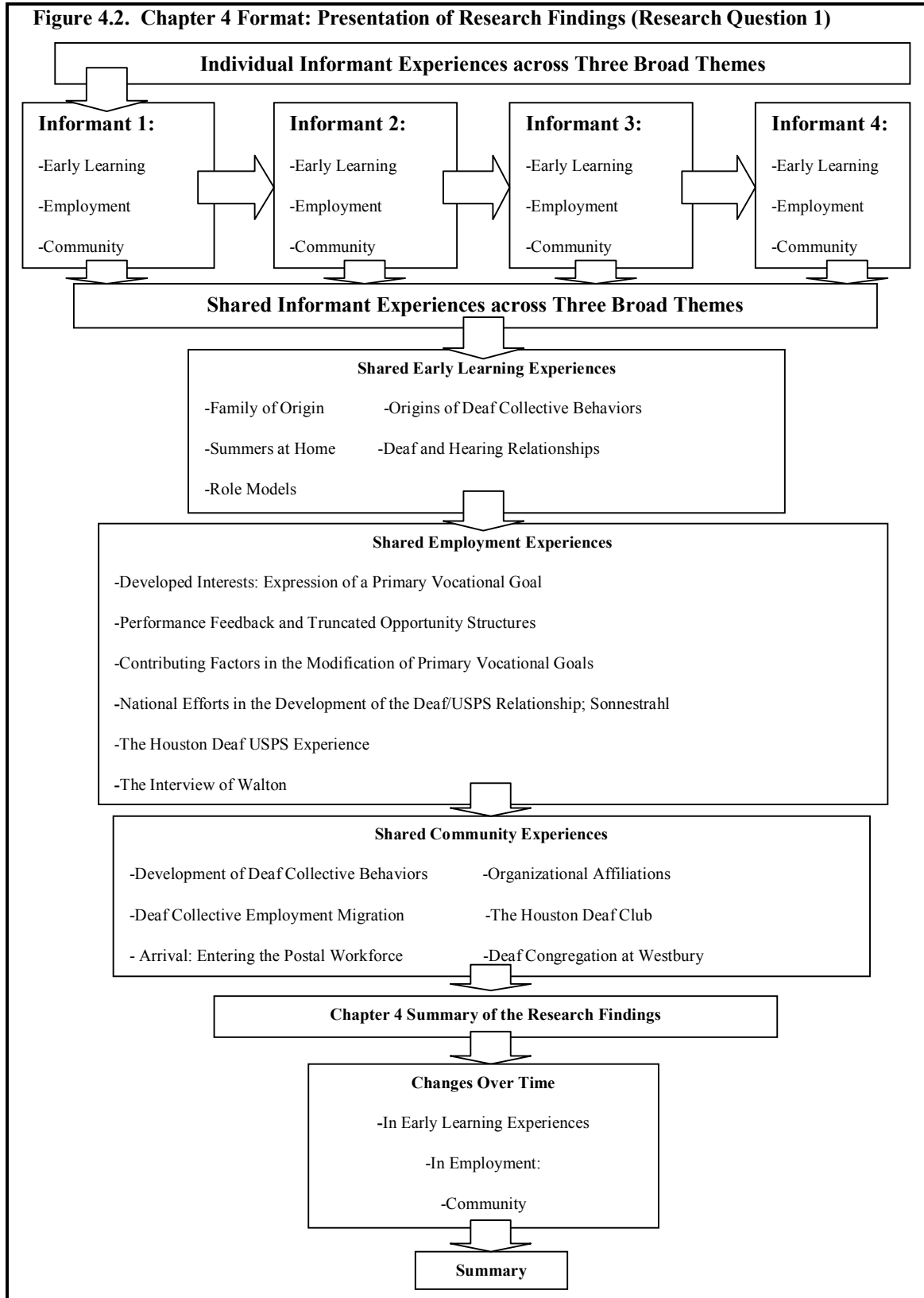
The first research question seeks to present the informants' experiences, which are central to the whole of the study. It seemed appropriate to devote the entire Chapter 4, to the informants' lived experiences, and the telling of their stories, with the central, driving force behind this aspect of the framework, being the endeavor to allow the space for the informants to tell their own stories, as much as possible, in their own words, without excessive analysis or interruption. The two additional interviews will be utilized to add depth to our understanding of the events under study, contribute to the whole of the narrative, and in offering further methods of data triangulation. The framework for the first research question will be explored further in the section that follows.

The remaining research questions (2-5) seek to develop understandings which require analysis, interpretation, and discussion. Considering the nature of this study, the research questions, and the answers that emerged, it seemed more appropriate to present the remaining four research questions in the discussion section at the beginning of Chapter 5. The two added interviews yielded new information in regards to the national efforts that led to the migration under study in Houston, information about previous migrations in other locations and information specific to the Houston area. Given that Walton was the DVRC responsible for all the Deaf/USPS hires in Houston and she is still employed with VR in Texas, now in management, her interview also brought with it a great deal of information in regards to changes seen over time, across the three broad, preset themes.

Now that we have established the framework this presentation of the research findings will follow, we will now explore, in the following section, how we will proceed to answer the first research question, which, as stated, seeks to understand the informants' individual and

shared experiences. To better illustrate how this will be accomplished, and to offer the reader a "roadmap" on this journey, Figure 4.2 outlines the format this presentation of the research findings will follow.

Figure 4.2. Chapter 4 Format: Presentation of Research Findings (Research Question 1)



The first research question which sought to understand the individual and shared experiences of the four primary informants will be split into two main sections. The first main section will be based on the informants' individual experiences, and the second will cover the informants' shared experiences. The first part of this research question, which seeks to understand the individual experiences of the informants will be explored by covering each of the four individual informant interviews, across the three broad, preset themes, which sought to understand the informants'; early learning experiences, vocational experiences and experiences related to the establishment of a new SDC in Houston. As we explore the data collected, the textual representation of quoted informant data will follow the specifications shown below in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3. Use of Quotations in Prose

- *Italics: Presentation of Deaf Informant data (ASL to English interpretations)*
- "Quoted Italics: Short quotes of Deaf data noted in prose"
- "Quoted text: Presentation of hearing Informant data in English (no interpretation)"
- [*Bracketed Italicized Text: Researcher's own observations (no indent)*]

Once all four individual informant interviews have been presented, the informants' shared experiences will then be explored through the use of summaries, again, by utilizing the three broad, preset themes to frame the discussion. This second main section of the first research question, seeks to shed light on the similarities seen across the four individual informant interviews, including emergent themes within each of the three broad, preset themes, to better

frame the discussion, and offer more depth to the development of the understandings we will explore in Chapter 5.

In seeking to understand the informants' early learning and vocational experiences, tenets pulled from Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) will be utilized to frame the discussion. SCCT is uniquely suited for exploring the Deaf world of work experience as it is less concerned with specific ages and stages of career developmental tasks, focusing instead on influences that either promote or stymie career development across the lifespan (Lent, 2005). Previous career development models were more rigid in their application and when used to discuss Deaf career development, deficiencies were sought in individual Deaf workers for the purpose of intervention to increase employability. Given the understanding that there are no Deaf-specific career development models to utilize within the present study, SCCT with a focus on influences that either promoted or stymied the informants' career development across the lifespan seemed most appropriate, as the purpose is not to seek out deficiencies, but to assist us in developing a greater understanding of what "normal" Deaf career development looks like. Also, the informants in this study all were successful in achieving tenure in the workplace, eliminating a need to seek out barriers to gainful employment.

Given the understanding that all of the informants in this study were able to succeed in achieving tenure in their chosen careers with the USPS, special emphasis will be given to elements that promoted successful career development. Within SCCT, persistence is seen as a sign of adequacy. SCCT as a unifying framework, pulls from the work of past theorists, rearranging past career development theoretical elements, "into a novel rendering of how people (1) develop vocational interests, (2) make (and remake) occupational choices, and (3) achieve

varying levels of career success and stability” (Lent, 2005, p. 101). SCCT sees the career development process as involving “three conceptually distinct yet interlocking process models,” which are; the interest model, the choice model and the performance model (Lent, 2005).

This section of the analysis of interview findings will seek to describe the informants’ early learning experiences; while paying special attention to the various activities the informants were exposed to while students at TSD. SCCT sees the various activities children are exposed to in home, educational and recreational environments as potential “harbingers of later career or leisure options” (Lent, 2005, p. 106). Through receiving constant feedback from the environment, the child develops specific interests. This pattern is seen as repeating until a primary choice for a future employment goal is made, at which time the individual takes steps toward attainment of the vocational goal, eventually entering the workforce where the individual continues to receive feedback from the environment, making adjustments as needed based on the information received from the environment, and the individual’s experiences within their chosen field of interest. While this study does not seek to explore all aspects of the informants’ career developmental experiences in regards to SCCT, the basic tenets described here, will be used to frame the discussion of data collected through interview study, in regards to the first two broad themes explored.

Individual Informant Interviews

The first two broad themes we will explore are based on the informants' early learning and vocational experiences. In covering the first two broad themes, we seek to understand how the informants’ early learning experiences led them to develop specific interests, leading to their respective primary vocational goals which were pursued after leaving TSD, and how these

vocational goals were altered to lead them to enter postal employment. The third broad theme seeks to increase our understanding of how the informants' early learning experiences and in particular, the collective employment migration the informants took part in, led them to establish a new SDC in Houston. Within this chapter, italics will be used for the five Deaf informants, as the interviews were conducted in ASL, but for Walton's interview (which was conducted in spoken English), quotation marks will be used as there was no ASL to English interpretation involved in the process.

Informant 1: Larry. Larry comes from a strong Deaf familial background as both of his parents are Deaf, his mother's aunt is Deaf, and his father also had two Deaf brothers who both lost their hearing during childhood. Larry has one hearing sibling. Of his Deaf family, all were heavily involved within the Deaf community, attending and also working at state residential schools for the Deaf. One of his Deaf uncles was a well known coach who gained notoriety in Deaf historical accounts for his coaching prowess, for having played integral roles in assisting several of his players to enter into professional sports and the Olympic Games. This uncle; a leader in the Austin Deaf Community, was also responsible for making significant changes at TSD, before leaving Texas, to coach for the North Carolina School for the Deaf, and then to the Florida School for the Deaf, where he served as Principal for the Vocational Training School, until his retirement.

Early learning experiences. Larry attended Texas School for the Deaf (TSD) and lived in the South Austin area, where many Deaf families lived during his childhood. He describes what life was like for him as a Deaf child, growing up in Austin;

My mother and father moved to Austin when I was 3 years old. Austin was then a small town. TSD was about 2 to 3 miles from my home. I never lived in the dorms. My mother and father always brought me to and from school every day. When I was a teenager, I had to walk back and forth. I was raised going to school at TSD. I entered TSD in 1954 and graduated in 1967.

He continued to describe his childhood, in the community in which he was raised;

I was raised in a home in South Austin where many Deaf children also lived. Those children were also day students like me; they did not live in dorms either. I had fun playing with those friends. Austin was a small town. If Austin was a big city, maybe it would not have been as easy to have so many Deaf friends nearby. At that time, everybody was close by but not anymore. I would say maybe other Deaf children were within 3, 4, or 5 blocks from my home. Today South Austin is still where a lot of Deaf people live.

Larry expressed that while attending TSD, his favorite subject was Math, but stressed there were many activities, competitions, and a host of vocational skill building programs in various areas offered at TSD.

During my time at TSD the Vocational Building had a lot of trades for us to learn. I learned things like printing using different printing machines and typing. I also learned woodworking, how to run a bakery, and a dry cleaning business. I had to learn typing because it was required for me if I wanted to go to college. I did have some other training. During the time I was there; TSD required all the boys and girls to learn a lot of things, not just the same thing over and over.

As we touched on the subject of role models during these early formative years, he pointed to his parents, specifically his father; who was a strong work role model for Larry during his childhood;

I was always impressed that my father worked hard. He always found time to work and be home to attend to his family. My mother didn't work until I was in high school. I think this is why I didn't think too much of my future job, I always seemed to think my family was more important because my parents did that in my family.

I asked Larry if there were other Deaf role models who might have had a positive effect on his development, and the conversation shifted to a discussion on one particular program he experienced as a TSD student, he felt influenced him a great deal; his membership and participation in the Boy Scouts of America. The Scout Masters for the troop were all Deaf teachers from TSD, offering the boys who took part in these activities, adult male role models, who were also professional Deaf Education teachers.

A long time ago, when I entered TSD in the fall, the Boy Scouts would miss school for one week to go to camp, to be trained to survive by ourselves as Boy Scouts. It was required that I go for one week. It helped us to develop and become independent.

When he touched on the experiences he had as a Boy Scout, I pressed further about this topic, because I knew it had a profound impact on his development from our many conversations over the years. He explained his entrance into this program and how the Boy Scout program at TSD came about;

I first entered as a Cub Scout. At that time there were a lot of mothers of Deaf children who were involved with Cub Scouts. Those mothers taught us how to do various crafts. These were the mothers of Deaf boys who lived in South Austin. They were all heavily involved. Today, there seems to be none (Boy Scout troops) like we had at TSD.

Given the high rate of deaf children historically born to Hearing families, and due to the large Deaf population in Austin, I asked whether the mothers who initiated this program were Deaf or Hearing.

All were Hearing, no Deaf parents that time. Later I was promoted to Boy Scouts, we enjoyed that as well and we had to learn many different things so we could enter competitions with Hearing Boy Scouts. Later I was promoted to Explorer,

but I had to stop because I became more involved with sports like football and basketball. So, I was eventually unable to participate in Explorer activities.

I had heard stories about these experiences while growing up in our Deaf community, so I continued to press for more details of his experience with the Boy Scouts of America, asking what the title of “Explorer” meant, to better understand the process that led to this honor. I was also mistakenly under the impression the highest level of attainment in Boy Scouts was Eagle Scout, but he explained this was not so, and further described the process.

No, first the Boy Scouts chose the best leader for their troop. That leader would then become a member of Order of Arrow. Then the boys chosen to become members of Order of Arrow would then join with the Hearing boys that were also working toward membership in OA. They had to do hard labor on weekends before they could become full members of Order of Arrow; Tomahawk troop.

I then revisited an earlier comment he had made, where he stated being in the Boy Scouts helped him to become independent and asked him to describe how this experience helped him to feel more independent, to which he replied;

We, the Boy Scouts would sleep in tents. We had to build our own tents near campfires. Every night, our Scoutmasters would tell stories. They were stories of Western times. They were interesting stories. I always paid close attention to the stories.

I asked if the Scoutmasters were Hearing or Deaf, and whether or not these stories were told in ASL;

Yes, the Scoutmasters were also TSD teachers, and they were all Deaf. Those Deaf teachers were required to be Scoutmasters and to go camping with the Boy Scouts. We loved to hear their stories every night.

At this point, I was reminded of a story Larry had told me when I was a child and pressed further about a time where he was required to take part in a “rite of passage” for his final attainment of the highest level the Boy Scouts offered at the time. To which he replied;

During my time in Boy Scouts when I was chosen as the leader of my troop to be in Order of Arrow, the first requirement was to take me deep in the forest with only two matches and one blanket. That was all I had. I had to start a fire, but I admit I failed to start a fire. It was a lousy time for me. There was no excuse for me not to start a fire. I had to stay out in the forest and sleep overnight. The next morning when I woke up, I had to find my way back to the campground. When I arrived, I passed the first step. The next month, I had to join with Hearing group. We all could not talk in any way, not even sign language. We had to work from early morning to night. After that, we had blindfolds put on us. They led us to the top of a hill. At the top of the hill we were able to see the Austin city lights at night. There was also a campfire with Indians dancing to celebrate our becoming members of the Order of Arrow. We started celebrating once we took off our blindfolds.

I then went back to our discussion about TSD and the many programs he experienced as a student there. I asked about other extracurricular activities he took part in.

In fact, I was more into sports because basketball practice required 3 ½ hours practice every day, after that what time left is spent on studying. I was chosen to be President of our class in 1967 during my junior year at TSD. My problem was that I was more focused on basketball than I could help my class as President. So, I had to step out of that position to give it to someone who could do a better job. I loved playing basketball more.

Upon my query of how TSD has changed since his time there, he replied;

Really TSD today is really not like it was in my time. Today they send the students home every Friday, Saturday and Sunday. That fact seemed to remove the Boys Athletic Association. BAA required the boys to play sports, and participate in various competitions, like; checkers, chess, dominoes, and cards. They always had some kind of competition every weekend but those were

eliminated. Also Boy Scout activities seem to have been eliminated. Football Boys Athletics in my time were required to sell cokes to support football games.

Today, they no longer do that. They have different methods now. The Weekend Socials among the students disappeared. Students now only go to school Monday through Friday, and then they go home. It's like school is focused on study, with little opportunity for socialization, then the students go home. I feel that is something that is missing now. The trade school has changed because of updates and technology. We had more hands on work, today it is more based on computers.

He further explained some of the differences he sees from his time at TSD vs. today;

I am going to make a comparison between back then and now. Now we have captioning with many channels. Back then when I was at TSD we had only one or two channels. When they had a college football game on Saturdays like; The Longhorns, UT for example; they did not have the games on TV. Sometimes when they had games on Friday, our house parents, who were also UT students, would act out the games for us. For example; one would wear a UT shirt (or jersey) and the other would wear the opposing team's shirt, let's say... For example; Baylor University. They would have a big board across the wall. They would also have the radio tuned in to the football game. When they heard about a Baylor player kicking off the ball and another UT player catching the ball, the one with the Texas jersey on would act like he caught the ball so we would know that a UT player caught the ball. Then, the other team kicked the ball and still another player caught the ball. On the board was a sketch of the football field where the house parents would show us where the ball or action was, and maybe some tackles. Then we would have discussions about the games. Also back then, we would have Friday Night Movie Night in the TSD auditorium with captioning. When the movies were done, many of us would discuss what happened during the movies and try to understand some of the meanings in the movies. Now that is gone.

Vocational experiences. Apart from being exposed to multiple working Deaf adult role models with strong Deaf collective work ethics within his family and at TSD; there were many vocational skill building programs which led to varied employment experiences, including summer jobs in bakeries and as a draftsman. These early learning experiences, coupled with varied employment experiences, led Larry to develop a strong primary vocational interest, which

then, led Larry to develop a primary vocational goal; one he pursued after high school. When asked what he wanted to be when he grew up (while still attending TSD), he explained;

At the time, I never really thought about that until I was maybe 15, 16, or 17 years old. I started being fascinated with architectural drafting because I loved handwork and drawing.

This interest in drafting came about through Larry's exposure to some of the many vocational programs and various activities TSD offered during this time. A few of his greatest interests prior to leaving TSD were in math, drawing, and drafting. When I asked about his primary vocational goal and what steps he had taken to reach this goal he replied;

At the time, I was not sure, because I was very confused. When I entered Gallaudet, I still had not found my dream job, and did not know what I was interested in. At that time Gallaudet was just a college (now called Gallaudet University) and it had limited choices of majors while other colleges or universities had more fields to offer. My interest was in architectural drafting. Gallaudet College did not offer that major when I was there. Also there were no other colleges that provided that major with support services for the Deaf with interpreters etc... So, I stayed confused. I did work summer jobs as an architectural draftsman for The Texas Water Quality Board (TWQB). I did work for example; with maps of rivers, I would enlarge the rivers so that scientists would be able to research about pollution and water banks. The job only had work for me three months out of the year. Once summer was over, there would be no work until the next year, when they would have some drafting work for me do.

Really I never thought about the post office at that time. I worked at the TWQB, doing architectural drafting. TWQB said they did not have any open positions for me to work there permanently. They told me to wait two years or maybe one year for an opening. I decided not to go back to Gallaudet because I had no desire to major in anything Gallaudet had to offer. I was very confused.

My wife, at that time, we were sweethearts and she was living in Houston. She told me that there were openings for the Deaf in the Post Office in the Houston area. I decided to challenge myself to move to Houston, which was a big city; bigger than Austin. I decided to take that challenge and take the entrance

exam at the Post Office in Houston. I passed and then I moved to Houston. Really... The post office was not my dream job. I just needed to work for my "bread and butter."

Larry was working during the summer with the TWQB when he learned of the USPS opportunities for Deaf workers. I pressed further about how he learned of this opportunity to which he replied;

My wife's mother's friend knew a woman that worked for Vocation Rehabilitation. She told them that there were openings for Deaf workers. That's how her mother heard about it. Remember; my wife's mother lived in Houston at the time. She was involved in The Ladies Sewing Club. The ladies in the Ladies Sewing Club were all mothers of deaf children who were also TSD students. They would get together once a month to gossip about events and things. I guess that is where they got the information about the post office job openings for the Deaf.

I asked if the opportunity to work with other Deaf individuals influenced his decision to enter postal employment.

Really, yes, because the post office was somewhere I never dreamed of working. It made me curious. And it was a challenge to get into the post office to work. The opportunity to work for the post office was something different.

In explaining the process he experienced of entering postal employment, he pointed to the modified entrance exam, where the two sections considered unimportant for the position of postal clerk, (which were also considered to be the greatest barrier to Deaf entry into the USPS) were eliminated through the efforts of Deaf leaders, prior to the migration. He explains;

Okay, the post office normally had tests called the civil service exam, but they provided a special exam called the LSM Letter Sorting Machine exam. At that time, they wanted to hire Deaf people to work on the LSMs. It was the modified exam that I took. I passed and was hired to work in the post office. Then, when I first entered work at the post office I had to have some additional training for LSM work. Training was maybe twice, no two hours every day. The rest of the

time, I learned different kinds of jobs in the post office. All of us were training for primary, sorting, and zip code grouping. I did not actually work on LSM until I passed another test. Then I was cleared to work on the LSM.

I asked how many d/Deaf workers there were in the Houston area, and he replied;

The place where I worked in Houston was called the General Post Office. That post office had at first maybe one, then two, Deaf workers. My group that entered together was 12 Deaf. One was Hearing, who the USPS thought was Deaf, but really, that person was Hearing. It was a mistake. Including him, all together, that made 13 of us. So at that time there were only 12 of us (Deaf postal workers). Then it got bigger. The last time I knew of the total number, there were over 200 Deaf employees.

I asked how many Deaf postal workers there were still employed with the USPS in the Houston area.

There were maybe 25 to 30 because many of the Deaf employees did not like working night shifts or having to work on weekends. Sometimes the Deaf want to all be off at the same time, for a special event. There would be many who wanted to be off and the post office could not let all the Deaf employees off at the same time. The post office limited the number of Deaf workers allowed to take off simultaneously. It seems to have caused many Deaf to quit the post office.

I asked why the number of Deaf postal workers dropped precipitously, and he explained that many of the Deaf postal workers “wanted their own way,” and offered this example;

For example; during that time, they hired many Deaf to work in the LSM Department. The Deaf employees worked well in rotating positions. When there was a big event like a Deaf Basketball Tournament, they all requested to be off the same weekend or at the same time. At that time there were three groups of Deaf LSM workers, working on three LSM machines. Many of the Deaf workers requested time off to be able to play in the tournament. Post office supervisors could not let more than four Deaf employees per LSM department off the same time. The post office had to keep the LSMs running all the time. Guess what happened...? Many of the Deaf employees skipped work to go to the tournament.

Only one of the four LSM machines was left running, the other two were not running and got stuck. The mail piled up.

The supervisor got mad and asked them why. The Deaf employees replied 'I must have fun.' That really hurt the idea of hiring more Deaf people. The post office felt they could not depend on the Deaf people to be accountable. A few years later the LSM was replaced by a different kind of machine that did more and did not require a worker to type commands into the machine. Since then, the post office did not hire as many people. The machines were able to do more work than people could do. Deaf employees quit working because it required studying more schemes and street names that required more training. Deaf employees got fed up and quit working at the post office. The numbers of Deaf workers dwindled smaller and smaller. Sometimes the post office may hire one or two Deaf to work as mail handlers. While few are still hired to handle the mail, there is less hands on work today, due to changes in technology.

In seeking to understand what his views were about this job and whether or not he saw this opportunity at the time of entry, as a temporary job or a career, he explained;

I was thinking when I started, that I would work in the post office for about one or two years, then go back to college.

I asked whether or not he ever returned to college, he explained;

I was thinking about it. After I had worked at the post office for a year, my wife was pregnant. I was going to Lee College in Baytown at that time. Through the summer, I lived in Southwest Houston, and I had to drive 50 miles to go to school at Lee College. I would go to school in the mornings and go to work at the post office in the afternoons; where I would work 12 hour shifts. All that commuting and working allowed me very little time to sleep. I was rarely off. Many times I would work 7 days a week with no holidays (or time off). I did pass all the courses at Lee but I couldn't continue because my wife needed my help at home with our new baby. So, I decided to not go back to college and instead, I decided to continue to work at the post office as my career.

Larry then explained how he continued this schedule of full time work while also attending Lee College for two semesters during the summer, until he made the decision to maintain postal employment. He further explained his decision to remain a postal employee.

Really, I had to learn to accept the kind of work I had and to show Hearing people what Deaf people could do. The Deaf can learn. Many Hearing people thought that Deaf people couldn't do the work. Then I proved to them that I could do the work. They then knew that I could do more work. Many Deaf back then were not allowed to do work other than working with the LSMs because of a lack of communication. The post office thought the Deaf couldn't do other jobs because with the lack of communication, the post office couldn't train them for other positions. We didn't have interpreters. Therefore I had to prove, time and time again, that I could do other work by moving around and actually doing the work.

I asked about whether or not interpreters had been provided, but he pointed to the exam process where there were interpreters provided during the exam process but only prior to the exam and explained;

As I recall, I remember, yes there was an interpreter. The interpreter just explained what the tests would look like. After that, we were on our own taking the tests. However, in the workplace itself, there were no interpreters.

When asked how he would typically communicate with Hearing postal workers and postal administrators, he replied;

It was a little tough. It was tough. There are many levels of intelligence in Deaf workers. We had to help each other to understand the Hearing people. We had to help each other to continue to work, to progress, understand tests and many new things. Because we would explain things to each other, we were able to do most of the work without interpreters. Really those explanations didn't really require an interpreter, but if they would just guide, and explain a few things, after that, there were no real issues.

I asked about how postal employment, in general, had changed over the course of his career, to which he replied;

When I entered the post office to work in 1969, there were a small number of machines. There was more 'hand work' and the machines required a worker to type the commands. There was much more hands on work. It required studying

schemes. Today, there is no requirement to study or to memorize. Today machines can do it all. Except for the big, thick, or damaged mail which still require people to do the sorting that the machines can't do. Some people work to find correct addresses. There is no more training except for window clerks because it requires communication. It is hard for the Deaf to work as a window clerk because of those communication problems. But some Deaf people do work as window clerks in other parts of the country and do okay...

Some states do not allow Deaf to drive and deliver mail. I did wonder why and now I know it is because often communication is needed during deliveries. But we still have pagers or texting now to help us to communicate.

The post office Hearing people have still not really learned how to communicate with Deaf employees. Many Deaf people ask me how they can get jobs at the post office. They think that it requires a lot of steps and exams. I tell them to look for where there are openings. Once you get in, you can climb up to better positions. Many Deaf do not want to start as custodians (at the bottom and work their way up). They want to start up higher. That makes it harder for them to enter work in the post office.

Considering all the changes seen in accessibility and technology, I asked whether or not these advances in technology carried over into accessibility accommodations for Deaf workers, in the postal workplace, or if the many communication barriers he touched on were still in place.

Yes, there are still barriers because of a lack of training of postal administrators. People themselves, need to understand how Deaf people can communicate. They need to be aware of the many different ways of communicating with the Deaf. It is still a problem. Another problem is that the post office does not keep employees in the same place. They are moved around and when that happens the new department who gets a Deaf employee must learn how to communicate with them.

I remember while I was working at the post office, that I noticed that supervisors were always moving every six months to different stations. Maybe some stay one or two years but never longer than that. When I got a new supervisor, I struggled with him/her until he/she would understand. The cycle repeated itself, over and over. That is still a major disadvantage for Deaf postal workers.

I then asked what his views were on how the job market has changed for Deaf workers, and whether he felt there were more or less jobs and opportunities.

I think many Deaf today; prefer living on SSDI, rather than working. That is a big problem. Because schools tell them to get SSDI when they are young rather than to encourage them to get training or go to special schools for certain trades. About different jobs... Back then, it was hard for Deaf to prove to Hearing that they could do a good job. Hearing people were skeptical. Some were hired. I see today many mainstreamed schools where deaf students with Hearing friends, have easier time in getting jobs with their Hearing peers help. I see that difference. I think today there is more opportunity where schools have ASL classes. They are more accepting of the Deaf than in my time. Today, the Deaf can have SSDI. In my time we did not have SSDI; we had to work for our "bread and butter."

Community experiences. In seeking to understand how the under study was established, I asked Larry why he initially chose to move to Houston (as this was not the only city that was actively hiring Deaf workers at the time). He explained;

The reason I picked Houston is because during that time the Houston postmaster was very eager to welcome many Deaf people to work in the post office. While in other cities, the postmasters were not like that.

Now, the postmasters have been replaced many times since then, and they think differently. During the time I was entering the post office to work; there was a good postmaster who welcomed us with open arms. That was really, a nice postmaster.

While conducting my research, I found that there was an established Houston Deaf Community prior to the migration of Deaf postal workers, including a Deaf church that had been established for quite some time, so I asked how large the Deaf community was upon his arrival.

Houston always had a large number of Deaf people. I really did not know many of them at the time. There were several of my classmates from TSD, from all different levels. I often visited Houston because my wife, who was my girlfriend

at the time, lived there. I knew several people there already, and I was familiar with the Houston area.

When I got the job at the post office and I moved to Houston, I first lived in an apartment with four other boys. They were all Deaf. Two of the boys were not post office employees, three boys were post office employees. We lived in a very small efficiency apartment. Three boys worked nights and two boys worked days. When we all were off the same time, it was a challenge. Our biggest problem was when the five of us would take turns buying groceries. When we would bring groceries home, the food was gone the next day. The next day another boy had to shop for groceries.

We roomed together for maybe two months. We knew we couldn't continue because there were too many of us. I moved out with one friend (also one of the roommates and Informant 4 in this study) to another apartment. We were able to do this, because we were earning more money, enough to be comfortable.

Larry and Felix (Informant 4) were roommates at both apartments. This arrangement worked well for both young men, as they both shared the same work schedule, allowing them the opportunity to carpool together and save money, taking turns driving each other to work. Upon further query, he explained;

Yes, he had his own car and I had my own car. We took turns driving to work because we had the same work hours. He lived with me for two months. Then he had to move out because I got married and my wife moved in with me.

During the time in which the employment migration under study began, there were no TTYs, through which to communicate. As such, Deaf persons were unable to keep in touch through any other medium save face to face interaction and by mail. I inquired as to how Deaf people during this time maintained correspondence with each other. Larry offered an explanation of what Deaf social life was like;

A long time ago when I was little boy, I remember for the Deaf, it was very important to go to the Deaf Club or to go to the Drug Store. That would be where they would meet and agree what to do or to let each other know about special events. They would plan ahead of time. Mail back then took about seven days. Now, it is much faster. Back then there were no captioned movies so the Deaf would meet for movies with captioning in the Deaf Club or other places. After the movies the Deaf people would enjoy discussing and debating about the movie. Today there are captions offered in few places so Deaf people have a few more choices but their fellowship and the discussions are gone.

When I moved to Houston and got married, we lived without doorbell signals. We depended on our dogs to alert us. Older houses were built above the ground with no concrete slab. The Deaf people would stomp their feet on the floor to call attention to another Deaf person, who would feel the vibrations on the floor.

“And we called it a ‘Deaf house,’” I replied.

Yes, that’s right, ‘the Deaf house.’ Then the doorbell signaler was invented. It started with just one flash but today it can flash all over the house. There are still problems with them. New homes can install them for Deaf consumers. Old homes still have some problems, but it is better than nothing for most of us.

This excerpt reminded me of our old doorbell alert system, which was located in the center of the house, in a hallway that led from the Living Room to our bedrooms. There was one large flashing light, and an extremely loud buzzer that went off when the doorbell was rung, and the light would flash. This doorbell signaler was used as both a primer to our explaining to others how Deaf people lived, and as "proof" when friends from school would refuse to believe my parents were actually Deaf. That doorbell signaler was a source of many laughs and ghost white faces, seen as Hearing people would run from it as if they had heard a gunshot.

Door bell signalers have improved a great deal, but as Larry states here, they still have issues. One is that the alert system is not designed to alert when someone knocks, instead of

rings the doorbell. Some older homes, with poor or outdated electrical systems have issues alerting properly. Sometimes, the alert systems fail, and when this occurs, there are no technicians who specialize in this area, so often one must seek out a new purchase, with the hope that it will suffice. While these alert systems can be extremely useful for Deaf families, the greatest technological advance in the Deaf home is seen in the evolution of Deaf telecommunication devices, as Larry explains;

When my wife and I got a TTY, I think our daughter was about 3 or 4, and our son was about 2 years old. We were so excited! That machine was an old telegraph machine. They were donated by the military and other government agencies. Mom was so excited to use it but our two kids hated to hear the noise and they complained about it. But it was really nice. One problem we had at first was when someone called us; we couldn't hear the phone ringing. Today it is so different; we have videophones to call other Deaf people to chat.

I asked if the changes in communication technology changed his life.

Yes. Now, with the videophone, I don't have to drive and can save on gas. I can talk with so many people. Also text messaging is nice. TV has more captioning than ever. I can understand and enjoy TV better. One problem we still have; some videophones have poor alert signals. There are many things that still need to be developed and improved. Some captioning needs to be improved too.

With every advance in the Deaf-World, come new challenges. Presently, captioning, while it should be perfected by now, is going through some growing pains. When television switched from analog to digital, it seems as though they also switched to utilizing speech recognition software, as there are many errors that make little sense. One of my many frustrations in this regard is seen in the censorship of captions for the Deaf, when for whatever reason, some responsible party decides to alter that which is spoken and heard, but not seen in the captions. Yet another frustration of mine, is seen when I watch the news with captions on,

and critical aspects of one side or the other in a news story is purposefully left out, or deleted.

Yet, as Larry explains;

Right now, they are better than nothing; compared to when I was a little boy. When I was a little boy, about 12 years old, I had a hearing cousin who could sign. We wanted to get a cherry coke. A lady asked me what I wanted, but I looked around and my cousin had walked off. It was very awkward. I had to say "Cherry Coke." The woman put her hands up to her ears and grimaced. I felt embarrassed. She did get what I wanted. That made me very uncomfortable.

A long time ago, people would freeze, and stare at Deaf people signing, but today it seems more Hearing people are aware of sign language. Also, with all the weird things people wear today, people have gotten used to ignoring so many young people wearing weird clothes, and doing weird things, that most people are not as shocked as they used to be, and over time, they became used to ignoring things, and us as well.

When asked about the Deaf community he helped to establish and how it had changed since his arrival, he explained;

Really, at work, sometimes it was not easy for Deaf employees to mingle because there were three different shifts and several different departments. But I did make new friends there. When my wife and I started going to church, I taught many of those Deaf post office employees the Bible and worked hard to get them to come to church. Those people (Deaf workers) became my good friends.

I then asked how the church he alluded to was established.

Really it is a 'mystery.' At that time (my wife's) parents lived in the Westbury area. When her parents moved to Europe, they asked my wife and I to move into their house to take care of it and to take care of their dog.

Well, we were living in the area near Westbury. We eventually had a baby. (My wife) knew that it was good for children to grow up in church. (My wife) looked in the newspaper and found an article saying that Westbury Church of Christ had interpreting services. It was a few blocks away from Westbury Christian Church where (my wife) went before but they did not have any

interpreting services. (My wife) decided to go to Westbury Church of Christ with (name removed), our daughter. She said when she went in she told the usher that we were Deaf. The usher walked down the aisle to the front row and brought back a lady. The lady ushered (my wife) to the front and stood up to interpret the services. After the services were over, (my wife) found out the lady was the wife of the senior preacher!

We also became friends with two young ladies who were our age. They were very eager to get us involved with church activities. We studied the Bible together and had fellowship with them and we got more and more friends. That's how we became so connected and close with the members at Westbury Church of Christ.

I pressed further about the Deaf aspect of the church and how the separate services for the Deaf evolved.

We were growing in numbers of Deaf members. We had heard about other churches having separate services for the Deaf. Our elders and deacons there supported that idea. We started a separate service and hired a Deaf Preacher. Sometimes, in our free time, we did go with the Hearing people to worship because we had made so many friends there. We did grow bigger and bigger. At the time, we had about fifty Deaf adults and about fifty Deaf teenagers. It was a wonderful time. But in the 1980's, there was an oil crisis.

If you remember, a lot of people lost their jobs. Many members worked for oil companies and lost jobs. We had about ten preachers at Westbury Church of Christ, but the Elders decided to lay off nine preachers; one of them being the Deaf Preacher. There was no money to support them all. Plus, many Deaf people also lost their jobs. Many of them lived far away from Westbury Church of Christ. So, we decided to help some move to different churches on the Southeast side of Houston and some to the Northeast side of Houston and even the Northwest side. Our Deaf members at Westbury dwindled down to about ten.

I asked if the Deaf congregation at Westbury was primarily made up Deaf postal workers.

Yes, well... About half and half.

I then asked how the he helped create had influenced his life and career over the years.

Really, my parents were Deaf and my uncle who was a football coach at TSD was also Deaf. My Deaf uncle and his wife were both teachers at TSD, and both were strong role models in the Deaf community in Austin. I was sort of trained to be a leader. I felt responsible to serve the Deaf. When I got involved in church, the people there taught me how to be a leader in the church.

I was one of the deacons, along with the other Hearing deacons. My focus was on the Deaf members. There was a man, a good friend, who always taught me about the role of being a deacon. That's how my attitude and my thoughts about the Deaf changed. I changed from an egoistic leader to a humble servant. I enjoyed this service and of course, many Deaf people would "stab me in the back" which is the norm for Deaf leaders. That is life. I enjoy serving, sometimes I get frustrated, and sometimes I have successes.

What Larry mentions here, in regards to the norm of Deaf leaders being stabbed in the back, is telling in that, as a collective community, leaders who stand out are often challenged. The Deaf community is extremely diverse in its makeup and not everyone comes from similar backgrounds. There are often struggles from within, as well as from without, as members disagree, and often resistance is seen from those who do not come from a Deaf-centered perspective, are more Hearing oriented in their ways of thinking, pushing Deaf members to aspire to be more Hearing-centered in their community based endeavors. There is also an influence seen, as will be touched on later, based on "old grudges" as community members have been connected to each other since childhood days spent at TSD. The concept of a Deaf leader within the SDC will also be further discussed in the Discussion section of Chapter 5.

I then shifted the discussion, asking Larry about any other organizational affiliations he had experienced in the SDC, over the years.

First, I was involved in the Austin Deaf Softball Club. I went to a lot of tournaments. When I moved to Houston, I played for the Houston Softball team. I also played basketball for the Beaumont Deaf Club. Remember; I always liked

to join lousy teams and try to help them to become better teams. I enjoyed doing that.

I played for Beaumont Deaf Club until I tore my tendon in my ankle/heel. I could no longer play. Also, working 12 hours a day, limited my spare time. I decided to establish the Westbury Deaf Club. That was similar to The Knights of Columbus and the Rotary Club. The biggest problem we faced was; we couldn't serve alcohol beverages. Deaf people were coming in large numbers but they were demanding alcoholic beverages. But we did not serve those. It was a struggle to grow for a few years.

Larry's efforts in establishing this sports based organization, involved joining the two organizations he listed, The Knights of Columbus, and The Rotary club, which both prohibited the sale of alcohol. Some Deaf individuals disagreed with this aspect of the organization, feeling this should be their decision to make, and this probably had a great deal to do with the fact that the main community based organization for the informants upon arrival was the long established Houston Deaf Club, which did serve alcohol. Yet another influence was seen in the connections between this organization and the church the informants established, which also frowned upon drinking. This type of conflict is the sort of issue Deaf community members would, as stated earlier, stab Larry in the back for, as some viewed this aspect of the organization as his efforts to individually make decisions that some community members felt should be made collectively. What they failed to see, however, was that this decision was out of his control. He continued this discussion with explaining how the ultimate demise of the organization came about.

Later the church had a fire in the area where all our equipment was stored. Everything we had burned up when the building burned down. I then decided to end that organization.

Years later I started a different kind of business based sports organization. Deaf people thought I was a crook in this business because it was not a nonprofit organization as they thought it should be. The Deaf people did not understand

what I was trying to do, and I felt that the Deaf people were not ready for this idea. So I ended that business as well. But I was always involved in church activities.

Larry here touches on one attempt, on his part, to combine a sports based organization (which Deaf Americans have historically responded well to) with a business venture. As he stated, the concept, coupled with a modest profit (for future stability of the organization, and in compensation for his efforts in working for the organization) was seen as taking advantage of the Deaf, by some community members. These types of conflicts are common as historically, there have been many instances where some unethical persons have unfairly profited from the Deaf community. While Larry's efforts were ethically sound, past experiences, made some wary of the concept.

Larry then touched on one of his current organizational affiliations.

After I retired from the post office, I became involved with the Houston Deaf Senior Citizens Board. I felt that the organization was having a lot of problems, so I became a board member to help them improve their organization. A few months later, I realized the organization was not a "good fit" for me, so I resigned. Now, I spend my time enjoying my retirement with my dogs.

[While at the time of the interview, Larry had stepped down from the Deaf Senior Citizens Board due to similar conflicts previously discussed, he has since returned (by request) and is now the Executive Director of the Board. While some Deaf senior citizens lamented his involvement, and his efforts to keep the peace by setting solid boundaries for members, they later requested his return, as his ability to keep the peace between those whose opinions differ, was, in hindsight, preferred to the conflicts that arose in his absence.]

I then recalled a Deaf bowling team some of the Deaf men played in and asked if the team was related to Deaf postal workers or if it was something else altogether.

Different, different. I was involved with bowling on one team of five Deaf people and we played against Hearing people in the Hearing league. We were not in the

Deaf league and I became friends with many Hearing people there. The competition was tough and more fun. Once, we took that team to Nationals, and we won. That was the last time we played. We eventually got bored with it. Because every time we played, people always complained and always cussed. They drank. That was enough for me.

At this point in the interview process, we had covered all the research questions, so I asked if he had anything he would like to add, in summary across the three broad themes we had covered. Larry then discussed what he feels are pressing issues for the Deaf community today.

I feel that every state should have something called a "Deaf Community Center." Maybe you wonder what I mean. For example; maybe the center could give information about various services for the Deaf; information about Deaf Clubs and organizations. Maybe the center could give websites or encourage Deaf people with special needs. The center could be a place that parents of deaf children could rely on for more information about d/Deafness. Maybe some Deaf are not well educated, and they may need more training. The center could provide information about where they can go for more training.

Suppose you as a parent have a deaf child, and do not know what to do, the center can provide information and resources. Often doctors will tell parents to get cochlear implants and not even give any other options for them to consider.

Doctors are not well educated about d/Deafness themselves. The center can help guide the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late Deafened, or Hearing Impaired people. I think it would be nice for every city to have that.

I asked if this was something he thought VR should be involved in.

Well, the center could be a place where it offers hearing aide services, VR services, and many other things. It should have professionals from various fields there. In old times, Deaf people really depended upon meeting at the coffee shop. We would meet at the Drug Store. The owner of that Drug Store was a Pharmacist, who knew sign language. Deaf people liked to go to his store because he would explain to them about their medicine and other things. He had a place called "coffee" or "sandwich" shop. The Deaf people would meet there to chat and eat. That was their social "happy hour." They would talk about community and current events like sports and football, and other things.

Sadly, the owner eventually died, and the business closed. The Deaf people were “lost” in Austin. Today when Deaf people go to the Drug Store and have questions about medicine, communication is a problem. They get information flyers or brochures instead. I feel that a center would help the Deaf in so many ways, like; information about taking the right medicine, etc... That would be really nice. Also, when Deaf people become old, where can they have fun? Where can they get help? Maybe their children will take them away from their friends to take care of them, but just stick them in a room in isolation.

I would like more than that. There are also many churches with Hearing people, who love going to church, that one day, may lose their hearing as well. Where can they go? They may stop going to church. Churches aren't sure what to do, and may think providing an interpreter is enough. Churches may not understand that the Late Deafened can't just acquire sign language right away. It is difficult for some to learn sign language at all. They typically can't lip read either. The community center can help in so many different ways. That would be so nice. Maybe you can do it.

Informant 2: Mike. Mike comes from possibly the strongest Deaf background of all the informants as he has the greatest number of Deaf family members. One of Mike's older siblings worked in the Houston area post office prior to the migration under study. This sibling later returned to college and became a DVRC in the Houston area. Mike has played a key role in the USPS as a union steward for Deaf workers Houston area. His experiences in mediating the conflicts experienced between d/Deaf workers, their Hearing counterparts and postal administrators, have afforded him a wealth of knowledge of the events that transpire in the workplace.

Early learning experiences. Mike comes from a large Deaf family where most of his family members, including both of his parents are Deaf. While all of Mike's siblings were also born Deaf, they were much older than Mike, entering TSD earlier. This left Mike the only child in the home for nine months of the year, save the summer months when his siblings returned to

spend their three month break from school. Mike was also the only Deaf child in the neighborhood. Mike learned to communicate with the other children in the neighborhood, serving as family interpreter when he and his siblings would play with Hearing neighbors. Mike expressed this had a profound impact on his development and ultimately led to his future work as a union steward for Deaf postal workers, with the USPS. When asked to describe his family of origin, and whether or not his family members were primarily Deaf or Hearing, he explained;

Okay, I have a Deaf family, including my mother and father. My mother and father lived in farming towns. They were the only Deaf children in their families. They married and had four children; my brothers and sisters. All of us are Deaf. We grew up in a black, blue collar community. We noticed that other families were also going through hard times. I always looked up to my father. He always said "we must have money to spend on you children to eat." He always worked. He said "work came first."

When my brothers and sisters grew up and married, we all married Deaf spouses. We had several, all hearing children. We wondered why we were the only Deaf in our immediate family. There were no other Deaf relatives. Then, after that, only hearing children were born in the family. I guess someone upstairs didn't like us. Ha, ha.

Mike here touches on the tendency of Deaf parents having hearing children. While it is often discussed that ninety percent of deaf children are born to two Hearing parents, with no previous exposure to d/Deafness, the inverse of this equation is that only ten percent of Deaf children are born to Deaf parents. The Deafness discourse still has yet to accurately include this aspect of the Deaf-World population, and has often made absurd claims that these children from Deaf families are either marginal members, or are not considered members at all. This does not however represent a Deaf perspective, as common sense might dictate that as a collective community, Deaf communities are more inclusive than exclusive when it comes to their own

children. Whether a hearing child from a Deaf family is considered to be "Deaf" or "hearing," is based largely upon their developed world view, which of the two influences is dominant, and their level of involvement in the Deaf community. The term CODA (Child of Deaf Adult), which is used to represent these children was completely unknown to me throughout my childhood and adolescent years. Typically, people were viewed as either Hearing or Deaf. I remember very well discussions I had as a child with my community elders in this regard, where I was told in no uncertain terms, that I was "Deaf" and in no way should I ever consider myself to be "Hearing."

Mike then discussed his early years, entering TSD as a small child, and what this experience was like for him.

I did go to the Deaf school in Austin, TX, and entered in 1957. At that time, they had just built a new school campus. TSD had the old school buildings, including what we called; the "mule ear" towers. They were lofty and they were torn down in 1957; the same time I entered TSD as an elementary student. I started living on campus at 8 years old. It was hard for me to leave home and live in school for nine months out of the year. I commuted back and forth from TSD and home.

In a way, while growing up, I felt fine mingling with other Deaf students because we all had the same Deafness. If I had stayed home, I may have felt awkward because my mother and father were adults and I was just a Deaf kid. At school, I had peers and we grew up together. We knew each other like brothers and sisters.

When Mike touched on the "mule ear" towers, it reminded me of a story I heard from family in regard to the mascot changes at TSD. Though I have never seen this documented in historical accounts, the football team, originally called "The Silents," were at one point donned "The Mules" after the towers Mike touched on.

Informant 1, who is also my father, spoke of his Deaf uncle who was a leader in the Deaf community, a teacher and coach at TSD. This uncle, upon reaching TSD by train, explained his personal frustrations when he learned the TSD mascot was a Mule. He quickly decided this was unacceptable and began an effort to change the mascot. Through his actions, and after a general consensus was made with the school board, the mascot eventually became a Texas Ranger. After this alteration, the football team became, what it is still called today; "The TSD Rangers."

Mike then went on to discuss his early experiences, the difference between his nine months out of the year, spent at school, and the time he spent alone at home prior to entering TSD;

When I was growing up, I was the only child at home. All my brothers and sisters were gone to school. I was lonely but I met other kids in the neighborhood. I was able to communicate with Hearing people. When my brothers and sister came home they would ask me to talk to our neighborhood friends and ask for say; a baseball bat or ball. I was fine with that and walked over to them. I got along well with Hearing people.

Then when I went to TSD, teachers said we must help one another. You are all the same; Deaf. I had the influence of school and my experience of my neighborhood friends. I felt I could work with both Deaf and Hearing people.

I have to; I have no choice but to get along with Hearing people. Many times I have obstacles. But from what I learned at TSD about helping one another; I also helped Hearing people. But the Hearing people would just say "thank you" and not help me. I was puzzled that I helped them and they did not help me.

While Mike was a student at TSD, he expressed that his favorite subjects were Social Studies and History, and explained;

That was all that the school had to offer to us. We had simple courses such as Science, Math, Social Studies, and History. We had nothing else. I had no choice but to take up all the courses.

He continued to discuss his TSD experience in regards to the many vocational programs TSD offered.

We were taught how to do dry cleaning. They would put us in a class to learn about the dry cleaning business. Sometimes they would put us in printing classes because at the time printing jobs were plentiful and the pay was good. They also had photo shop training, and auto mechanics training. I entered auto mechanics training because my dad worked on cars all the time. I wanted to be a mechanic like my dad. Those were the basics that we had at TSD.

When asked if he also took part in any sports, or other activities while a student at TSD, he replied;

Sports, oh yes, yes. I played basketball, track, and football. That was all the sports TSD had to offer. I also was involved with Boy Scouts. I stayed until I got close to getting an Eagle pin. I did not make it. Oh well. I followed my brothers' and my dad's ways, they dropped it too. I decided to do the same as they did.

You may wonder why I took up all the sports at TSD. Why I also joined the Boy Scouts, the Choir Club, and the Drama club. Those were the only times we could get out of TSD. I didn't want to stay in school as if it was a prison. Because I was involved in all those sports, I enjoyed getting out in the world. I wanted to expand my knowledge of events outside of TSD. Some of the other kids stayed on campus, and they didn't really learn all that much.

When asked how Deaf Education had changed since his time at TSD, he explained;

At TSD? Unfortunately, I have not visited my alma mater for years. A few years ago I did go to TSD. I was shocked to see that they now have everything; better trade tools, and now they have computers. Computers are really special. I recall that during my time there at TSD, we didn't have those luxuries. The students now have their own rooms with kitchens of their own. During my time at TSD, we didn't have those.

I had to run to the store to buy canned food and open them, and cook them on fire, then eat them. The cafeteria did not give us good food to eat. Their food was lousy. The big change at TSD is the computer. Their way of teaching is different because of the computer. The kids are not the same any more. Because in my time we were a group that grew up together and were close to each other.

Those kids do not talk and sign at the same time any more, like when I was young. We had to talk and sign at the same time. Deaf Education itself, I have noticed there are less Deaf authors who write books about Deafness. It seems to be only Hearing people writing those books. The Deaf need to see more Deaf authors and be proud of their Deaf counterparts to influence them and make them feel like they can write books too. Deaf people need Deaf role models.

Vocational experiences. While still a student at TSD, Mike developed a strong interest for a future employment goal. He explained;

I wanted to be an oncologist. They study cancer. I loved science and I was fascinated how cells work together, but the USPS got me by offering me a good job before I ever continued with the study of oncology.

Mike, as was seen with all four informants, was exposed to a host of subjects, extracurricular activities, and vocational training programs. While Mike was still a student at TSD, but home during the summers, he worked as a lathe operator with his brothers; all working with their father in his shop.

As stated, of all four Deaf informants, Mike has the greatest number of Deaf family members and over the years, several have worked for the USPS. I asked how many of his family members had worked for the USPS. He replied;

My brother used to work there before I did. My wife started working along with a group of Deaf people that were brought in by VR after I was. I started working in the post office because I needed the money. I saw Larry (Informant 1), Felix (Informant 4), and others already working there. I found that working at the post office gave me enough money to live comfortably.

Prior to that, I was working at Texas Instruments on the assembly line. The pay was so minimal; I had to borrow money from friends who worked at the post office to pay for my car. When I got some money, I had to pay my friends back. It became such a routine, that I decided to quit and work at the post office. My brother, my wife, and I all worked at the post office. Later, my brother left because he had health problems from dust in the post office. The machines produced so much dust.

Mike's older brother was one of the first Deaf individuals to enter the postal workforce in Houston prior to the migration under study. This older brother left the postal workforce and returned to college, eventually entering the field of Vocation Rehabilitation as a Counselor who specialized in working with Deaf individuals.

Mike entered the postal workforce alone, without VR assistance in 1970, and when asked if the opportunity to work with other Deaf individuals influenced his decision to enter postal employment, he replied;

Yes, some of it, because if I went in by myself, it may not be fun. I learned that from my experience in working at T.I... I had no social life there. I was lonely watching other Hearing people interact with each other. I was not able to understand any of them. I needed to communicate with other people.

At the post office I had a chance to chat with my Deaf peers and I worked better and faster too. It made it easier because we all could understand more together, in what we are doing at the post office. With Hearing people there was always more of a communication problem especially with regard to directions. It was difficult to know what I was supposed to do when communication was a problem. They could have informed the Deaf group in writing.

I then asked how and why this job opportunity evolved into a career.

Post office employment was and is stable and steady. I remember during WW II and WW I, many people had financial problems during the Depression years. Postal workers and the movie actors were the only ones making good money. I thought that would be an ideal job to have if we had another Depression. I would still have had a job and would not have had to worry about being laid off.

The reason the job is stable, is because of the union that makes contracts with the USPS. They always want to keep the "no layoff" clause. That is my security. I support that idea. During my years working at the post office I would see many people get laid off from their jobs. It made me want to be safe and stay with the post office up until now and still today.

I then asked Mike to describe the entry process, including the entrance exam, and was surprised to learn he did not enter the postal service through VR services, which at the time, was required of Deaf workers, as a means to "certify their Deafness."

I went directly in and took the tests on my own. I think I was the only Deaf person that took the normal tests (the civil service exam vs. the modified LSM specific exam, and without VR support or interpreters to interpret the exam directions) to get into the post office. A few weeks later, VR sent several Deaf people to work in the post office. The VR Counselor asked me how I got into the post office. I told that VR Counselor that I went through the normal channels to take the tests, passed, and got the job at the post office.

The VR Counselor asked me to sign my name (to say) that I did come in to work (through VR services) at the post office along with the group. I felt insulted and belittled. I told them "no, I did it on my own, thank you." The VR Counselor was not happy about that because it would have given her credit that she brought a higher number of Deaf people in the post office. But that was a mistake.

Mike was the only known Deaf worker that entered into the Houston area Post Office during this time, that went through the typical channels of entering the USPS, by finding out where the exams were being held, showed up, and passed the exam without VR assistance, and without being given exam accommodations. While he felt insulted that he was asked to sign, certifying that he entered with VR assistance, pointing out it "*was a mistake*," this more than likely had more to do with USPS requirements at the time, of only admitting Deaf workers that entered through VR services.

While it appears that it was possible for Deaf workers to enter the postal workforce without VR assistance at the time; VR was involved in support services beyond the exams as interpreters were present for the training of Deaf workers and postal administrators. The early Deaf postal workers were given trial periods to prove the worth of hiring Deaf. While these early workers were required to take the entrance exams, once postal administrators had been convinced by the performance of the first cohort, postal policies shifted and opened the doors to all Deaf workers, assuming that all Deaf workers were the same. This was seen as a mistake by both administrators and the informants in this study. Mike explains what may have contributed later, to the sharp decline in the number of Deaf postal workers;

When many Deaf people came into the post office, they were playing and partying. Those Deaf people worked next to me, by my department. They were all Deaf. I thought that was wrong. It would have been better if they mixed some Deaf and Hearing so Deaf people would have been able to learn from the Hearing, how to work at the post office. Because they were all Deaf, they all did not know what to do. They would talk and talk across the machines.

Supervisors kept telling them not to talk. The Deaf people told the supervisor to leave them alone. I tried to tell them not to do that, and told them they needed to be working. They thought I was silly and trying to force them to work. They would tell me “no way!”

I was embarrassed that the Hearing people would see the Deaf people like that. Hearing people would ask me why they do not work like me. I told them we grew up in the same town, but it just happened that we have different work ethics. I think that hiring so many at one time was not a good idea.

Given the understanding that Mike is the Union Steward for Deaf postal workers, he has more experience than most in regards to the Deaf postal experience; I then asked about the drastic decrease in the number of Deaf postal workers, and why he felt this happened.

Because the post office itself decided not to hire "handicapped" people any more. That conflicted with their contracts. The union is fighting with USPS about that. The post office hired other minorities like; Indians, and black people. Right now, there is a large number of black people in the USPS. Also the post office hired Hispanics for equal employment. The number of Deaf employees continue to decline. The post office decided to make the Deaf people take the tests (unaided). The Deaf people were failing the tests. So Deaf interest in the post office declined because of the testing requirements.

Deaf people were no longer interested in taking post office tests because they felt they would fail the tests. And if someone failed the test, the post office gave them ninety days to work. Many Deaf people did not know that they could call the post office and tell them they wanted to continue to work. They thought they were only allowed to work ninety days and after that point, they would be fired. I found out this was happening and tried to tell them about the postal regulations and procedures. I told them not to give up but to call the post office instead. When people keep calling in, the post office eventually takes them back in. Deaf people just didn't bother calling in or they stopped trying. That is how I became the union steward for the Deaf (postal workers). My job is to help them.

The union started in 1970. Sixteen years later, I became a steward in 1986, after I saw what was happening to Deaf post office employees. When I realized that I was doing fine, but the other Deaf employees were complaining so much, I wondered why. Then I found out there were many misunderstandings, and that they did not understand the procedures. They had different levels of education. I felt sorry for them. Many Hearing people took advantage of the Deaf. The Hearing people couldn't use me, just like your Dad (Informant 1). We, the two of us, were two of the few Deaf people who fought back and spoke out. That is what made me want to become a steward to fight for Deaf employees' rights.

Of the four informants, the two Mike eludes to as having taken a stand against those who tried to take advantage of Deaf workers were both Deaf of Deaf and both assumed larger roles as leaders in the workplace and in the community, always leading by example. This exchange also points to the collective sense of those who recognize a need and move to take action, for the betterment of the collective, in work and community. While these responsibilities may seem

discrete in their application, they carry over into other areas. Larry focused more on the community outside of the workplace and the spiritual needs of Deaf community members, while Mike, assumed a larger role in the workplace by becoming a union steward.

I then asked Mike if he enjoyed his work as union steward, to better understand his motivations and why he felt he was the best worker in the collective to assume this larger role in the workplace.

I love to have debates/arguments with post office supervisors. Sometimes I have to do that by writing and often people will stare at me when I walk in to talk with supervisors where problems are. I don't care, I am not afraid to talk with Hearing people.

This exchange reflects Mike's leadership role in the collective community, and how his feelings of the inherited Deaf of Deaf responsibility translated into his becoming the primary mediator for Houston area Deaf postal workers, becoming the "Deaf voice" in dealing with administrators in the postal workforce.

On one of the Facebook pages I had encountered during my research, several Deaf postal workers posted queries as to whether or not the union still held conferences for Deaf postal workers. I checked the website multiple times over the course of several months to see if anyone had answered the question, and no one had. To triangulate, I asked about the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Task Force and whether or not the conferences were still being held. Mike explained;

At one time there were many, many conferences. We (union stewards) do still have task force conferences but we are now limited to only one a year. We used to have five conferences a year because we had five different regions. We would go to different conferences in the different regions all over America.

We do still have Deaf (USPS union) stewards to help Deaf employees. Some Deaf employees did not know about them and said their own stewards did not inform them of meetings and events. I had to find out what happened. The stewards said it was because they never showed up at the meetings that would have informed them (if they would have attended the meetings). That is the one main excuse for Deaf people not being aware of these things. The stewards said "if they do not show up at meetings, why should I tell them." I tried to help them understand that we are working for the union to help the Deaf people understand what is going on. Sometimes Deaf people still do not care about it.

Right now there is a cut back of task force meetings that can help Deaf employees. We want to help but at the same time the union has money problems just like the USPS. We have had declining numbers of meetings from five, four, three, two, and now just one a year. This year we will have a convention in Las Vegas. It looks like there might be a turnout of only ten, and maybe two, Deaf people that will show up there.

Some time ago, we used to have about forty Deaf postal employees involved in the meetings. The meetings were great with forty Deaf employees, but it has dwindled down to just two now. I am one of the two involved.

See its different now. That's the convention, but the conferences are different. The last time I was at a conference, it was in Detroit, Michigan. We had only twenty Deaf postal employees show up. I was the only person from South District that went there. I often wonder; What is wrong? It used to be about 700 Deaf employees attending conferences, now that 700 has dwindled down to 20.

I then described the Facebook page, my queries of various Deaf postal workers, and the lack of a clear response, and asked if the USPS advertises, or announces the conferences. He explained;

No, an independent individual established that website for questions. That person has no first hand information. The Task Force Committee only has first hand information. That created a conflict with the union. The union said they couldn't do anything about the problem. Those people can do anything they want. We do not need to get involved with them.

The USPS does not provide that service. It's individual people who establish their own websites about their gripes, complaints, and so forth. The Hearing postal workers do that often, as well. But when Deaf postal workers establish one, it only lasts a short time and is taken down.

Mike's comment touched on the created state of exclusion seen in the literature during my research, so I then touched on the lack of data in all postal discussions and historical accounts in reference to Deaf postal workers, asking if he was aware of this, which he was. I then asked if he knew why this was the case.

I guess long time ago, Deaf people didn't know about the post office. They may have received mail or information but they did not know to apply for work at the post office. I don't know. There were several Deaf people working in the post office in the past. But information about them was suppressed. When those Deaf employees became older, they would talk about their experiences in the post office. I met one, much older, Deaf man who used to work in Virginia. I was shocked. I said "WHAT?"

I asked him "when did you start working for the post office?" His reply was "1930's." I was shocked because I had never heard of that before. I asked how he got a job with the post office. That person said a friend pulled him into working at the post office. The post office liked him because he never wasted time talking and he never complained. He said he never even said he needed to go to the restroom. He stayed on the job the whole time. The post office really liked his work and kept him. That is how the post office started hiring more and more Deaf. They thought all the Deaf people were the same as that man. In fact, it is not always true. They're not always the same.

This theme of "not all Deaf workers are created equal," was repeated by all four informants and points to the differences seen by Deaf individuals of those who ascribe to the Deaf collective work ethic and those who do not. This also points to the tendency of many people of all types, to apply stereotypes based on limited exposure, to all Deaf persons, and the Deaf experience. While being a Deaf solitaire in the workplace is a formidable challenge, to

enter the workplace alone, to set a solid Deaf example as an employee, then to have encouraged your employer to hire more Deaf as a result is a great honor for Deaf workers.

I then asked how postal work had changed for Deaf workers over the course of his career, to which, he replied with one word, “*technology.*” I pressed further, asking if technology had led to any improvements for Deaf postal employees, as the advancements in technology seen in industry have also been seen in regards to accessibility for Deaf populations outside the workplace.

No, it declined. Truly the biggest change was technology. Many Deaf employees were stuck because they did not know how to use the computer. Computer based machines took over the jobs of living human workers. Those computer machines are like robots and we have more and more of them. The post office needs only one or two people to run the computer based machines. The post office and the Deaf workers had to scramble to find work within the post office.

They informed the Deaf community that the Deaf workers were bored and didn't have much work to do in the post office. This made many Deaf people not want to work in the post office anymore. Deaf people thought that the post office would not offer Deaf people a career or permanent jobs. Other Deaf people wanted to look for better career work. The post office normally will only hire temporary workers.

Many Deaf people who start working as temporary workers do not know that the post office sometimes hires temporary workers permanently. Deaf people can call or ask for another ninety days to show the post office that they want to continue working for the post office. They usually don't.

I then asked Mike if this was something he felt VR could assist with.

I don't know because after what has happened in the past with Deaf employees. First of all, Deaf people require an interpreter when there are meetings. The post office at first was fine with that until they found out how expensive interpreters are for such a short time.

The post office decided they no longer wanted to hire Deaf people. The post office is stuck with the Deaf employees that they have now. However, the number of Deaf employees is dwindling.

My concern is that the post office is waiting for the number of Deaf employees to dwindle. I am not sure about the future of Deaf employees in the post office. That is something that worries me.

I asked if this negative USPS sentiment toward Deaf workers might in part, be a result of the class action lawsuit from the "Anthrax in the mail incidents," where d/Deaf postal workers were found by the courts to have been denied interpreters for critical information given during safety meetings in regards to the anthrax attacks in postal locations across the nation (Chess & Clark, 2007). He explained;

Not really only that, but also other things that have happened at times before that. Deaf postal workers would approach asking for an interpreter to solve simple problems. That gave the Hearing postal workers a bad image of Deaf postal workers. The Hearing people would think that means if a Deaf person wants to work in the office, they would demand an interpreter. That would be very expensive.

They started to wonder if each individual Deaf worker would require their own interpreter. That would be even more expensive. The Hearing people do not really understand what the Deaf people mean about needing interpreters. Deaf people just need an interpreter for important meetings, maybe once a week. That is possible but there are always misunderstandings between the Deaf and Hearing employees.

The Hearing postal workers do not know that there are many interpreting agencies in Houston. They thought there was just one and they kept asking for that agency to provide interpreters. I found out they were using agencies from Louisiana and Alabama.

You know what? They called Louisiana to ask for interpreters to come to Houston. I had to tell them that there are interpreting agencies in Houston, which would save money. I told them you can call them in Houston and have them interpret cheaper.

Wow! Louisiana is a huge waste of money! Having to pay them for travel and hotel! It was obvious; Hearing postal workers really are not educated about things related to the Deaf community.

While many of these misunderstandings seem nonsensical, it is important to note that Deaf individuals, including the informants in this study, often do not see the issues that arise between Deaf and Hearing workers as outright discrimination, but more so, as a complete lack of education of Hearing persons in regards to Deaf populations, as is seen in Mike's comment here in regards to the hiring of interpreters from out of state, vastly inflating the cost of hiring an interpreter for Deaf postal workers. This also points to a need from VR agencies to better educate employers, and Hearing populations, especially in light of the understanding that Deaf individuals are by and large, blocked from recognition in dominant discourse.

Given the understanding that communication access is a critical aspect of the Deaf world of work experience, I asked Mike who was responsible for the hiring of interpreters.

It's actually the District Managers that are responsible for getting interpreters. Of course, many supervisors, I'm speaking of Station Managers, do not want to hire interpreters for their Deaf employees because they have to pay for it on their own, in each station. They have to come up with the money on their own. Those higher up will say, "Yes you need to hire one," but many times station supervisors decline to do so.

Like me; I struggled because I never had an interpreter in my station; for so many years; since 1986. Just recently, they finally brought interpreters in. I was so happy! Then I told my supervisor, "Really there were so many issues I've held onto for so long, that have accumulated, that I know you will not like me anymore because I may seem more negative than before in communicating my frustrations. You will wonder why I was fine before until the interpreter showed up. I will tell you everything that I had to suppress through so many years."

I wanted to throw it all at them. My supervisor asked me "you've been doing so well for so many years with no complaints, why is it now that we hire interpreters (and you should be happy), that you're now so upset?"

I told them; "This is what I've wanted to say for all the years I've been here, it's just that now, I can actually TELL you!"

I unloaded on them, and now they are cold to me. I showed them that I still have some sense left!

This exchange between Mike and his supervisor is telling in that, from the supervisor's perspective, the exchange might likely have made him fearful or apprehensive about hiring an interpreter in the future. But, in reality, it was a heated exchange because of all the years Mike had spent in the workplace, frustrated, without an interpreter that was the source of his ire.

After the exchange, this supervisor may very well have thought that his bringing in an interpreter that day, was the catalyst, and ignored the years Mike had to spend in silence. This again, points to a potential need for a VR intervention to nurture, and foster effective communication in the workplace.

Community experiences. As stated; Mike comes from the largest Deaf family of the four informants. Unlike the other informants, he was born and raised in the Houston area, giving him a unique insight into the Houston Deaf Community, prior to the time in which the migration began. As we shifted the discussion toward the Houston Deaf Community, I asked him why he chose to come to Houston, including where, how and with whom did he live upon arrival.

The truth is: I've always had deep roots in Houston. I was born and raised in Houston. I did not really move to the Houston area, because, in a way, I've always been here. I grew up in Houston with my parents. I went off to school and college, and then I came back home to Houston.

When I returned to Houston, I didn't want to live with my family, because of course, I was young and independent. I was ready to live on my own. I went on to work in the post office. I never went back to live with family. When I married, we moved a few times around the Houston area. Finally, I now live in the North part of Houston.

I asked how the Deaf community in Houston had changed since he first arrived, after his return from school.

A LOT! Oh yes, a lot of changes have happened. Really technology itself has changed so much. It has changed our lifestyles. Years ago we were close as family.

In the past, when we visited friends, we would take a bath, clean up and dress nicely before we left. We would all get in our cars and drive to friends' houses. We would knock on their doors and sometimes find out they were not at home. Then we would write a note and leave it on the door. Afterwards, we would have to drive all the way back home and take off all our nice 'visiting' clothes.

In the past, the Deaf Club was the only place that the Deaf people could come together and socialize. We would help each other, and sometimes work together on building and developing the Deaf Club building together. They had programs there for our families and children. Now with modern technology, we can text, email or video phone with each other.

The Deaf people in Houston do not go to the Deaf Club anymore as it's not needed. With this modern technology we started to spread out to various Deaf events that interested us. We are more mainstreamed with Hearing people because they have different things to offer us that were different from the same old things Deaf people did, exposing us to new interests. This gives the Deaf a broader view of different events and activities that they might be interested in. The Deaf people are not as isolated as they used to be because that has become boring for them, with no new faces. So the Deaf people are more scattered than in the past.

The Deaf school has cut enrollment numbers due to mainstreaming and the Deaf school is no longer the only way Deaf children receive an education. There are mainstreamed schools for the Deaf everywhere. The Deaf people who

grew up in mainstreamed schools tend not to be as involved in Deaf events. They seem to prefer to be with Hearing people. The Deaf people are now really more spread out in all directions.

I shifted the conversation toward Deaf organizations as he had just mentioned the Deaf Club, and I recapped the organizations he had already touched on and asked if he had been involved with any others.

I helped start the Houston Deaf Caucus with one of my brothers and his wife, and other Deaf people. We were trying to establish a Deaf community center. After trying to raise money through fundraising events, we realized it was not working. We simply didn't have enough leaders participating.

I was part of trying to establish the Texas Deaf Caucus. It did grow. We had too many organizations that serviced Deaf people to remember. Deaf people had their preferences.

Part of the problem was because we all grew up and went to school together. Some carried old childhood problems from their TSD days and continued to hold grudges against people for those reasons. Some would not want to be a part of a new organization if someone they didn't like was involved in it.

The Texas Deaf Caucus fell through. I had heard there was another Deaf group trying to establish exactly what we were trying to do back then. They asked us questions about what to do. The real problem was no one was willing to commit to it. If you don't have people with the willingness to commit then the organization will fall.

I then shifted the conversation to Westbury Church of Christ and asked what was so special about that church that garnered such an enormous response.

We were asked to go to Westbury for something, what is it called? It was something for Deaf people to get together. When we got there, we were surprised so many Deaf postal workers were there. That was cool.

Then, when we went to work, we had something to talk about. We enjoyed talking together and just being friends. We did enjoy attending there.

The gatherings Mike touched on here were called "potlucks," where everyone would gather and bring a dish or two. These gatherings would often attract hundreds of Deaf persons, many of whom would travel great distances to attend. As a child, I failed to see the postal connection to the church but this exchange points to the possibility that the Deaf postal workers, unable to socialize in the workplace, in part, gathered to not only socialize, but also to collectively share critical information about the workplace.

At this point, I was curious and asked who it was that convinced him to attend services at Westbury.

Of course, that time we were single. I was being mischievous. Your Dad (Informant 1) asked me to come to Westbury Church. He kept persuading me to come and have fellowship there. He was my good friend, so I was fine about going there.

It was during that time that I met my wife. My wife and I also got married in Westbury Church of Christ.

This was new information for me as I had never heard this, and I asked if they were both working at the post office at the time. Mike explained that at the time, he was employed with the USPS but his wife had not yet started working there. He clarified;

When I met my wife, she wasn't working at post office at the time. A little later she started working at the post office along with a large group of Deaf people. I was happy to steal her for myself.

I then shifted the conversation back to the general community we all shared, expressing my joy to be learning so much about our community and asked how this tightly knit community he helped to establish had affected his life over the many years.

The Deaf community is really like a family. We see each other almost every day. It does influence us because when we hear about other Deaf people's successes in their lives, we learn from them. I find I can give tips to other Deaf people who have problems. We all pass around tips to each other, and help each other. I do learn things from other Deaf people. I stayed with the group. Now that many started to retire, they seem to be more spread out and we are not as close as before.

It's just like the union. In past union meetings, we had maybe 10-15 Deaf members in attendance. Now we have only two. It is just me and my wife. The reason is because so many retired. It did influence my work. Now, I am not needed as a union steward because they are all retired. The post office is not bringing in new Deaf workers.

Mike here, touches on the fact that the USPS is no longer bringing in new Deaf workers, which he stated in the previous section is the result of a change in postal policy where the USPS decided "not to hire handicap" individuals anymore. Unfortunately, in the eyes of the USPS, this also includes Deaf applicants. Although this new policy precludes the hiring of Deaf applicants, this is not to say new d/Deaf workers are not entering the USPS, as Mike explains;

The post office may have hired some in different crafts such as; mail carrier. They did hire one or two Hearing, or Hard of Hearing. Someone at work told me that a Deaf woman was working at post office. I was surprised.

I thought they meant a "real Deaf person." I started looking for that Deaf person. I found out she was Hard of Hearing. I asked her how she got into the post office. She said that she just applied for the job. It was hard communicating with her. She went to mainstreamed schools and associated with Hearing people. I believe there are some d/Deaf employees that we may overlook. The post office may hire d/Deaf people without letting us know.

Mike here touches on the deaf vs. Deaf distinction, which should be noted, as this invariably means the woman he encountered was not associated with the Deaf community and as such, she does not share the same Deaf collective work ethic. Mike also expressed difficulty in

communicating with her, and he exhibits the Deaf view of this new employee as a Hearing-oriented person with a hearing loss, hence the "Hard of Hearing" distinction. This is important to take note of as employers and professionals working with the d/Deaf often see all persons with a hearing loss as the same, which, as this passage suggests, they are not.

At this point in the interview process, it was time to wrap up the interview, so I asked Mike if he had anything he would like to add in summary.

It is important for Hearing people to understand the Deaf people. They need to understand how we live, how we talk, how we work, how we think, and more important; how we feel. Hearing people many times do not understand us and still do not understand the Deaf people.

Even in the workplace, they still are clueless about getting interpreters. They are clueless how we can talk on the phone or communicate. All the information they need is on the USPS Task Force website. Why don't you just look at it, or read it?

Hearing people are still putting down and oppressing Deaf people. I still struggle with Hearing people to this day. I am just one person and I was working for all the Deaf employees. Your father (informant 1) worked alone among Hearing people at his station. He was the only Deaf person in his building. The Hearing people tried to put him down. That was my frustration.

The neat thing was that your Dad and I could keep in touch by texting to agree to meet and discuss his case. I would tell him what he could do. He has me give him information of things he can do to solve various problems. I, sometimes, would encourage him to do different things. Most of the time, he did solve his own problems on his own.

I guess we need more leaders to lead other Deaf people. I really appreciate that you are doing this, and asking these questions for your study. I hope that your study will influence the Hearing people to understand the Deaf people more.

Mike points to the manner in which Deaf workers utilize collective behaviors to problem solve in areas of both the problems of daily living, and those encountered in the workplace. This understanding is critical for professionals who work within Deaf populations as these informal means of problem solving through interdependence within the collective, also foster independence from formal services.

Informant 3: Frederick. Of all the informants, Frederick possibly has the strongest desire to work. As a child, I wondered if he ever slept, as he was known to have had three jobs at any given time and was also known to be a skilled mechanic who often fixed various items for member within the community for extra cash. Due to this strong desire to work, Frederick most likely has the most world of work experiences of all the informants. These experiences however are not confined to the USPS, as during the many years he has worked for the post office, his position there was never the only position he held. Of all the informants, Frederick is also likely to have the most experience in seeing firsthand, the changes over time, specific to the climate in the world of work for Deaf workers.

Early learning experiences. Frederick was born into a predominately Hearing family, but did have several extended family members who were also deaf. While Frederick came from a Hearing background, he entered TSD at an early age, where he was exposed to Deaf culture, ASL, and the Deaf collective work ethic. These two influences; Hearing, and Deaf, culminated into the development of the strongest desire to work I have ever known. I was stunned to learn through the interview process, that Frederick's strong desire to work became a means by which to mediate his feelings of social isolation when home for the summers, in a completely Hearing environment. Frederick describes his family background;

My family, my parents, and my brother are all Hearing, except me. My mother's side of the family has four cousins, no three cousins that are deaf. My father's side; all are Hearing. My mother said I was born deaf. She thinks I am deaf because she had high fever and German measles while she was pregnant with me; though she is not sure if that is how I became deaf.

When asked about his early educational experiences, he replied;

When I was labeled as "deaf," the doctors recommended that my mother look at schools in Houston, Dallas, and Austin.

My mother chose Austin and Texas School for the Deaf. TSD provided sign language and speech training. Which; of those two; sign and speech; I did not learn speech at all. I only learned sign language.

When I went home from TSD for the summer, my parents keep expecting me to talk but I never did. I only used sign language. This puzzled my parents. They wondered why TSD did not provide me with speech training. In fact TSD did, but it depended on me. I didn't want to voice talk. I told them "I just prefer the Deaf-Way, to communicate in sign language."

When I was in school at TSD, from fall to May, I would sign. During the summer time, my mother would teach me how to speak. Whenever, I would gesture, or point at things to communicate she would slap my hands and tell me it was not nice to gesture. She said "you have to learn to speak." I eventually learned to speak well. Some people were surprised that I could speak well, which I learned through my mother.

Frederick, in this discussion about communication, points to the conscious choice he made in choosing to sign; preferring the "Deaf-Way," over speech. This exchange also points to the importance of parental roles in the education of their deaf child. While Frederick was exposed to speech training at TSD, it was his mother who taught him to speak in the home.

I then moved on to the discussion about Frederick's early learning experiences at TSD, and asked about the various learning experiences he encountered. He first describes the various activities where social interaction was central to the activity, then describes various courses he was exposed to.

At the Deaf school, TSD, I was involved with Boy Scouts and BAA (Boys Athletic Association). I played baseball, basketball, football and games like Chess, Checkers, and Dominoes. I enjoyed those weekend competitions. That was a lot of fun...

At TSD, when I was growing up, from 1954 until I graduated in 1969; what I experienced in my school, my education; was learning courses like; Math, English and History. My favorite subject was History, and learning about things that happened in the past.

He also touched on one leadership experience while at TSD.

I was class president during my senior and junior years.

Frederick; a man who loves to work with his hands, and always seeks to keep himself busy; then touched on his main interests in relation to the various vocational training programs he was exposed to while a student at TSD.

In vocational school, I learned drafting, auto mechanics, woodworking, and upholstery. Of those, my favorite was auto mechanics. That was my favorite. When I finally bought my own car, I knew what to do. I knew how to fix my own car.

This passage is telling as many Deaf individuals, including Frederick, tend to enjoy learning experiences they feel are relevant to "real world" needs and experiences. Given that Frederick had a passion for "hands on" work, it was no surprise to see his favorite learning experiences were in relation to the many vocational training programs he was exposed to while a student at TSD. One vocational skill learned during these formative years, led Frederick to choose a future employment goal to become a welder.

When asked about his future employment goals while attending TSD, Frederick explained;

When I was in school, my goal was to have a job. I never wanted to go to college. It was not my "thing." If I went to college, it would limit me to become either a Teacher or a Counselor. I wanted a blue-collar job, not a white-collar job. So I chose to be trained in Welding. It was my favorite thing to do. I liked to get dirty, and enjoyed doing dirty work.

Frederick points here to the limitations seen in postsecondary institutions of higher learning for Deaf individuals during this time. Most colleges and universities had little or no support structures in place for Deaf students. The only options Frederick saw at the time were to either become a Teacher or a Counselor. These limited options were confirmed by the other informants in this study. This also suggests Frederick was well aware of his interests, the job market conditions, and career options prior to leaving TSD. He continued to describe his experiences at TSD and how he came to develop certain interests;

Really, at school, when I was growing up, I really did not know what my future would be like. Then, when I took Vocational training courses, I studied several things and found I liked auto mechanic work the best. I also learned welding. During the summer times, when school was closed, I had part time work in welding.

Frederick, as stated, has one of the strongest work ethics I have ever seen, and I've always been curious as to how he developed such a strong will to work as he typically would have at least two jobs at any given time. He also consistently kept himself busy with odd jobs on the side. As a child, I remember wondering if he ever slept. He described the influences that led him to develop such a strong will to work and always stay busy.

Oh, yes, during the summer time, my parents left me out, because my parents were Hearing, and they liked talking with their friends and liked to play cards with their friends. I just sat around, with nothing to do because of my d/Deafness.

My brother was also Hearing and he could socialize with them. I couldn't. So I decided to start working outside, first mowing the lawn, then

knocking on friends and neighbors doors to earn money. I mowed lawns, and washed cars for money too.

Frederick started working early, and was always seeking new ways to earn money. He later explained he would do anything to make a dollar, including polishing shoes, or working on neighbors' cars, using skills he had learned at TSD to plan and save for his future.

My parents would ask me "what are you doing with all the money you earn?" I told them I was saving my money for my future and to buy a car for when I finished school and got a job.

After I finished school, I bought a car and got a job. That is why I have a habit of working all the time. All I did was work, work, work, work. My parents often left me out because I was d/Deaf, and my parents never learned sign language.

I did ask them to learn sign language. They said; "no, you can talk." I asked them; "what if I do not understand you, like when you use big words?" We had to write. My parents later realized, and told me, that they should have learned sign language when I was a little boy. My brother, while we were growing up; I taught him sign language. I often depended on my brother to tell me what our parents said. That's how we communicated in our family.

The mode of communication struggle touched on here is part and parcel to the mixed d/Deaf and h/Hearing experience. Inherent to the Deaf experience is the ever-present reality of communication barriers, even within one's own family of origin. As Frederick points out, simple conversations without the use of signs are possible, but when the complexity of conversational content increases, the probability of miscommunication increases as well; hence the need for Frederick to utilize his brother as the family interpreter, or communicate in writing. The complexities of effective communication touched on here, also increase when the Deaf individual is unfamiliar with the Hearing person, or the content being discussed.

As a young child, Frederick, was also a residential student at TSD, attending school for nine months, and returning home for three months of summer. He further explains his early childhood experiences at home, growing up in South Texas.

I was born in McAllen, in South Texas. There were no Deaf people there. I grew up never associating with Deaf people in McAllen. I had some friends through my brother. We played baseball and different games. I kept myself busy with work. My parents taught me how to work, to be responsible, to clean house, etc... I was bored and felt like a dumb man. My brother was lazy, and didn't do anything. I did all the work for him.

That is why I have a habit to keep busy and keep clean. My parents taught me to cook, wash clothes, clean and etc... That is how I learned to be responsible. I thank my parents for teaching me those qualities.

Frederick had always enjoyed working with his hands, and keeping busy. He expressed that he had a primary employment goal of becoming a pipe welder for an oil company. Upon leaving TSD, he pursued this goal further by entering a vocational welding program at Lee College, in Texas.

Vocational experiences. Frederick, as was seen with all other informants in this study, also developed strong interests based on the education and vocational training he received at TSD. His two strongest interests were in auto mechanics and welding. He expressed loving to work *with his hands* and *getting dirty*. His primary vocational goal, based on these developed interests, was to become a pipe welder for an oil company. He described his post TSD graduation experiences.

When I finished school and graduated, I got out in the world, what did I want? Oh, first after school, I found a job as a draftsman. That required me to go to college. But I didn't want to do that. I wanted a blue-collar job, and I wanted to

be able to work outside. I quit that job and transferred to another college to be trained for welding work. I liked working outdoors.

When school was over, I studied Welding at Lee College in Baytown. When I got my certification by passing the certification exams, I made the best scores in the tests I had to take to pass. My goal was to work with oil field pipes, but I had a problem. Insurance companies would not accept coverage for me because I was Deaf. They said if something happened to me, I may sue them. That was the reason they did not want to cover me. The only job I could get was in a small shop on the floor, and not outside. It was frustrating.

Then I heard about the Houston Post Office opening jobs for the Deaf. I decided to apply for that job because the post office offered good benefits, a good job, and a good retirement plan. I thought it would be better than welding because of the dangers it may pose for my eyes or my body. I decided to try the post office and I stayed with it ever since.

When asked about how he learned of the opportunities for Deaf workers with the USPS, he explained;

I learned about the post office through friends. I did get the job at post office but one thing I did not like is I had to study, and memorized names of the streets.

I had to study those cards, because if I failed, I couldn't keep the job. I had to keep passing tests to keep my job. When I passed those tests, it also helped me to know all the streets in the Houston area. I learned my way around Houston by working at the post office and because of those tests.

When asked if the opportunity to work with other Deaf individuals influenced his decision to enter postal employment, he replied;

I liked working alone and not being involved with the Deaf at work because working with other Deaf people made us talk during work hours. This caused us to not be efficient at our jobs. While working, I preferred to be alone, but working with Deaf people is great for during lunch and break times. I enjoyed talking with other Deaf people. I just prefer to work hard. I just really like to work.

Frederick was then asked how this job opportunity became a career, and what influenced his decision to remain in the postal workforce. He explained;

When I started working at the post office, I started liking the job there and just stayed there. Now it has been almost forty years. One problem I experienced is in regards to the communication problems I had with my supervisors. Sometimes, I really needed an interpreter. It is really tough to be writing all the time in order to communicate. When we finally had interpreters, it really solved many issues.

When there are many Deaf employees in the post office, we must have an interpreter. For example; we have meetings about safety and about being on time, advice, and many other things...

I then asked Frederick how postal employment had changed over the course of his career.

Work at the post office has changed a lot during the time I've been there. Today it is technology that handles the mail. Years ago it was Letter Sorting Machines. Now we have machines that have 'eyes' to do the work we used to do. Yes, there were many changes over the last forty years. It's not like it was before. We have better machines to work on mail delivery.

He was then asked what he felt was the greatest contributing factor in his career success.

He explained;

I do not feel like I've had any success for forty years. As for retirement, I really can't predict the future. I don't know.

Based on prior knowledge, I knew his wife also worked for the USPS, but was unsure if she was still employed there. So I asked if she still worked at the post office.

My first wife worked at the post office. My second wife also worked at the post office. The third time, I did not want to get married to another woman who worked at the post office. That's when my present wife asked me to marry her. I was shocked.

Eventually, I did marry her. We are still happily married. She is much better than my first and second wives. We have been married for 23 years.

Three of the informants married Deaf women who also worked with the post office. I had never thought of how strong the work, community and church connections were until Frederick pointed out two separate marriages to women who also worked in the post office. Interestingly, of his two wives who also worked in the post office, his first was Deaf, but his second was Hearing. This was unique to this informant, but it points to the bonds people form from common employment experiences. Neither marriage lasted, as Freddie was married a third time, to a Deaf woman who did not work in the USPS. Given his love for work, and the understanding that most of his waking hours were spent working, it makes sense that he might also find love in the workplace. However, his third, and current wife, has never worked for the post office.

Even though Frederick expressed that he didn't like to work with other Deaf individuals, as he found it to be a distraction, his marriage to two Deaf women who worked for the post office, speaks to the importance of these connections in regards to effective socialization with Deaf peers. As stated, Deaf individuals often live and work in situations that foster feelings of social isolation. Historically, the experiences Deaf individuals share with other Deaf persons are the bonds that "tie them" as a collective culture. Given this understanding; collective employment opportunities for Deaf workers, should also, invariably lead to the development of Strong Deaf Communities (SDCs) in geographic locations where Deaf employment opportunities are plentiful.

I then, joked about his intense personal work habits and asked how many jobs he presently holds.

One. Before it was two. But now it is just one. I did work at Wal-Mart part-time and at the post office full-time concurrently, for almost 18 years. Then I stopped and now have just one job with the post office. I am addicted to working.

I pressed further with regard to his job with Wal-Mart, as I had heard they might currently be targeting Deaf workers for employment opportunities. So I asked about whether or not they had hired many Deaf workers.

I have experience working with Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart asked me when I applied for the job, "how can we communicate?" I said "by writing."

Then I got the job. I had no real problems because I was able to speak a little, lip-read and write. But other Deaf Wal-Mart employees couldn't write, speak, or lip-read. They had to get interpreters. It makes it tough.

When Frederick discusses how some other d/Deaf workers couldn't write, he reflects the issues touched on earlier in that his strong work ethic led Wal-Mart to seek out other d/Deaf workers, but as was discussed earlier, Wal-Mart seems to have made the common mistake of assuming "all d/Deaf are created equal." With the USPS, this meant waiving the entry exams for the second, much larger cohort of d/Deaf workers, while in this example, it would seem Wal-Mart executives overlooked the fact that some of those d/Deaf workers hired could not even read. This understanding that Deaf workers know all too well, seemingly led Frederick to decline efforts to bring more d/Deaf workers into the Wal-Mart ranks.

The manager asked me "do you know of any other Deaf workers who would be interested in a job?" I told them I didn't want to be involved. I told them I backed off because "I can't tell you if they are good or bad." They were thinking Deaf people were all the same. Deaf people are not all the same and they wanted to hire more because I am a good worker. While, they may have liked my work and wanted to hire more Deaf people, I had to tell them that "not all Deaf people are the same. Not all are like me." So, yes, Wal-Mart does hire some Deaf people but not many.

Again, the sentiments toward Deaf workers seen here, may have in part, been fostered through the experiences Frederick had while working with the USPS. All four informants expressed that not all Deaf people are the same when it comes to their work ethics. Frederick declined to take part in this possibly because he was uncomfortable with the Hearing-World's tendency to stereotype all d/Deaf workers as either "all good," or "all bad."

Community experiences. Frederick was then asked about his lived experiences in moving to Houston, and why he specifically chose to move to the Houston area.

I moved to Houston when I found a job, really.

How did I move to Houston? (asks self)...

I guess because there were many Deaf people in Houston, I followed them. I started school at Lee College in Baytown. I got my Welding certification. I also knew that Houston had many jobs available. It really was not because of many Deaf. I didn't really care about that. It really was because of employment. I needed a job. Once I found a job, I interacted with many Deaf people in Houston.

When I arrived in Houston, I did not know many Deaf people. When I found your Dad (Larry), he led me into the Houston Deaf Community. I learned from him. He knew I was lonely and that I did not associate much with the Deaf community. I really could do anything but as I learned more about the Deaf community; I became more involved. Working in the post office also gave me the opportunity to know more Deaf people in Houston.

Your Dad persuaded me to become involved in Westbury Church of Christ. I really thank him for that. I learned a lot about church and found more friends. I also learned how to live the "right way" because, before that I was a mischievous man.

Frederick's drive to seek gainful employment was his primary motivation in coming to Houston, and though he was a bit of a self-described "loner," once he was reunited with Larry (Informant 1), he began to associate with the Deaf community in Houston. He also points to the

postal workplace as yet another means for him in making further social connections with other Deaf postal workers. Frederick also touches on an important distinction in that Larry (Informant 1) recognized that he was lonely, possibly pointing back to Larry's expressed feelings of his Deaf of Deaf responsibilities in leading d/Deaf individuals who were isolated out in the community, into the newly established SDC fold.

When asked if he had participated in any other Deaf organizations in Houston, he replied;

I started bowling and was in a bowling league. It was with a Deaf group of men. I was involved with the Houston Deaf Club organization. That was all really...

Church also, but most of the time, I went to movies at the movie theatres. Many Deaf did not understand how I could enjoy them when I couldn't lip read. This was before closed captioning was available.

I just liked to watch the action in the movies. I usually knew what was going on. Later when I rented those movies with captioning, I saw that I did really understand them without the captioning. I grew up addicted to movies.

But really, while I was growing up, my only enjoyment was while I was working but, once I started associating with Deaf people... Honestly... I did not really like associating with Deaf people when I was young. I liked to be by myself more.

I enjoyed that solitary lifestyle but once I was married, I became involved with, and started sharing more with, other Deaf people. I enjoyed associating with the Deaf community, the Deaf Club, bowling, movies, parties, birthdays, and going out to eat with groups. That is my pleasure now.

While Frederick's comment about the bowling team he played on was similar to that of Informant 1, they did not play on the same team, or in the same league. Upon further inquiry, Informants 1 and 2 played on the same Deaf bowling team, but within a Hearing bowling league. Freddie chose to play on a Deaf team, but in a Deaf bowling league.

Freddie also touched on his tendencies in his youth in seeking time alone. While he stressed his preference to spend time alone, he also expressed that Informant 1 pulled him into the Deaf community, where he became more involved as he learned more about the Deaf community. Frederick seemingly did not realize how lonely he was until this experience, expressing gratitude to Informant 1 for creating a Deaf collective social environment where he became more involved with other Deaf community members, learned how to live the "right way," and where he now finds pleasure in associating with other members.

Frederick then touched on what he feels the Deaf community's needs are today.

My concern is when I get old, who will take care of the elderly and Deaf senior citizens? Like a nursing home? Or something like that? It would be nice to have a place for Deaf to associate with each other.

My son asked me "what will you do when you retire and get older? What are your plans?" My son wants to take care of me. He asked me "would you mind living in Seattle?" I told him "fine." He asked me if I would like to work with him on his boat catching fish and cooking them. The job is six months a year, during the summers and winters. I am considering working with him when I retire.

Interestingly, (but not surprisingly) Frederick's plans for retirement still include an employment focus. Even though Frederick continues to enjoy time alone, he (as was seen with all the informants in this study) is still concerned about growing old alone, without the ability to maintain contact and socialize with other Deaf community members.

I then asked Frederick if he had anything to add in summary, to which he replied;

I have nothing special to say about the Deaf community, itself, and your Dad (Informant 1), knows a lot more about the Deaf community, and the needs of Deaf people.

I am not like him.

My main focus has always been on working.

Informant 4: Felix. Felix's vocational experiences upon leaving TSD tie this study to the primary line of inquiry in that he chose to enter into the printing trade, which as was mentioned throughout this study, was a staple in Deaf employment circles for well over a century. However, as can be seen throughout history, as technology changes, Deaf employment opportunities tend to decrease. Felix was added in part due to his connection to Larry (Informant 1) in the manner in which they arrived to Houston, where several young Deaf men (who were also in the process of establishing themselves in work and community) offered each other a system of support by rooming together in a small efficiency apartment until they could afford to move out on their own. Felix was also added to this study because of his continued involvement with church organizations and the Houston Deaf Senior Citizens organization.

Of note; this interview was the only interview I did not conduct myself due to the informant's communication concerns and technological issues experienced (as he was traveling during the time the interviews were being conducted). As such, my father, who has served as the key informant in this study, conducted this particular interview. This decision was made for three reasons. The first reason, as mentioned, was due to communication, as we felt this would garner a higher level of quality data. The second reason was due to the technological issues as the informant was traveling at the time and had no access to the Skype program (nor was the informant familiar enough with Skype to be able to set up the other end). The third reason was I felt this would give my father a larger role in the study as a co-researcher; which I felt could only

add to our discussions as it would give him yet another perspective on this study and add to his understanding of the process.

Yet another reason: my parents have multiple means of video phone (VP) technology (as I only have a computer based program which does not allow for connections to other forms of VP technology) and my father happened to have a system that would allow for a connection between their house and the available technology in the location of the informant at that particular time.

Early learning experiences. Felix was born deaf, into a Hearing family where only he and his sister were deaf. There were no other deaf family members in his immediate family. Felix was also a residential student who entered TSD at six years of age. As was seen with regard to the other residential students at TSD, he attended and lived in the dorms on campus for nine months during the school year, and returned home for three months of summer.

He explains his entry into TSD as a child.

I entered TSD at 6 years old. My aunt encouraged my parents to send me to TSD. My parents had never even heard about TSD before. My parents decided to take my aunt's advice to take me to TSD. I grew up at TSD; my whole life.

When I started school, I was in the Oral Program for two years. Someone said that my voice sounded like a pig. That I had a voice that sounded like a pig making noise. I was so embarrassed!

I eventually stopped the Oral Program and I was transferred to the sign language program when I was about 8 years old. When I was 6 or 7, they thought I had some hearing. I tried to tell them I had no hearing at all.

The experience Felix touched on here is, as it has been since the rise of oralism, (based on the medical view of deafness which sees manual communication in ASL as a hindrance to

development) an ever-present reality for deaf youth (Lane, 1999). Especially with regard to deaf children from Hearing backgrounds, an oralist approach to education is often attempted first. This is often the only exposure to language the deaf child has, until it is made evident that the child will not be able to learn or effectively communicate via speech and lip-reading, then signs are introduced. The cost is time lost in the most critical years of language development. These experiences are often regarded as abusive by Deaf adults. Since the introduction of "inclusion," and "mainstreaming," which, for deaf children, translates to social isolation, these methods have once again been introduced in large scale in schools across the United States. Felix was ultimately able to exit the oral program and finally began to receive an education at TSD, through the use of ASL (also referred to as the manual method).

Felix also pointed to one common experience of Deaf persons, (as was seen with Informant 1) where one had a bad experience while attempting to utilize speech in a Deaf-Hearing interaction left a markedly negative impression of what they could expect from the Hearing-World in regards to their use of speech to communicate. These negative impressions are often seen as catalysts leading to their respective choices in choosing manual communication and the use of ASL.

Felix was then asked about the various activities he participated in while a student at TSD.

Sports, mostly. I was involved with Boy Scouts, basketball, and football briefly. I was also involved in other things that I enjoyed like; various games, and I learned a lot.

I finally was able to associate among the other Deaf students. My associations with Hearing friends and Deaf friends were so very different. With

the Hearing people I was more frustrated; especially with (regard to) communication. It was very frustrating.

With my Deaf friends, it was so much easier to communicate and make friends with them. Later when I was about 11 or 12; I started to associate more with the Hearing kids in the neighborhood. It was still frustrating with communication. It was a hard time.

At TSD, my number one favorite subject was History and then Math. I really liked both. I hated English and Reading. Those were always very difficult for me.

When asked if he felt the knowledge, experience and education he received from TSD had prepared him for his future employment, he explained;

Half yes. Half no. Some good, and some not so good. Because at TSD, when I was young, they did not have good signing teachers until I was about 12 years old.

Later, at TSD I finally had some good Deaf teachers. Because of that, I was able to actually understand what they were teaching. Most of the teachers in my earlier years really were not very good signers because they were Hearing. Some of them did not know signs at all.

When I was about 11 or 12, I finally had a Deaf teacher who signed. I liked that. I could finally understand my teachers! I did much better with Deaf teachers. Most of the Hearing teachers stunk at signing. A few times there were good Hearing teachers that could sign.

That was the biggest problem area with my education at TSD. It is so important for Hearing teachers to sign well to help Deaf students learn better and faster. Having Deaf teachers who signed, helped me to learn fast.

This exchange is telling in that the Hearing teachers Felix had at entry into TSD, were oriented to an oralist approach to Deaf Education. This approach does not allow for the use of signs, which meant Felix felt that his two years in that environment was, in his view, time wasted. Felix not only had difficulty with Hearing teachers that couldn't (or wouldn't) sign, but

also those who did sign. He expressed he didn't begin to really understand the content until he was exposed to "*good Deaf teachers.*"

This passage points to a critical distinction that should be made here as it is the source of many misunderstandings in Deaf education. Being either "hearing" or "deaf" does not a good teacher make. However, being a good signer, or ASL user, makes all the difference. Native signers (those who are born into Deaf families where their first language is ASL, whether they're born with the ability to hear or not), tend to possess a greater variability in their signing abilities than those who learn ASL later in life. Native signers who become Deaf Educators, are keenly aware of the "communication connection" shared, and are naturally able to vary their language level and signs to meet the needs of each individual student. This ability is at the heart of the meaning when Felix pointed to "*good Deaf teachers*" making such a difference in his education, then shortly after; he expressed "*a few times there were good Hearing teachers that could sign.*"

When asked about what his future goal for employment was during his childhood spent as a student at TSD, he responded;

Well, really, what did I want to become? ...hmmm.. A printer. I did want it very seriously at one time. I was fascinated with the whole business of printing. I did enjoy some wood working as well. I felt that the vocational training was limited at TSD.

Around the time when I became 16 or 17, my aunt and uncle in Colorado Springs, Colorado, advised me not to pursue that particular field. They said that the future of the printing field was not good because of the rapidly changing technology. They did not feel it was a good profession for Deaf people.

Felix ignored the advice he received from family and upon graduation from TSD, he chose to continue his pursuits toward becoming a printer. Felix was then asked if the training he received while attending TSD in the printing trade helped prepare him for future employment.

Yes, it was good training but there were very limited resources and old-fashioned equipment at TSD. When I went for training in Hot Springs, Arkansas, they had updated technology and newer methods of printing. When I was trained there it was easy for me to learn because I already had the basic training in printing at TSD.

That was really an important time for me.

Prior to the postal migration under study, the preferred trade of choice for Deaf workers was in the printing trade. This was seen in Buchanan's (1999) work and was touched on in Chapter 2; the Literature Review of this study. To understand how central the printing trade was to the American Deaf Community, one must only study Deaf History, as the little historical documentation that exists in regards to Deaf Americans has been recorded and preserved through the trade of printing, in the Little Papers touched on in Chapter 2 (Van Cleve & Crouch, 1989). As Felix suggests, this preferred trade was greatly affected by the updates in printing technology, narrowing the pool of opportunities seen in this particular trade for all workers, including the Deaf American working class. Advancements in technology also greatly affected the availability of opportunities for Deaf workers in the USPS.

Vocational experiences. Upon graduation from TSD, Felix chose to pursue further training in the printing trade in Hot Springs, Arkansas by entering a vocational training based program in his area of interest. The program, made available through the Hot Springs Rehabilitation Center, was one of very few at the time that offered support services for the Deaf.

When I entered that school, they told me it would take two years but I was able to finish in one. I had learned enough of the printing basics, at TSD, that I did not need another year of training in Hot Springs.

When asked if he had an interpreter for his training, he replied;

Some. There was a Hearing person who signed fairly well. Another one who signed a little better. However, it was so easy for me to learn and I was a fast learner. I did learn enough in one year that I didn't have to go another year at that school.

Upon completion of his training in Hot Springs, Felix, then began to search for his first job as a printer.

I was offered a job in Illinois. I thought I would like it, but when I went there to visit, I realized that the area where the job was located was a very dangerous area. That was where a lot of crime happened. They offered me a job paying me \$10.00 an hour. That was a good salary at the time. My job would have been to print Post, Life, and sports magazines with color details. But, because of the high crime rate in that area, I decided not to take the job. I decided instead, to move to Dallas and start working there.

Felix relocated to begin his new job as a printer, but ran into one pressing issue early on in this endeavor.

Yes, printing was a goal I had but there was a problem with health insurance because I was Deaf. I was doing fine working as a printer. Really, I had no problems with the job itself.

The one problem I did have was not being able to have health insurance coverage. Health insurance companies did not want to cover Deaf printers. They were concerned that the Deaf would sue them if injured on the job. Health insurance also did not trust Deaf printers.

Before that time we did not hear about discrimination. Now that we know about discrimination, it has become better for the Deaf. Life is much different now for us now.

I felt like I had wasted my time and training at TSD, at other trade schools, and in print training. I was disappointed until I heard that the post office had job openings for Deaf people.

When asked how he learned about the USPS job opportunities for Deaf workers, he then described the process that led to his change in vocation and his decision to enter into the postal workforce.

I learned about the opportunity through Ralph White. He told me that in Houston, the Post Office was opening jobs for the Deaf but I had to take an exam. I didn't care. I had taken a civil service test in Corpus Christi for printing and I already passed it there. I then went and took the test in Houston. I passed that one too. Both postal locations offered me jobs. Corpus Christi offered me 2 cents more in salary than Houston. I decided that the Corpus Christi Deaf Community was not as good as the Houston Deaf Community. I entered work at the Houston Post Office because the benefits were good. That was very important for me. It was worth the effort getting into the Houston Post Office.

He was then asked who Ralph White was, for clarification. He explained;

He was a teacher at TSD but then, at the time, he was a Vocation Rehabilitation Counselor in Austin. He was the one who told me about the Houston Post Office job opportunities for the Deaf. Ralph White was also good friends with Walton the VR Counselor for the Deaf in Houston at that time. He made the call for me to Walton to get me signed up for the test in Houston. It was worth it for me to go there and take the test.

Felix was asked whether or not the opportunity to work with other Deaf people helped influence his decision to enter postal employment.

No, not really. I was really looking for a job myself. It was important to me to find a job with benefits and etc. I did not follow other Deaf. It was the benefits that were most important for me.

While the opportunity to work with other Deaf individuals may not have been a prime determinate, in making his decision to enter postal employment, when faced with a choice between Corpus Christi and Houston, Felix chose Houston, based on the knowledge about the difference between the local Deaf Communities in both areas. Seeing the Houston Deaf Community as the better option, Felix accepted the position in Houston, and entered the postal workforce.

Okay, when I entered work at the post office, I started on machines called ZMTs. That machine handled the bar codes. I admit; I almost did fail on the exam for that job. I struggled and finally passed it. At the post office, I was able to do a variety of jobs and not be stuck in one place. I did not really want to be stuck on the machines all the time. Having the variation of jobs and not staying in one place all the time, was important to me.

While Felix states here that he started on ZMT machines, he actually started on the LSMs, as the ZMTs didn't come until roughly a decade later. Felix also expressed that he was appreciative of the variation in work assignments, as he didn't want to be stuck on the machines all the time. These comments point to the possibility that the variation may have also contributed to his ability to achieve tenure, as he felt that if he was forced to work only on the machines, the probability of "burnout" may very well have increased exponentially.

He continued explaining his employment experiences and the influences that led to his decision to enter postal employment;

In my adult life, after high school, I started with printing which was easy work for me. My life with printing was okay. Later, I learned about the post office job offers and decided it would be fun to try it. While I was waiting to hear if I passed, I was still working as a printer. I was no longer interested in the printing trade and decided to work at the post office. It was a new thing for me. In printing, the pay was fair. The post office paid much more hourly. That was why I decided to work at the post office. Working at the post office has helped me in

my lifetime. I was employed with the post office for 40 years, from 1969 until my retirement in 2010.

When asked if postal employment had changed for Deaf postal workers, over the many years he was employed there, he replied;

Yes, it has changed in my lifetime (especially) with technology. Different machines came and went. The number of Deaf workers at the post office declined.

Today it is very different with a smaller group of Deaf workers than back then, when there were so many Deaf workers. Technology has changed so much, because now postal machines require less people to work on the machines.

Community experiences. Felix, as was seen with the other informants, was frustrated with the realities of his chosen profession, forcing him to seek out other options. When asked why Felix chose to move to Houston, he replied;

I moved to Houston because of the job. The job opportunity with the post office was the real reason I moved to Houston.

After being asked what life was like when he first arrived, Felix explained;

When I first moved to Houston, I had a roommate; Larry (Informant 1). We were sharing an apartment for a while. Larry got married and I moved out. Then, I had another roommate who I moved in with, who was also a Deaf postal worker. A few years later I fell in love with my wife. She was so skinny and she looked like Cher. I fell completely in love with her. We eventually got married. Our lives changed so much when we got married. It was interesting. Our marriage lasted well for many years and we are still married today.

Felix eventually married a Deaf postal employee who entered the postal workforce after the first cohort of twelve. Both remained postal employees for the duration of their careers.

He was then asked why he roomed with and married fellow Deaf postal workers.

Why? I don't know. The post office men that were my roommates were easy to communicate with. When I fell in love with my wife, she did not know any sign language. I had to teach her signs and in the process, I fell in love with her and married her. It has been great ever since. My wife also worked in the post office. I did not fall in love with her because of her postal salary. We enjoyed communicating with each other and we got along well. She is my best friend and my "number one."

Felix points to an important distinction here as he said several times during his interview the frustrations he experienced when trying to communicate with Hearing people who do not sign. He also expressed the ease with which he communicated with Deaf friends, in sharp contrast. With regard to his wife, who was also deaf, but unable to sign when they first met (she was educated orally, with no ASL exposure, but had very limited ability to communicate through speech and reading lips), the communication barrier was overcome by his taking the time to teach her to sign (and her taking the time to learn-in part from developed communication needs), leading to the development of strong bonds that persist today. This points to a strong bond based on similarities in experiences of being d/Deaf, by living and working in a Hearing-World. It also points to one of the characteristics d/Deaf individuals tend to appreciate most in others is the willingness to seek out accessible avenues of communication. Regardless of whether or not the person can sign (or sign well); respect is given to those who "find a way." It seems reasonable to suggest that those who have experienced communication barriers their whole lives tend to make linguistic connections whenever possible.

Felix was then asked about how the Deaf community in Houston had changed since he first arrived.

Okay... It was fine and the Deaf community was great with signs shared among the Deaf people but it was lonely outside the Deaf community.

At work, I had no one to talk to and was bored. So the Deaf in Houston got together at the Deaf Club to chat. I was working at that time too, and there were some Deaf people from the post office there as well. It was neat.

Felix here, points to the Deaf Club as yet another meeting place for the Deaf where Deaf postal workers gathered and socialized. This type of Deaf organization was in part, a bar. The differences seen between the Deaf Club, the various Deaf sporting events and the church based organization at Westbury, serve as examples in how wide the spectrum of organizations, inherent to Deaf communities, truly are. Felix also expressed he felt "*lonely outside the Deaf community,*" pointing to a shared collective need in establishing and sustaining these organizations to mediate the feelings of social isolation most Deaf individuals endure in living their daily lives.

Another good community service was church. I learned so much from going to church. I did also enjoy that. Before I started at church, I was clueless about life. The Catholic Church had brainwashed me. That experience was 'so-so.'

When my good friend (Informant 1) started teaching me, and I started to learn more from the church about the Bible that had proof; I rejected the Catholic Church and joined with this church and started my "new life." I was baptized and started this new life. Then, my whole life changed for the better. It truly was worth it to make that change.

Felix was then asked about how the community he helped to create had influenced his life and career over the years.

Okay, when I have problems with my wife, I have the church to help us. The lessons I have learned have helped me to change for the better. The lessons have also helped my wife as well. We have been attending church services all these years. The group at church is more like brothers and sisters. It made it worthwhile to attend the services and fellowships.

There are other people who live in bad ways. I learned to ignore those same problems we all have, and continue to improve myself. God's words are so important and they help us understand how to live. God's words give me stronger roots to stand and they are very important to me.

Felix explains here, the value of his continued membership in the church as a guiding force in his life, and in his marriage. The comment Felix makes here of the church group being "*more like brothers and sisters*" is profound in that these same sentiments were expressed by the informants' in relation to the Deaf collective bonds they formed with each other as students at TSD. This lends credence to the assertion that the church continues to be central to the development of SDCs and Deaf members, in that the church offers one of the only venues where Hearing views are seen as similar to Deaf collective behaviors. In part, this seems to be strongly related to the manner in which church congregations operate and how these Hearing, religious based collective behaviors seen within the church run parallel to the very nature of Deaf cultural norms.

The Deaf Club is a staple in cities with Deaf populations and often serves as the first point of contact for Deaf migrants upon arrival. The Deaf Club is one of the oldest forms of Deaf established organizations, and no discussion about Deaf socialization would be complete without mention. However, they are known for perpetuating divisions based on "*old grudges*" from early learning experiences. Further divisions can often be seen based on community member characteristics as well. This divisiveness in the Deaf Club could also point to yet another contributing factor in the development of church based Deaf organizations, where cohesiveness is seen as a central motivating factor in seeking to maintain a more positive alternative to the Deaf Club "scene."

Felix then described the difference between the Deaf Club and his experiences in attending church services.

The Deaf Club was 'so-so.' I can't explain it. There always seemed to be a repetition there, of the same old problems.

At church I never stop learning more and more about how to live better. I enjoy the discussions and the advice I receive from others at church.

At the Deaf Club it got boring. I am no longer interested in the Deaf Clubs.

At church, I enjoy the fellowship, and the help offered when someone is sick. When there is a problem with someone's health or marriage or anything, the church is very important in helping or supporting those people who have those problems. I truly learned so much. The church is still very important to me.

Felix was then asked about any current organizational affiliations he is associated with, and he explained;

I enjoy the 'Deaf Retired Men Breakfasts.' We get together to eat and chat. I enjoy that so much. Before, when I was working, it was so busy, with work and my responsibilities at home. Going to those breakfasts helps me to forget past problems and just enjoy. That is an awesome thing!

As Felix suggests, the church is a primary source of ongoing social support and a place for personal, spiritual growth. Felix also points to the gatherings of these retired Deaf men as a mediating factor for the social isolation and the problems of daily living. In this respect, these various organizations and gatherings of Deaf individuals serve as a system of informal support services, again pointing to the critical nature of peer support for Deaf individuals.

When asked if there was anything he thought could be improved for the Deaf community he lives in today, he answered;

Okay, with the Houston Deaf Senior Citizens, it is okay but it needs to improve and grow. I am Deaf and sometimes, I need some help. I want to enjoy that organization more.

At our church, we continue to meet and study with both Deaf and Hearing people. I do enjoy that. I also enjoy the ASL Socials for both Deaf and Hearing people who are learning sign language.

Some of those people who go to ASL Socials are students who take ASL classes at school. That is radical! I enjoy meeting so many different people. I do enjoy fellowship with other Deaf people, especially our church fellowships. We have fellowships with both Deaf and Hearing people. It is so important because Hearing people have a lot more knowledge than the Deaf. I learn so much from these fellowships.

Here Felix points to the importance of Deaf and Hearing interactions for personal and collective growth. These Deaf/Hearing interactions are often seen as opportunities for Deaf individuals to be exposed to new funds of knowledge outside the collective community. In part, through socialization with Hearing persons outside of the Deaf community, not only does the individual Deaf community member learn, but each new lesson learned, in turn, also advances the knowledge base of the collective Deaf community as a whole.

The ASL Socials Felix discusses here, were established by Larry (Informant 1) and a Hearing member of the church who was an ASL teacher at a private school here in Houston. ASL, as is seen with regard to other languages, is best learned through conversational usage. The ASL Socials were established in part, to offer Hearing students of ASL opportunities to interact with Deaf individuals in a safe environment (some Deaf organizations, including Deaf Clubs, often also serve alcoholic beverages, precluding the attendance of many young ASL students).

On the second Friday of every month, the ASL Socials meet at one local Chik Fil A. The owner of this establishment reserves space in the restaurant and the response has been so positive; there has been some internal corporate discussion of creating similar relationships in other locations across the country. In Houston, ASL courses are now offered in many of the local high schools and Deaf community members not only feel a responsibility to the members of the collective Deaf community but also in making themselves available to assist Hearing persons in learning about the Deaf-World.

As a child, I often saw these interactions with Hearing people as a complete waste of time. But over the years, I have seen many of these Hearing persons go on to become employed in various Deaf services and in turn, these efforts ultimately served to support the collective Deaf community.

In closing, Felix added;

I want to encourage Shane to help Hearing people understand Deaf people even more because he has a Deaf background. He knows and understands Deaf because he was born to Deaf parents. I do congratulate him on what he is doing. I would love for him to finish this dissertation, graduate, and go on to do great things.

Now that we have covered the informants' individual experiences, and the first part of the first research question, we will now discuss the informants' shared experiences. Again, we will cover the following section across the three broad, preset themes, while touching on emergent themes seen in the informants' interviews, within each of the three broad themes.

Shared Informant Experiences

In this section, we will explore the informants' shared experiences. This summary of the research findings, in regard to the informants' shared experiences will be split into three main sections, with one corresponding section for each of the three broad themes explored, following the same format used throughout this study. The three broad preset themes used throughout this study, again, consist of; early learning experiences, collective employment/vocational experiences, and experiences in the establishment/development of a new.

Shared early learning experiences. Phase I of the interview questions sought to understand the informants' early learning experiences by exploring their familial backgrounds, early educational experiences, what it was like for them to be raised in these environments, the experiences that best prepared the informants for the world of work, what subjects learned during these early years sparked interests for future employment, and what these future employment goals were; leading into Phase II of the interview process. The emergent themes to be covered in regards to the informants' shared early learning experiences consist of; family of origin, education received at TSD, summers at home, role models, origins of Deaf collective behaviors, and Deaf/Hearing relationships.

Family of origin: home and school. In seeking to understand the early learning experiences of d/Deaf persons, one of the most influential determinants is based on the individual's family of origin, and specifically, whether the family is Deaf, or Hearing, as this will invariably influence all decisions made, including where the d/Deaf child is educated. All four informants reported having other deaf family members, while only two came from Deaf of Deaf

(DofD) roots; including being born to two Deaf parents, and having multiple other Deaf family members. Both of these informants' (Informants 1 and 2) first language was ASL. The remaining informants (3 and 4) were born to Hearing parents but both also had other d/Deaf family members as well. Informants (3 and 4), while they were both born to Hearing parents, they did not acquire English as a first language from their families. As such, their first language learned was also ASL. This ASL exposure took place in the residential school setting at TSD, giving them solid models of true, native, ASL users.

As mentioned earlier in this study, when deaf students enter the Deaf residential school setting at an early age, they typically, and seamlessly convert to a Deaf centered worldview. The older one becomes, and the less exposure they have to ASL and/or Deaf Culture, the more difficult his or her conversionary process becomes. Deaf cultural values in the residential school setting are transmitted from peer to peer, instead of the traditional method of cultural transmission in the Deaf World seen in regards to children who are Deaf of Deaf (DofD) and as such, these core Deaf cultural values are transmitted from Deaf parents to their Deaf child. Informants 1 and 2 are both DofD, and as such, they served as cultural models for other deaf students who came from Hearing backgrounds. Given that both of these informants (3 and 4) entered TSD at a young age, they are also seen as full members of Deaf Culture.

All four informants were educated at Texas School for the Deaf (TSD), in Austin Texas. One of the informants (Informant 1) did not live in the dorms, as his family lived in South Austin and he commuted to TSD from entry as a young child, until high school graduation. This is certainly not the typical d/Deaf childhood experience, yet it does point to the tendency of Deaf persons to settle in, or around state residential schools for the Deaf.

Education at TSD. All four Deaf informants expressed primarily positive experiences with the education they received at TSD. Informant number 4, however, did express frustration with being placed in an oral program at TSD for his first two years there, until the school finally realized he would not be able to learn without the use of ASL. Unfortunately this was not until after two years of trying to explain (without the benefit of language) to everyone that he could not hear and he could not learn in an oral environment. He was then moved to a signing classroom, but with Hearing teachers who were not highly skilled in ASL. He expressed a great deal of relief and appreciation when he finally encountered “*good Deaf teachers*” at TSD pointing out; “*I could finally understand.*” He also explained; “*It is so important for Hearing teachers to sign well to help Deaf students learn better and faster. Having Deaf teachers, who signed, helped me to learn fast*” (once he was finally placed in a signing class).

The basic courses offered at TSD, were similar to those offered in public schools at the time, but TSD also offered a great deal of exposure to a myriad of vocational skill building programs and early learning experiences that were just as important, if not more so, for the four Deaf informants who attended. Some of the vocational training programs offered during this time consisted of; printing, “photo shop” training, baking (how to work in a bakery), dry cleaning, mechanics, welding, upholstery, drafting, woodworking (including exposure to various arts, crafts sports and leisure activities). If a Deaf student was planning on attending college, they were required to take a typing class.

TSD also had various clubs the students participated in such as the Cub/Boy Scouts, a Drama Club, and a Choir Club. All four of the informants reported taking part in, or being exposed to all of these programs and activities (except typing as this was only required if one

planned on attending college). As Informant 1 pointed out; “*TSD required all the boys and girls to learn a lot of things, not just the same thing over and over.*”

All four Deaf informants who attended TSD were also heavily involved in the various sports programs at TSD, offering them ample opportunities to assume leadership roles and learn how to work with others toward common goals. To fund these sport based athletic programs, the Deaf players were required to raise the funds to support them through the sale of concessions. TSD offered track, baseball, basketball, and football. While the TSD teams consisted of all d/Deaf players, they played against both other Deaf residential schools and smaller Hearing schools as well. At TSD, there was also a Boys Athletic Association (referred to by the informants as BAA), which was designed for weekend activities and competitions in various games such as chess, checkers, dominoes, and cards. These competitions were part of what the informants called “*Weekend Socials.*” The Weekend Socials also consisted of “*Friday Night Movie Nights*” in the auditorium and various sporting events made accessible to Deaf students.

The Friday night movie nights were rare occasions for Deaf students to be able to watch movies with captions (as during this time, movies were not typically captioned and as such were, in large part, inaccessible to them). After the movies, the students would hold discussions and debate the meanings behind the storylines. The inaccessibility of movies during this time was also seen in relation to sporting events, most of which were not televised, but were covered on the radio. When there were sporting events of interest (often this meant games played by the University of Texas that took place on either a Friday or Saturday) the house parents (who were also UT students) would reenact the games for Deaf students, wearing the two teams' jerseys

using the chalkboard to visually represent the playing field, while acting out the plays as they heard them on the radio

Many TSD students, including the informants were, as they still are; huge UT fans. The University of Texas, located within walking distance of TSD, in the past, set aside a bloc of tickets for TSD students to be able to attend home games. Many of the house parents at TSD were also UT students. Again, the discussions held after the games were seen as central to the activity. These discussions offered greater access for Deaf students, as the social aspect of every activity was seen by the informants as central to understanding. The Socratic Method here took place manually in ASL.

The Boy Scouts was yet another activity all four Deaf informants reported to have participated in. The Scoutmasters were all Deaf teachers who also worked at TSD. This Cub/Boy Scout program was initiated by a group of Hearing mothers of Deaf children who attended TSD. While all four of the informants expressed learning a great deal from being exposed to this experience; Informant 1 was chosen as the leader of his troop. This added to his feelings of responsibility in playing a leadership role in the Deaf community. Informant 1 also had an uncle and an aunt who both taught at TSD. His uncle was a very popular coach, and Informant 1 expressed that this too, added to his feelings of responsibility to assume various leadership roles within the Deaf community.

Informant 1 also explained how the Deaf Scoutmasters would tell western stories in ASL around the campfire, and expressed how much all the Deaf students enjoyed those stories (ASL storytelling is highly valued in the Deaf community). The sports and various programs discussed

here were not just for the students' enjoyment, as in large part, participation was a requirement. As such, all four Deaf informants expressed exposure to most if not all of the programs TSD offered. However, were the activities not required, the informants still would participated, as Informant 2 explained; these various activities were seen as both the only way for the students to get out of school (which he likened to a prison for those who never left campus), and as a means by which to broaden their scope of early learning experiences through exposure to learning experiences in the world outside of TSD.

Summers at home. TSD, being a residential school, meant that Informants 2-4 were residential students who lived on campus in the dorms, attending TSD for nine months (for the duration of the school year) and returned home for three months of summer. All three Informants (2-4) expressed a great deal of isolation during time spent at home as they lived, primarily, in Hearing environments. Two of these informants felt isolation during the summers at home because their families and all the neighborhood children were Hearing. Informant 2, who came from a Deaf family, with older Deaf siblings who left for TSD earlier, discussed a great deal of isolation during the school year, prior to his entering TSD. Informant 2 also stressed the importance of Deaf peer relationships, as he felt that, while his parents were both Deaf, they were older, and he harbored feelings of isolation without having Deaf children to play with in his neighborhood.

During the times in which he was the only Deaf child in the home, while his Deaf siblings were all at school for nine months, he explained how he was forced to learn how to get along, communicate and play with the Hearing kids in the neighborhood; stressing the need for Deaf-Hearing peer relationships as well. He also expressed that when he and his Deaf siblings

were all home for the summer, he often served as the "family interpreter," mediating between his Deaf siblings and the Hearing children in the neighborhood. He pointed to this experience as critical in his development as he felt this experience later led him to work for the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), mediating between Deaf workers and Hearing USPS Administrators.

Informant 3, born to two Hearing parents, with one Hearing brother that served as the family interpreter, also felt the "sting" of isolation as there were no other Deaf children or Deaf adults in his home town. However, the social isolation he felt as a child, led him to develop a very strong work ethic as he started working around the house and yard to mediate his feelings of isolation. His yard work at home led him to his first job, where he started knocking on neighbors' doors to drum up business, working odd jobs around the neighborhood to save money for his first car after graduating high school. He explained he was able to save enough money to purchase his first car, and was excited because he learned at TSD, through exposure to auto mechanics, how to maintain it.

Informant 1 was the only informant who did not express any feelings of isolation in his childhood as his family was primarily Deaf; he lived in a neighborhood with many other Deaf children and commuted to TSD as a student until graduation.

Role models. All four informants were exposed to parents who were all seen as strong working role models. All four informants reported having parents with strong work ethics. In addition to their parents as strong working role models, they were also exposed to strong Deaf professional role models who worked at TSD in various fields.

TSD, being the heart of the Texas Deaf Community (as is seen in most states in relation to their coveted residential schools) also had, and continues to have a strong working relationship with their alums. This relationship between TSD and the Texas Deaf Community offered the four Deaf Informants who attended an infinite number of opportunities to interact with Deaf adults; a critical aspect of Deaf development. These relationships forged between Deaf adults and Deaf children, added to the informants' feelings of responsibility to assume these critical roles as adults, passing the life lessons learned on to the next Deaf generation.

Origins of Deaf collective behaviors. Yet another crucial aspect in the TSD experience for Deaf youth is seen in the strong collective bonds that for those who are DofD, are transmitted from Deaf parents to Deaf child, but for deaf children from Hearing backgrounds, these same bonds form through developed relationships of these deaf children to both their DofD peers, and the various Deaf adults they are exposed to in their youth. The bonds formed between peers is also seen as critical to DofD children as Informant 2 touched on when he explained;

*In a way, while growing up, I felt fine mingling with other Deaf students because we all had the same Deafness. If I had stayed home, I may have felt awkward because my mother and father were **adults** and I was just a Deaf **kid**. At school, I had peers and we grew up together. We knew each other like brothers and sisters.*

In seeking to understand the collective aspect of Deaf Culture from a Deaf perspective, and how these sentiments form, Informant 2 explained it quite well;

When I was growing up, I was the only child at home. All my brothers and sisters were gone to school. I was lonely but I met other kids in the neighborhood. I was able to communicate with Hearing people. When my brothers and sister came home they would ask me to talk to our neighborhood friends and ask for say; a baseball bat or ball. I was fine with that and walked over to them. I got along

well with Hearing people. Then when I went to TSD, teachers said we must help one another. You are all the same; Deaf. I had the influence of school and my experience of my neighborhood friends. I felt I could work with both Deaf and Hearing people.

I have to; I have no choice but to get along with Hearing people. Many times I have obstacles. But from what I learned at TSD about helping one another; I also helped Hearing people. But the Hearing people would just say 'thank you' and not help me. I was puzzled that I helped them and they did not help me.

As this passage suggests, while the collective bonds tend to form in the residential setting in a myriad of ways, the collective lessons learned in the Deaf-World, are reinforced through interaction with Hearing people in the Hearing-World as well and the experienced refusal of these Hearing persons to reciprocate assistance in the same manner in which it was given.

In other words: the lived experiences of Deaf individuals in living and working within various Hearing-World environments, only serve to reinforce the collective bonds developed from within the Deaf-World. This was touched on in Chapter 2, in the discussion of how Strong Deaf Communities form (Groce, 1985). While Groce pointed to experienced discrimination as a possible precursor to the establishment of insular SDCs, this passage suggests, it might have more to do with the cultural conflict between a collective Deaf culture and the individualistic nature of the general, Hearing American culture.

The interdependency seen in Deaf communities is built through a system of constant exchanges between Deaf individuals from within the community, where the strengths and weaknesses of each individual Deaf person are well known to the collective and “who one goes to for what,” is based on lifetimes of shared experiences. While this was certainly a positive experience for all four Deaf informants, it also has a negative side as well. Three of the four

informants touched on this in one way or another. Informant 1 talked about being “stabbed in the back” and how this was widely accepted as the norm for Deaf leaders. Informant 2 expressed Deaf persons would often “*hold grudges*” and would not join specific organizations if certain Deaf people were involved. He explained the grudges many people hold from their early educational experiences that people would carry over into adulthood. Informant 4 also touched on the same problems that kept repeating at the Deaf Club between Deaf community members.

Deaf and Hearing relationships. To clear up a common misconception, I should add here, that all four Deaf informants stressed the importance of Hearing allies and fellowship in mixed company. While many see the Deaf-World experience as an “us vs. them” mentality; this is not always the case for Deaf people. All four informants stressed the importance of d/Deaf and h/Hearing interaction as critical to learning and personal growth for Deaf individuals. While the informants all mentioned experiencing difficulties in Deaf-Hearing relationships during these formative years, the opportunities they all shared while fellow students at TSD, helped to foster feelings of confidence, leadership abilities, and increased self-efficacy which later assisted them in effectively dealing with Hearing populations in their adult lives.

Shared vocational experiences. In this section, we will explore the informants' experiences with the world of work, beginning with the informants' expression of a primary vocational goal based on interests developed at TSD, performance feedback received from employment experiences, contributing factors in the modification of primary vocational goals, the national efforts that led to the postal opportunities for Deaf workers, and the Houston Deaf USPS experience.

In addition to the many vocational skills and subjects learned in their youth, the informants were also able to gain work experience primarily during the summer months when school was not in session. Informant 1 worked for two summers in a Bakery, and two additional summers as a draftsman. Informant 2 worked during the summer months alongside his brothers, for their father, as a lathe operator. Informant 3 worked throughout the summer months drumming up business around his neighborhood mowing lawns, washing cars, polishing shoes, and by utilizing skills learned in auto mechanics at TSD, he was also able to fix his neighbors' cars for extra cash as well. Informant 4 worked on a farm, picking cotton for his first summer job. He also worked as a stocker for a local grocery store, and for the city, in maintenance.

Developed interests: expression of a primary vocational goal. All four Deaf Informants in this study developed clear interests which led to primary vocational goals, which they pursued after graduation. All four Deaf informants (1-4) developed strong interests based on courses and/or vocational programs they were exposed to while attending TSD. Informant 1 had a primary vocational goal of becoming an architectural draftsman, Informant 2 wanted to be an oncologist, Informant 3 wanted to be a pipe welder for an oil company, and Informant 4 wanted to enter the printing trade.

Performance feedback and truncated opportunity structures. All informants pointed to limitations in options (or truncated opportunity structures) after high school. Informant 1 had a summer job with the Texas Water Quality Board (TWQB) as an architectural draftsman, which he maintained for several summers, while also attending Gallaudet University (which at the time was called Gallaudet *College*) where he said he had limited choices for majors (his field of interest was not available at Gallaudet), and the programs he could find offered no support

services for Deaf students. He was disappointed he was unable to obtain full time employment with TWQB, but was encouraged by his employers to remain, and was told a full time position might be available in a year or two. He was on break from college and working his summer job with TWQB when he learned about the opportunity with the USPS.

Informant 2 accepted a position out of high school with Texas Instruments on the assembly line, and planned on working for a while before returning to college. He found himself borrowing money from family and friends who worked for the post office to make ends meet. He also expressed feelings of complete social isolation at his job with T.I., which he pointed out as yet another influence that led him to choose to enter postal employment as he already knew many of the Deaf postal workers in the Houston area.

Informant 3 entered into a welding program at Lee College in Texas, where he excelled until learning no one in the oil industry wanted to hire him; again, because of his Deafness and for fear of potential future litigation. He expressed he was only able to find work on a shop floor, which he was disappointed with as he desired to work outdoors. He learned from friends about the USPS opportunity, felt the work would give him the hands on work he sought, and decided to take the position.

Informant 4, immediately following his graduation from TSD, entered into a junior college for further study, but quit after three weeks because there were no interpreters available. Informant 4 then decided to become a printer, seeking to further his training in Hot Springs, Arkansas but once he started working in his desired trade, he too found that the insurance company would not cover him because he was Deaf. Again this was due to the fear of potential

future litigation. He learned of the postal opportunity from Ralph White, a former teacher of his who had become a DVRC in the Austin area.

Contributing factors in the modification of primary vocational goals. All four informants pointed to the availability of benefits as a main determinate in seeking to pursue employment with the USPS. All four informants expressed being well aware of the quality of the job offer and saw it as both a secure and stable position. Once on the job, these sentiments were reinforced by the needs of the informants in starting families of their own. All four informants expressed some interest in working with other Deaf workers, to varying degrees though this was not the key deciding factor for any of them. All four informants were well aware of the job market conditions for Deaf workers, and recognized the value the opportunity to work with the USPS held for them. All four informants mentioned the stability, the quality and the most influential aspect for all four informants in choosing to pursue this opportunity was the availability of benefits. Two of the informants (3-4) pointed to the disappointment they experienced in regards to their first job and the refusal of insurance companies to cover Deaf workers for fear of future litigation.

While most insurance companies and businesses did not want to insure Deaf workers for fear of future lawsuits, should they be injured, the USPS may have had a unique situation develop in which it was seen to be a "safer bet" in hiring Deaf over Hearing workers. At the time this employment migration occurred, the USPS had just recently developed and installed the LSM (Letter Sorting Machine) at some of their larger postal locations; as was seen in Houston. The Hearing postal workers tended to dislike this particular assignment due to the excessive noise. This one factor seems to have been a major influence in the decision to hire Deaf workers

as they were already Deaf, and the USPS knew they wouldn't be sued by Deaf workers for losing their hearing in the future.

Support for this assertion can be seen in the hiring of Deaf workers specifically for the LSM, the modified LSM exam (which was modified for Deaf workers) and by the common assertion from Deaf postal workers who say this was the reason the USPS started hiring Deaf workers. All Deaf workers included in this study, were initially hired to work on the LSM machines, but reported they also moved around quite a bit, working at different stations giving them variety that they appreciated (as none of them wanted to stay in one place, working one position for the duration of their careers). Upon entry, they had to be trained and pass a series of exams to begin work with LSMs.

One of the population parameters set for this study was based on the requirement of all Deaf employees to register with VR services to be considered for postal employment. All of the informants save one utilized VR services to gain entry (as was required of them at the time). Informant 2, knowing many Deaf individuals already working for the USPS prior to entry, simply found the testing information, showed up at the testing center in Houston, passed the test, and entered the USPS on his own in 1970. He explained, he was later approached by the Houston area DVRC and asked to sign a document stating he followed the same process as the others, but he refused, as he felt insulted. While Informant 2 felt slighted by this request, it seems this exchange occurred due to the USPS requirements and the parameters set by VR at the time the migration occurred.

Summarily, all four Deaf informants entered the USPS in the late 1960's, early 1970's, were able to achieve tenure in this competitive work environment, and were successful in making careers out of the initial postal job opportunity. At the time the interviews were conducted, two of the informants had already retired; the remaining two are nearing retirement.

National efforts in the development of the Deaf/USPS relationship. In developing an understanding of how the phenomenon of USPS Deaf collective employment under study came to pass, one critical question remained unanswered. How did the USPS Deaf collective employment opportunities come about? Without opportunity; the migrations, the jobs, and the informants' tenured careers with the USPS would never have occurred. Prior to conducting the interviews for this study, it was thought that the Gallaudet study (Manning & Stansbury, 1969) was the main impetus in the development of the Deaf/VR/USPS relationships that led to tenured careers for all four primary informants. This assumption was proven to be false, and the GU study was found to have been conducted well after the relationships were forged.

To better understand the efforts and the series of events that led to Deaf United States Postal Service migration, we look to the interview of one Deaf man whose efforts to secure employment upon graduation from New York University with a degree in Engineering in the late 1950's, led to a chain of events that eventually open the doors for Deaf Americans across the country to enter postal employ. Sonnestrahl, a Deaf man in an era long before the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), attended New York University without the aid of interpreters, with the only accommodation available being a provided note taker; supported through VR funds for the blind as there was not a system in place for Deaf students in the post secondary setting.

Sonnestrah, as he began to prepare for the transition from school to work, was;

...trying to figure out where I would go... I decided on the Washington D. C. area because there were many jobs available there for the Deaf within the federal government. If I got laid off from any job, there were other jobs in the D. C. area I could apply for without having to "pull up my roots" from the D. C. area and being forced to move to other parts of the U.S..

As Sonnestrah began his search for employment during his senior year of college, he quickly experienced a rude awakening.

When I got my first letter from the federal government; I was so excited to open it. It looked so official with the "Federal Government" letterhead. The form was very formal. There were two eligibility criteria columns. The one on the left said "eligible" which meant I passed; and the one on the right was checked "not eligible due to medical reasons." I was puzzled and tried to figure out what it was about my body that made me ineligible.

I suddenly realized they were referring to my Deafness. That was the first time in my life I was actually scared because I was Deaf. I wondered if that meant all my three years in a Hearing high school and four years in Hearing college; altogether seven years of being a "loner," without an interpreter, all my goals were thrown out of the window because of the fact I was Deaf. It was unbelievable!

I was already married and my wife was pregnant. I graduated with no job. My wife had our baby boy. We moved to Baltimore where my wife's family lived, near Washington D.C., and I kept looking for a job. There were none.

But Sonnestrah's endeavor to secure employment in the Washington D.C. area, did not end there. Call it chance, or fate but;

Then, it just so happened that my friend's cousin who owned a restaurant in Washington D. C., told me about the fact that every Friday three important key people in congress would get together for lunch at his restaurant. Those Congressmen were; LBJ (Lyndon Baines Johnson, who at the time was a Senator), Homer Thornberry (a Texas Representative), and Sam Rayburn

(Speaker of the House). These three men were all from Texas and they were old friends who enjoyed eating lunch together at that restaurant on Fridays.

My friend's cousin was sitting with them and chatting with them one day, when he found out that Homer Thornberry had Deaf parents which meant Homer was a CODA. As they were discussing that, he also discovered that LBJ grew up with Homer and they were best friends. LBJ said Homer's Deaf parents were like his "second set of parents." My friend's cousin mentioned my name and explained that I was Deaf.

LBJ told him to tell me to send another application directly to him. I did that. Then LBJ called me through my wife's parents and asked me to come in and fill out another application. I did that and turned them in. Then about two or three weeks later; I got a personal letter from a woman who was a secretary from the personnel office in the Navy Department. The letter asked me to come in for an interview. I went there, and before the interview. They showed me LBJ's note that he attached to my application. I wished I kept that paper. It read; "Decide based on his ability not his disability."

During the interview with the supervisor, I found out the man who interviewed me, also had an aunt that was Deaf. That probably gave me a way into getting the job, and I was hired.

Two weeks later, I went in to work and was asked to return to the human resources office. There I met the director who knew how to finger spell and he had a Deaf sister. He told me that he did turn in my application to the Civil Service Commission; now called OMB (Office of Management Budget I believe). That agency's office managed all federal employment. They turned down my application for the same reason; "due to medical reasons."

It was ironic that the first letter I got from them that said that I was not eligible, "due to medical reasons," also said in the letter head on the top left part of the envelope, "hire the handicap."

True enough; that was what the envelope said.

However, the Director of Human Resources decided to give me a temporary job for six months, not a permanent job. It was a six month trial period for me. So, I accepted and started working. After six months, my supervisor wrote a letter submitting samples of my work that said I was doing fine. In this letter he asked to keep me on the job permanently. Again I got another letter with the same kind of envelope and a letter that said I was turned down "due to medical reasons." And again; the envelope said "Hire the Handicapped."

So, I gave my supervisor the letter. He went to CSC. He told me later that in the CSC office, they had a big sign high up on the wall of the office that said "Hire the Handicapped." He went and met with the Director of the Medical Department. My supervisor said that in the office noticed there were no pictures of Deaf employees anywhere. He then realized we can't really tell from a picture if a person is Deaf because Deaf people look "normal."

My supervisor asked the director if he hired Deaf people. The director said "yes." My supervisor showed the director my letter, and asked about my case.

The director said; "Oh well... He is Deaf."

My supervisor replied; "You say you 'Hire the Handicapped.'"

The director said; "Yes, but the law states clearly, 'you must be able to hear to become an engineer.'"

My supervisor replied; "then we need to change that."

Remember, this was long before the ADA.

So they held meetings about the issue and at that time NASA was also just being established. NASA heard about this and they decided to immediately change the laws and make the changes permanent, because they were ready to print the brochures seeking to hire engineers for employment.

So, as I understand it, to this day, those changes are still standing strong. In a two week time span they changed the laws and rules and processed them. That was very fast. It was the fastest change in legislation in the history of the federal government. You know how slow the government is.

But it was passed! I had a permanent job!

This struggle, and these exchanges, ultimately led to increased employment opportunities for Deaf workers in various locations across the country. This conflict and the changes in legislation that occurred as a result all took place in 1958-1959. However, while Sonnestrahl was elated to have finally found a permanent position as an Engineer for the Navy Department, he was still concerned by all the barriers he experienced while trying to secure employment. He expressed these concerns led him to become more active in the human rights of all Deaf Americans. His experiences with discrimination in seeking federal employment taught him a

great deal about the world of work and the limitations imposed by the "status-quo." He attributes this shift in his professional focus, in large part, to his personal concerns for the futures of his Deaf children and Deaf grandchildren.

He explained that he was by no means alone in the sharing of this sentiment as;

During that time there were many Deaf people around me who were attending colleges and we were all training to prepare ourselves for the world of work. There was a setback for many of us Deaf people in the working world with Hearing oriented rules. This Deaf group of people were frustrated that these Hearing oriented rules excluded them from the working world without meaning to. This made me decide to get involved with advocacy for the Deaf. I was doing that while I was working as an engineer for the Navy Department.

At this point in his career, Sonnestrahl had already developed strong ties with the Civil Service Commission and decided to attend the 1962 NAD (National Association of the Deaf) Conference in Florida. This was his first time to attend, but he soon found upon arrival, that other Deaf leaders were already holding discussions about the issues between Deaf Americans and the discriminatory policies of the United States Civil Service. During the NAD (National Association of the Deaf) conference, Fred Schreibner, the Executive Director and Secretary of the NAD at the time, presented research the NAD had conducted, in reference to a lack of Deaf Americans working within the United States Post Service, pointing out the issue as one that needed to be addressed. Fred Schreibner and the NAD;

...called me in to take the lead on that. So, I went there and they showed me what the entrance exams looked like for the Hearing people who wanted to work in the post office.

I remember very well that the test had five parts. The first one; was about numbers related to the post office. The second one was about memorization because of letter sorting. The third one was related to locating addresses. The fourth one was reading paragraphs (reading comprehension). The fifth one was

about poems. I was puzzled and I asked "what does this have to do with working in the post office." They said "the jobs for clerks were very boring so they need to be able to appreciate and enjoy the music while working."

I asked "What about the Deaf?" They did not realize that it was a barrier.

Doug Burke and I discussed this issue with them and we all agreed that we would waive the last two parts of the test but keep the first three parts of the tests for Deaf applicants.

Then Doug and I; remember Doug Burke was the Washington D. C. area VR Director at the time; so he was able to get 22 Deaf people who were all VR clients to take the exam.

Doug himself was Hard of Hearing and he was the interpreter. I was there. I remember taking pictures there. I think I have pictures of that somewhere. It was the first ever group of twenty-two Deaf clients who entered the post office. Doug was there to interpret for them. They took the exam. Two of them passed, twenty of them failed. The trainer who gave the tests told those who failed that they "do have training classes. Really you can train, review the exam and take the tests again."

The first cohort of Deaf workers in Washington D.C. entered the USPS during 1966-1967, and this working relationship ended in 1968 as Doug Burke left for employment with National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) and Sonnestrahl left for the Leadership Training Program (LTP) at California State University, Northridge (CSUN) in 1969.

During his time spent at CSUN, Sonnestrahl continued to wonder about the Deaf/USPS relationship he had helped to establish and upon graduation from the LTP program, he secured employment with the Michigan Department of Labor in 1970. Sonnestrahl made contact with the VR agency in Michigan, developing further working relationships with a Hearing man named "Best," who oversaw the Deaf VR program, and Best's supervisor, Harvey Schoof.

These contacts, led to other Deaf focused working relationships in which mutual collaborations resulted in increased opportunities for Deaf workers within the postal service.

Harvey Schoof contacted the postmaster in Detroit, Michigan who alerted Schoof to 100 job openings at that time. The testers were contacted and a request was made, asking the exam administrators permission to bring in Deaf workers for training. This request opened doors yet again, increasing employment opportunities for Deaf workers in Michigan.

At that time, Glenn Anderson started a new job in Detroit as a VRC for the Deaf. He was shocked that the post office was set up and ready for Deaf people to take the tests and apply for jobs within the postal workforce. Over 250 Deaf people in Detroit wanted a post office job, but they only needed 100. The training was packed! They were trained and taught.

Dick Babb, another person we collaborated with, worked for the Detroit Hearing and Speech Center. Dick was an LTP classmate of mine. He came to the training and provided interpreters.

It was a team effort of the Department of Labor with Babb of the Detroit Hearing and Speech Center, and VR. There was training and there were interpreters provided to prepare the Deaf people for the tests.

Then, when they were finally tested, 200 of them passed. Two hundred passed! Two hundred out of 250 passed! So Harvey Schoof met with the postmaster and asked him if he could hire more than 100. The postmaster said "since 200 passed we will hire all of them."

Harvey couldn't believe it! All of the 200 were hired. The 50 who did not pass were sent for more training. Eventually, 30 of them passed too. Two hundred of them entered the Detroit Post Office. At one point, we discovered they were not allowing Deaf people to be mail carriers. They were allowed to be clerks and LSM operators.

One woman, who worked in the post office, knew sign language. She was involved with the Deaf program in her church. She was the director of human resources in the Detroit Post Office. She was very supportive of Deaf workers and was happy to continue to train the Deaf to memorize many things. They had a rule that they had to memorize 95% of everything within 90 days, or something like that. She was very involved in the trainings.

Glenn Anderson was also involved as well. Many passed, some barely. Some were delayed but eventually all of them passed those tests. Those were very good results!

Then, of those 50 who had failed the tests 30 of them passed. Those 30 were then hired as well. That brought the total number of Deaf employees up to 230. There were discussions about allowing Deaf people to be carriers. They came to an agreement to give it a trial test. I think about 10–20 Deaf sought to be carriers. They went out in the field along with Hearing carriers regularly, explaining the routes as partners with interpreters for support. I also have pictures of that too.

They were concerned about the Deaf carriers not hearing the dogs. However, they saw that the Deaf people were visually alert. They carried mace with them. They made sure that the Deaf were ready to face those challenges.

The biggest concern from the post office was that the Deaf employees could not hear dogs barking. After a 30 day trial period, those Deaf carriers were allowed to continue as carriers.

Then in one suburb, I forgot the name, maybe Clawson, I forgot. It is just north of Detroit. There was a small post office there. The postmaster there heard about Deaf employees and was happy to hire them as drivers. There were no problems with that.

For some reason it was not documented.

Up in Flint, there were about 35 to 40 Deaf people working in the post office. The postmaster in Flint was very supportive of the Deaf workers driving. He also allowed them to drive. In Detroit, the postmaster was not supportive of Deaf workers driving. Three women were allowed to drive as carriers in Flint. In Detroit they allowed Deaf to be carriers but only to walk, not drive. One Deaf was allowed to drive in a six month trial. That carrier was observed.

In Washington D.C., at the Civil Service Office, Rose heard about it. I lived in Washington D.C. at that time. I spent my time shuttling between Detroit and Washington D.C. every two weeks. When I came to Washington D.C., I would visit Rose and give him the updates so he was aware of what was happening in Michigan.

Those updates were good because in the last 2 weeks of that 6 month trial period for the Deaf carrier drivers, one carrier parked on the street to get out and deliver his mail. This carrier was Hard of Hearing but he heard the accident when another vehicle crashed into his postal truck. When they investigated the wreck, the other driver found out that the postal worker was deaf and blamed the wreck on his deafness.

However, the policeman investigating was aware that the deaf worker had parked correctly with the tires slanted toward the curb. The other vehicle that hit it knocked the postal vehicle over the curb. It was obvious that the Deaf postal

carrier's truck was parked at the time of the wreck. Everything was fine for the Deaf carrier.

However, the post office was still skeptical about Deaf workers being very vulnerable in case of accidents. There was much discussion about it. I went to Washington D.C. to meet with Rose. We discussed it and agreed to try a one year trial. The post office people were nervous about that. One year passed and with the same two people, and there were no accidents. After that one year passed it was more acceptable for Deaf workers to drive post office vehicles nationwide. Finally, they allowed the Deaf people to drive! True enough, more and more Deaf people were working in the post office everywhere.

The same concept (a trial period for Deaf postal drivers) was established in Lansing, Michigan with 30 Deaf people; then in Grand Rapids and in Kalamazoo. Hiring Deaf workers became more widespread. It spread to Chicago. It was a ripple effect that spread nationwide. I left in 1974 and was no longer involved in the post office issues. That was the extent of my involvement in the post office.

During the time in which this collaboration took place in Michigan, (in the early 1970's) the phenomenon of Deaf collective employment migrations had spread to cities across the United States. In Texas, relationships were also being forged between VR professionals and postal administrators. In 1969, the Deaf collective employment migrations reached Houston, leading to the first group of 12 Deaf men to enter the Houston Post Office with the support of VR services.

As was seen with previous employment migrations for the Deaf there were one or two Deaf postal workers in Houston prior to the migration. One of these Deaf men, left postal employ, returned to college, eventually becoming a DVRC. This man was also the older brother of Informant 2.

While Deaf leaders, allies, and key players, were laying the groundwork for what was to come in Houston; little did the young Deaf men who would eventually become postal workers themselves, know that the groundwork was being laid down for what would become their future careers. The initial relationships forged, leading to increased opportunities for Deaf workers

across the country, occurred while the informants were preparing for the world of work as students at Texas School for the Deaf.

The Houston Deaf/USPS experience. To better understand the Houston Deaf collective employment migration under study, and to offer yet another method of data triangulation; we look to the interview of Walton, the DVRC who was recruited by VR professionals in Texas, specifically, to work with Deaf workers seeking to fill the postal ranks. The reader will notice the interview text in this interview is different than that which has been used for the previous five interviews. Quotations will be utilized without italics as this interview was conducted in spoken English, and did not require ASL to English interpretation.

DVRC Interview. Walton, the DVRC who oversaw the recruitment and training of all Deaf postal employees during the migration period under study, has a long history (spanning over forty years) within the Texas Vocation Rehabilitation system. Walton, a CODA, was born to two Deaf parents who were strong Deaf leaders in the Houston Deaf Community prior to the insular SDC established by the informants in this study. Walton, a woman who continues to work tirelessly for the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) and the Texas Deaf Community, explains how she came to work in the field of VR;

"I graduated from college in Jan of 1969, and I was a teacher. My dad owned a dry cleaners in Houston, and he had a very good friend who was the supervisor of DARS who (also) owned a dry cleaners, who came to my Dad, and asked, 'Did your daughter just finish college?' And he said 'yes.' He said, 'I have been looking for someone who can sign for over a year, and I don't care what their degree is in, can I come talk to her?' And they came to my classroom and asked. So I said 'ok, I'll just do it through the summer of 1969,' thinking I would just be there for a month or two, and now forty some odd years later, I'm still here.

I started in June, and that was already going on... Dallas had some Deaf people working, Austin saw a few Deaf people working so the (VR) Counselors for the Deaf were talking about it and sending letters back and forth. And so it was just an opportunity that was thrown in my lap, and I was young and energetic at that time, and thought I could conquer the world.

Those Deaf people started working, and I think in September or October of '69, after I was hired in June, so a whole lot of stuff went on, when I was trying to figure out where I was because I didn't know anything about VR or what it did at that time, I was very, very green as far as that, but I did know my Deaf people. So that's what got me."

Walton was recruited by Noah Sparks, but expressed she worked closely with Ralph White, who was the VR Program Specialist for the Deaf, at the time. Ralph White was mentioned by Informant 4 as the DVRC who had both been his teacher at TSD, and as the VR professional who alerted him to the postal opportunities in Houston. Walton explained that Ralph White, at the time she entered the field of VR, was responsible for the Southern region of Texas, and as such was also Walton's immediate supervisor.

I touched on comments made by the informants in regards to a welcoming postmaster in the Houston area as one of the main reasons the migration occurred, and Walton explained that this Postmaster Elder, who was her connection to the USPS administration, also had a son, referred to as "Junior," that happened to be the Human Resource Director at the time.

"So that didn't hurt us because that was really our connection because they were doing this in other cities in Texas, before it hit Houston. But just like you said if the top person doesn't want it to happen, it's not going to happen."

I then touched on a few of the research findings in regards to there being a few Deaf workers (including the older brother of Informant 2) in the Houston USPS system prior to the first group of twelve, a second, much larger group in the early 1970's, the exam accommodations for the first group, and the omission of the exams for the second, much larger group.

Walton explained how the two sections omitted (as per the comments of Sonnestrahl in earlier migrations) were for the first group of twelve, confirming these findings, including the exam being waived for the second, much larger cohort.

"Right, right. That was that first 1969 group. We changed it for the 1972 group. We had two groups; large groups, that went to work for the post office; one in 1969, and one in 1972."

While the USPS entrance exam was waived for the second wave of Deaf workers, Walton still had to weed out and pick from a very large pool of Deaf applicants. Walton confirmed that the USPS exam was waived for the second group in 1972, but introduced new information in that she had taken the GATBY and modified it, seeking to increase the likelihood of matching well, Deaf workers to the USPS job description.

"Ok... I went through and looked at the job description of all the jobs that they were doing, and I pretty much knew what the jobs were, and I pulled certain parts of the GATBY out as a pretest, before we went and took another test.

Because a lot of them were not making the 'throwing' with the ZDT machines; they couldn't 'throw' and they weren't catching the mistakes of the similar. So I pulled two of the subtests from that and gave the group that and they had to pass those two subtests before they could even go to take the entrance exam. But that was a made up thing that I did.

Because I had so many in that '69 group and the group was good, but there was 125 or so in '72, so it was just huge. So, you had to figure out how to weed them in and how to weed them out, because everybody wanted to work at the post office."

As this passage suggests, the first group, while hired to work on the LSMs, had already seen the change in technology from the LSM to the ZDT by the time the second, much larger, cohort of Deaf workers entered the postal workforce in 1972.

Walton also played an integral role in developing the USPS/Deaf relationship in Houston, by working closely with key Postal Administrators, and by spending a great deal of time in the workplace, offering real-time, on-site support.

"I was there just to do 'hands on' because I wanted to make this work with Elder. And I promised him I would be there most of the time. I also had other interpreters there too, but I was there to watch it and make sure we weren't having any flubs. They all went to work in the middle of the night. So, I went to work with them, so that they could understand the process and make sure the support was there."

Before I asked about one of the interview findings, seeking confirmation from Walton in reference to the Deaf event that the informants touched on as a main source of conflict between Deaf postal workers and postal administrators, she tells this "funny story."

"And then somewhere there was a funny story that happened and I'm not sure when it hit. But anyway... One of the funny things that happened, which I know you will be able to relate to, I believe with the '72 group, after they had been there for a while, I had gotten a phone call at about two o'clock in the morning, that said; 'there is only two Deaf people here, where are they?'

I said 'what?'

He said 'they haven't shown up for work, do you know why?'

I said 'I don't have a clue but I'm on my way and I'll talk to the ones that are there.' But on the way, I went and woke up mom and dad and said 'what's going on is there anything going on?' And Dad said there was a basketball tournament. So guess who was waiting for all of them the next day?

To give them some good soft skills on 'you don't go to the basketball game in Dallas when you have a job.' But that was a cultural thing. There was something going on, so they were going. Yeah, culturally, they went to those things. It was very funny. I'll never forget that one because they were all wondering why I was waiting for them the next night after they went to Dallas. But anyway, it only happened that one time, and they didn't do it again."

While this one cultural conflict, seems to have been the greatest conflict seen between Deaf postal workers and postal administrators in the Houston area, this was not the only issue of

contention between the two. Yet another problem seen, by informant report and confirmed by Walton, was that Deaf workers would tend to work much faster than their Hearing counterparts, as they could not converse (as did the Hearing workers), while they worked with their hands. Once their work was completed, they could "chat," but the Hearing supervisors saw this as unacceptable behavior. This was where Walton attempted to educate the supervisors, but this issue was ongoing as the informants pointed out; USPS policy required supervisors to be rotated out every six months to a year. Every time a new supervisor entered the workplace with Deaf workers, Deaf workers would have to "start from scratch" in educating their new supervisors about Deaf workers. This would suggest an ongoing need for post closure VR support in the workplace. This may have also contributed to the decline seen in the number of Deaf workers over time.

Walton touched on the difference between Deaf and Hearing postal workers, and this cultural conflict.

"Because everybody else was jabbering and ours didn't jabber, because if they jabbered, they wouldn't be able to do their jobs. And so there was, you know, unfortunately, there was some who used them, because they would work almost nonstop."

Again, this was where Walton would step in, to educate postal supervisors, but VR support in educating Hearing postal employees about the Deaf also included communication skills training.

"I know that we taught sign language classes there. I had someone come in, it wasn't mandatory that anyone take them. It was done 30-40 minutes before their jobs started and after for the ones that wanted to learn, we were able to combine that also."

Walton then pointed to one critical aspect of the USPS Deaf collective employment phenomenon that in part, led to the hiring of hundreds, in that she specifically chose Deaf leaders for the 1969 group, who she felt would show a strong Deaf collective work ethic, to encourage the USPS to hire more Deaf workers.

"You have to do a good job when you do it first. Your (Deaf) leaders have to be there."

This same sentiment was echoed by Sonnestrahl;

Well, I always picked the best Deaf people and placed them upfront; those who I knew would set a good example.

While the selection of Deaf workers who would initially set good examples, certainly contributed to the hiring of Deaf workers en masse, the tendency of Hearing persons to see all Deaf workers as the same, also had a negative side as well. Unfortunately, the tendency to stereotype is a common trait when dealing with employers and Deaf workers. While the tendency to stereotype is a common human trait, in general, it can also prove to be detrimental to Deaf working populations in regards to their employers' perceptions of Deaf individuals as a whole.

Sonnestrahl offered an excellent example of one exchange from a former client he worked with, which ultimately led to a negative opinion of all workers with traits similar to the client, based wholly on misinformation and a lack of understanding.

Glenn had one client, who was Deaf and black. That person lived in the inner city in Detroit. That person got a job at the Ford Plant in Dearborn. That was in the 1970's. Dearborn is a town West of Detroit. That was a white town. His work shift was from 6 AM to 2 PM. He was an assembler. (At the time) they had strict union rules that if you were asked to work overtime, you had to say "yes." You

would work four hours overtime, not just a couple of hours. That person had the job as an assembler which paid good money.

Two weeks later he showed up at my office. He was laid off; fired. I was puzzled that he was fired in just two weeks. I made a call to the plant through an interpreter who was also the secretary (in our office). The Foreman said "he was lazy."

"Lazy."

So, I went back and asked the client what happened. He said he got the job and was working. He started work at about 4 to 6 AM.

Well, he lived in the inner city and he had to get up at 4 AM to catch the first bus at 4:30 AM. He had to ride three different buses to get to work on time at 6 AM. When he finished working at 2 PM, he had to ride three buses to get home at about 4 PM. That was fine.

Then one day, they ordered him to work overtime. He was fine with overtime. He worked overtime from 2 PM to 6 PM. (After his shift ended) he tried to catch the first bus but found out the last bus ran at 5 PM. He had tried to hitchhike but he was in an all white area of town, and no one would pick him up. He struggled to get home and arrived home late at night and in the morning he went to work. When they asked him to work overtime again, he said "no."

So they fired him and said he was "lazy."

Then I asked him why he couldn't get a car. He said car insurance in the inner city (of Detroit) had risen so high after a series of riots in the area, that it became more expensive than a car. He had just started working and was trying to save money.

He looked all over for a place to live in the Dearborn area, but this was a white area of town and he was rejected time and time again, because he was black and (to make matters worse) now the Ford plant labeled him "lazy."

So then he was black, Deaf and lazy, and these attributes were attributed to all Deaf people, all black people and all black-Deaf people. So Ford stopped hiring all black people, all Deaf people, and all black Deaf people.

But who wrote the schedules? White people did.

White people developed the schedules not thinking about the inner city people who had to ride buses to work. They assumed everyone drove. But this Deaf black man couldn't drive yet. What about him?

So they blamed the wrong people for the wrong causes. They blamed not only all Deaf people, but also all black people.

This tendency of employers to stereotype points to an ongoing need from VR professionals to continue to educate employers about Deaf populations, and their Deaf workers, and any environmental barriers that the client may face. This passage also points to barriers outside of the work environment that need to be addressed if Deaf workers are to be successful in maintaining employment. The communication barriers experienced by Deaf individuals in the workplace, and a lack of employer understanding of Deaf persons are an unfortunate, but common aspect of the Deaf world of work experience.

Yet another unfortunate characteristic of the Deaf world of work experience seen was the tendency of employers in taking full advantage of their Deaf workers as they knew they would not complain. Walton touched on this when she pointed out that there were those who would "use them because they would work almost nonstop." This was also touched on by Informant 2 when he brought up one experience where he met a much older, retired, Deaf man who worked for the USPS, explaining how the USPS loved his work as he would not even stop working to take a restroom break.

By informant report, the initial experiences during the trial period for Deaf postal workers in the Houston area consisted of an extremely demanding work schedule where, as Informant 1 pointed out, he was required to work 7 days a week, in 12 hour shifts for years before he was able to secure a full time position with the USPS. Sonnestrahl questioned this when asked, saying it was illegal, and pointed out this was not seen in regards to the locations he was involved in.

Walton, however, confirmed this finding as part of the postal experience in the Houston area. This again, points to the variance of the Deaf postal worker experience, seen in different geographic locations, depending largely upon the postal administrators in each region, and the demands of labor from within the USPS.

I then asked Walton about the historical patterns seen where the Deaf collective work ethic, established by few, led to the desire of employers to hire Deaf en masse. Walton confirmed these findings, stating "it was a thing we just had to explain, they just take care of each other, that's just what they do;" pointing to the very nature of Deaf individuals in regards to the world of work and how they tend to utilize the collective to further advance their understanding of the workplace demands required of them by their employers.

Yet another finding confirmed by Walton, as was seen in the interview of Sonnestrahl was the tendency of postal administrators (as was seen in previous Deaf employment migrations) to offer trial periods for Deaf workers for differing lengths of time, (depending upon the sentiments of administrators in specific locations) before they would allow Deaf workers to secure a permanent position. This same trial period was seen in the case of Sonnestrahl, when he entered employment for the Navy Department as an Engineer.

While the interview of Sonnestrahl pointed to Deaf postal workers breaking barriers by entering different positions, most of the Deaf postal workers in Houston (including all four informants) were limited to the position of clerks for the duration of their careers. Walton expressed that she believed that two deaf individuals were able to rise to supervisory positions but this was certainly not the norm in the Houston area. This was confirmed by Informant 1, but

he stated that one was unable to remain past the trial period, while one other was able to remain supervisor.

Walton's involvement in the Houston area VR/Deaf/USPS relationship ended in 1978, but this was not the end of her involvement in working with the USPS and Deaf applicants. She explained how the process had become much more difficult and taxing for Deaf applicants. She discussed the plight of two Deaf applicants seeking postal employment; one of whom she "had to get political" with. This one man, who performed well on the job, throughout the trial period, ultimately became discouraged through negative feedback in the workplace, and ultimately, he gave up altogether.

Shared community experiences. Now that we have covered the informants' early learning experiences and experiences with the world of work, we now look to develop an understanding of how these experiences led them to establish a new SDC in Houston after migrating for postal employment. In this section, we will cover the development of Deaf collective behaviors, the Deaf collective employment migration the informants took part in, their arrival to Houston, entry into the USPS, and the informants' various organizational affiliations.

Development of Deaf collective behaviors. The four Deaf Informants' shared community experiences began at TSD, where they all grew up together as "*brothers and sisters*," developing strong collective bonds, based on Deaf cultural norms. Informant 2 touched on this in what he expressed was one of the most valuable lessons learned while at TSD, where he said they were all taught to help one another because "*you are all the same; Deaf.*" Over the years, while students at TSD, these bonds were strengthened by the various activities discussed in their

early learning experiences, and in particular through team sports; which they also took part in together. The significance of team sports within Deaf populations can be seen in the various sports based organizations established during previous Deaf collective employment migrations, the various tournaments which continue to attract hundreds of Deaf individuals, and on an international scale; the establishment of the Deaflympics (previously called the World Games for the Deaf). The first Deaflympics were held in Paris, in 1924, and continue to this day.

In the present study, the significance these Deaf-centered sporting events held for the informants, can be seen in the various sporting events they all took part in, and in that sports based organizations were the first organizations they established upon arrival to the Houston area. One contributing factor that seems to have influenced the informants to first establish Deaf centered sports organizations was their youth. As the informants aged, their involvement in sports decreased, giving way to increased involvement in the church, and other community organizations, as the informants started families of their own. Yet another example of how central sporting events are to Deaf Communities was seen in the first major cultural conflict between Deaf workers and USPS administrators when one Deaf basketball tournament shut down several of the LSMs, causing the mail to pile up, when nearly all Deaf postal workers in the Houston area skipped work to attend the tournament in Dallas.

Deaf collective employment migration. While all four informants, upon graduation, sought employment in different fields, in different geographic locations, their efforts were met with less than ideal employment experiences. In large part, this was due to Hearing-World barriers that either limited, or excluded them from achieving their full employment potential. All four informants pointed to limitations in the world of work as a main determinate in seeking

postal employment, but Informant 1 also pointed out that had Walton not been involved, the migration to Houston might not have occurred. Informant 1 pointed out two main influences in making his decision to enter the USPS in Houston.

The first influence was the knowledge that Walton was the DVRC involved, and the reputation of her father, who was well known in the Deaf community as a Deaf leader in an established Baptist Church in the Houston area. Walton's father was also an accomplished businessman who owned his own dry cleaning business in the Houston area. These two characteristics garnered a great deal of respect within the Deaf community as Walton's father exhibited both a strong example of the Deaf collective work ethic and a strong sense of Deaf collective community involvement. The second reason given was that the postmaster in this region was known to be enthusiastic in regards to the hiring of Deaf workers.

The first influence, in regards to the Deaf knowledge of the involvement of a Deaf-centered professional, seems to play an integral role in Deaf collective employment migrations. During Sonnestrahl's interview, not only did he touch on the many key people involved, he also pointed out two poignant examples of this phenomenon.

Yes, for example in Detroit where I worked in the Department of Labor in collaboration with VR. At that time, the VR Counselor was a Hearing person. I remember his name now, it was Pat Best. He was a former Priest.

He also knew sign language. He quit the church and got married. He worked as a VR Counselor. Deaf people started going to him in large numbers.

When I joined the Department of Labor, Harvey Schoof noticed that many Deaf were coming in for help to get postal jobs.

Pat Best's signing skills were not wonderful but Deaf people liked having someone sign with them.

This led to the hiring of Glen Anderson who was Deaf and black. The result was many black Deaf people from the South moved to Detroit because of Glenn.

In the South there were no Deaf and black Counselors so when these people heard there was a black, Deaf, VRC, they picked up and moved to Detroit. I think about 400 people went through Glenn to get jobs. Glenn had so many clients. It was all because of Glenn. They could identify with him because they were like him, and because he could sign well too.

The first example Sonnestrahl points to here is telling in that many Deaf individuals respond well to professionals who are Hearing, yet sign. Regardless of whether or not the individual signs well, Deaf people tend to appreciate the effort one makes to communicate effectively in their own language (ASL). The willingness of Hearing professionals working in Deaf populations to take the time to learn and utilize ASL is highly respected in the Deaf-World.

The second example Sonnestrahl points to here, is also telling in that the migration of hundreds of black Deaf workers from the South, to the Detroit area, occurred largely, because they had learned of a black Deaf DVRC in that specific geographic location. This comment points to a tendency in Deaf populations in seeking professionals they readily identify with. This sentiment also seems to be reinforced when Deaf workers know of Deaf community leaders already established in the workplace, offering a system of social support they can expect to have been established, and prior to their arrival.

While the informants who were of the first cohort of twelve, expressed they were not particularly influenced by the prospect of working with other Deaf individuals, Informant 2, who had worked in a completely Hearing environment and entered a year after the first cohort, expressed he was influenced by the opportunity to work with other Deaf workers. He explained this as the result of his experiencing a great deal of social isolation at his previous place of

employment. This may point to a stronger desire in working with other Deaf persons, for those who entered the postal workforce later.

Arrival: entering the postal workforce. Upon arrival in Houston, Informants 1 and 4 lived together in an efficiency apartment, as roommates, along with several other young Deaf men, some of whom were also Deaf postal workers. Informants 1 and 4, after having been on the job for a short while, had enough money saved to move into another apartment as roommates on their own. When Informant 1 married, his wife moved in and Informant 4 moved out, again choosing Deaf roommates who also worked in the USPS. Informant 2, who was originally from the Houston area, was able to secure a place of his own, yet found he was struggling to pay bills, and was forced to borrow money from Deaf friends who worked at the post office. He described this financial issue as cyclical, repeating, until he finally made the decision to enter postal employ himself. Informant 3, had worked his whole life to save money for his future after high school and while he was able to afford a place of his own, he spent a great deal of his time alone, until Informant 1 pulled him into the Deaf community. He expressed a great deal of gratitude for this as he was previously unaware of both how isolated he was socially, and how much he truly desired to connect with other Deaf community members.

All four Deaf Informants entered the postal workforce earlier than the hundreds that followed, and three of the Informants married Deaf women who entered the USPS with the much larger, cohort of Deaf workers in 1972. One Informant married three times, choosing fellow postal workers for his first two wives. The selection of Deaf wives who were also Deaf postal workers, points to the development of strong bonds felt between Deaf workers, based on shared experiences of being Deaf; living and working in a Hearing-World. All four informants

exhibited a strong Deaf collective work ethic, setting solid examples for other Deaf postal workers to follow in the workplace, and in the community. All were also heavily involved with the collective, they helped to establish.

Organizational affiliations. All four informants helped to establish, or took part in a multitude of various Deaf organizations, where Informant 2 explained that there were far too many to remember them all. These various organizations, all centered on the socialization of Deaf community members, including everything from hobbies, sporting events, the Houston Deaf Club, churches, and more politically based organizations geared toward improving the lives of Deaf community members.

The Houston Deaf Club. Possibly the oldest of these organizations, established prior to the migration was the Houston Deaf Club. Deaf Clubs have historically been seen in major cities, offering a central location for Deaf individuals to plug in to the local Deaf community. While the Houston Deaf Club offered programs for Deaf individuals and their families, as an established "club," alcohol was also served. This may have negatively affected the social dynamic as the informants pointed out; there were cyclical issues that tended to repeat with Deaf persons who utilized the organization. This may have also contributed to informant feelings of a need for an organization that would morally benefit the collective community.

Deaf congregation at Westbury Church of Christ. Of these organizations, the Deaf congregation established at Westbury Church of Christ, was the most influential in my life, and possibly the informants, as well. All four informants used the same sign in referring to how they lived prior to the establishment of this church and how the experience changed their lives for the

better; "*mischievous*." Informant 1, responsible for the establishment of the Deaf congregation at Westbury, was also the first Deaf individual from this cohort to marry and have children. He expressed this was the driving force in seeking out a local church that would suit the needs of Deaf persons in the Houston area. On a side note; in showing how tightly knit this Deaf community was, Walton, the DVRC who was responsible for the hiring and training of all Deaf postal workers during the migration under study, also interpreted at this informant's wedding.

While there were other Deaf church congregations, they were not in the immediate area in which the Deaf informants lived and worked. It also seems as if the lack of "acceptable Deaf behaviors" in the workplace (and at the Deaf Club) also encouraged this informant to first seek to involve his fellow Deaf postal workers. This church group served the collective community in establishing a moral code of ethics. All four informants expressed this experience was a positive influence in their lives. At least one of the informants met his wife, and married her in this church.

Informant 1 expressed that there were hundreds of Deaf members in this church, and roughly half of them were also Deaf postal workers. This fact seems to point to sentiments of Deaf persons toward a need to socialize with other Deaf postal workers outside of the workplace. In part, this was due to their inability to socialize in the workplace (as Deaf workers cannot sign while working with their hands), but it also points to a potential influential factor in the ability to achieve tenure, which finds support in that; of the Deaf individuals who were able to achieve tenure, making careers out of the initial postal job opportunity, most were also long standing members of this congregation, all of whom attended church services regularly. While this church group eventually folded during the oil crisis due to economic reasons, several of the

original members still worship together at a "sister church" that was later established nearer to the homes of those who remained. As informant 1 pointed out in his interview, assistance was offered to those who lived in different locations around the Houston area, in finding new places of worship closer to where they lived.

The close connections Deaf individuals experience in church based programs, with both Hearing and Deaf members seem to be largely influenced by shared collective behaviors. Deaf collective cultural values, and the collective nature of church congregations, both function like extended kinship networks. The willingness of Hearing church members in seeking to understand and commune with Deaf community members is akin to the same collective behaviors Deaf individuals learn very early in life. These positive Deaf-Hearing interactions within the church may have also influenced the informants' community based experiences as most of them stressed the importance of these interactions in regards to personal and intellectual growth. As the informants grew older, they also increased their interactions within Hearing populations in the community at large.

Summary of the Research Findings for Research Question 1

This chapter covered a wide range of topics in seeking to develop understandings of the informants' individual and shared experiences across the three broad, preset themes. In addressing the first aspect of the research question, seeking to understand the informants' individual experiences, each individual informant interview was reported, to allow space for the informants to tell their own stories, in their own words. The informants' shared experiences were then discussed. Within the first preset theme based on the informants' shared early learning

experiences, we discovered emergent themes of the informants' families of origin, the education they received at TSD, their experiences during the summer months at home, the various role models they were exposed to, the origins of Deaf collective behaviors, and Deaf/Hearing relationships during these formative years.

The second broad theme based on the informants' shared vocational experiences, yielded emergent themes of their developed interests, expression of a primary vocational goal, the performance feedback from the environment, the contributing factors that led the informants to modify their primary vocational goals, the national efforts that led to the USPS opportunities for Deaf workers across the country, and the Houston Deaf postal experience. The third broad theme, based on the informants' shared experiences in the establishment/development of a new SDC in Houston, yielded emergent themes in regards to the development of Deaf collective behaviors, the USPS Deaf collective employment migration to the Houston area, what life was like for the informants upon arrival, and the informants' various organizational affiliations.

Now that we have presented the research findings in regards to the first, primary research question based on the lived experiences of the informants, we are almost ready to move on to the next chapter, where we will utilize the data gleaned from the interviews, and presented in this chapter, to answer the remaining research questions (2-5); which seek to develop understandings based on the interpretation of the data collected. However, before we can continue on this journey of discovery, seeking to further our insight, there is one emergent theme, based on questions about changes seen over time, that simply cannot be ignored, as it is integral to developing an understanding of the Deaf world of work experience, offering not only greater

depth of understanding, but also an entirely new context, breathing life into the historical patterns touched on in this study.

Changes Over Time

In seeking to understand how the Deaf-World experience for the informants has changed over time, we will explore some of the research findings, again across the three broad themes. To better understand the changes seen over time, we look to both the informants' responses and the interview of Walton. Walton is uniquely suited to assist us in the development of these understandings, as she was a member of the SDC her parents created, was living in the Houston area prior to the migration under study, was present for the whole of the migration, played the most integral rehabilitation role throughout the building of the USPS/Deaf collective employment relationship, is still employed in the Texas rehabilitation system, and she was also a TSD board member for twenty one years.

Changes in early learning. Today, Deaf children are no longer primarily educated in the Deaf residential school setting, as was seen when the informants were young. The Deaf residential setting, at one time, was the only option for parents with d/Deaf children. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, P.L. 94142) has brought with it greater access for many students with disabilities, yet poses challenges for d/Deaf students who are often ill-equipped to handle the mainstream environment, that is ill-equipped to handle them. Public support for d/Deaf students in the residential school setting has waned, and the focus for many, has shifted to the mainstream.

Informant 1 pointed to a complete lack of socialization and the removal of many of the programs that centered on socialization, contributing their demise to changes in policy which now send students home on weekends, and holidays. Many of the programs experienced by the informants, including the Boy Scout program, are no longer seen at TSD. Informant 2 pointed to changes seen in how much easier life is for students now, as he remembered having to cook his own meals, and having to share communal spaces where now Deaf students have their own rooms, and have better food offered through the campus cafeteria. Informant 4 also pointed to changes in technology, and how these changes impacted the printing trade skills taught, where now, everything is computer based. All four informants pointed to changes in technology at TSD, primarily seeing the rise of personal computers as having the greatest impact on the manner in which students are taught. While the informants' opinions on how education at TSD has changed are of interest in the present study, one interview trumps all in light of how these changes have taken place, and what these changes mean for Deaf youth.

Walton, the DVRC interviewed in regards to her involvement in the USPS employment migration, also served on the board at TSD for 21 years, stepping down in 2000. Given this understanding, of her extensive involvement with the board, I asked about the changes in vocational skills training programs, that have reportedly been cut back significantly, and what actions the board takes in regards to labor market trends.

"Well I haven't been on the board since 2000, and so I know that they were very strong in trying to look at labor market statistics and matching the vocational programs with the labor market. If there was no longer a need for this area, then let's get rid of it and bring in this skill, and I worked very hard at it.

We don't need a 'shoe repair' anymore or 'dry cleaners' anymore, we don't need others, but there are things we do need. Like the 'auto body,' because that is still a good trade, but we don't want all Deaf people to think 'I can only work in this sphere, and I can't do anything else,' because they can do anything they want to; but if they leave with that vocational skill and some academic skills, then they have got the best of both worlds; not just vocational only, because the school for the Deaf was notorious for having 'plans A B, C, and D' for the Deaf kids, and 'D' was the lowest, (the) LFD (Low Functioning Deaf) kids.

Just like we all know that everybody in Texas is not going to A&M and UT but they all think they are. Most of the jobs right now are in the technical fields and I'm on the task force here locally, and we preach this to the high schools, we aren't talking about the Deaf schools, we are talking about schools in general. We have got to teach these kids trades, and the academics need to be there too, but the jobs are in the trade skills.

And they need to be given that opportunity. And for a long time, in public schools, the 'Special Ed. kids' could only go into one or two of the handicap programs. Whatever they got their P.L. 94142 money for; that's where they put their Deaf kids or the Hearing, the Special Ed. kids, they never thought of them as doing things outside, that the other kids did; like going into the drafting part of it. I remember fighting for kids in public school. Not the Schools for the Deaf because they were real good about that, but here, they would say to that; 'no', and I said 'why not?' We have all of these jobs; we have got to do that. We have to do that in parallel. We can't do one without the other.

Because you're going to need (all of it). They'll never not need the vocabulary and the language; throughout the training, they'll always have that. And a lot of them have hated me for quoting the average reading level (said to be at a 3rd-4th grade level) of d/Deaf people. They don't like me when I say that. And I tell them, 'you might not like me for saying it, but it's the truth. You might be higher than that but I'm talking about the average, I'm not talking about where you are.'"

The issues Walton touches on here (as she points out), are seen in the general public as well, in that trade skills and other vocational training programs have, as a whole, been sidelined, due to a developed expectation that all children should only be prepared for college. In a growing climate of "tightening purse strings," programs seen as "nonacademic" have possibly

taken the brunt of the effects in this decrease in funding, even though these programs were clearly central to and integral in the informants' career developmental process across the lifespan.

Yet another common sentiment among the Deaf is that now, at all Deaf residential schools, more Deaf students are seen attending, that also have multiple disabilities and serious behavior problems. Walton echoed this sentiment in a series of exchanges with her Deaf mother.

"I always hated this when she said this... She would say 'where are the normal Deaf people?' And I said 'what?' And she'd say 'where are the normal Deaf? They're not here anymore.'

I said; 'no mom, they are staying in school, they're staying at their local school districts and being educated, where the more severe d/Deaf kids are coming to the school for the Deaf.'"

These exchanges point to a few of the many negative repercussions of the "social progress" for children with disabilities in education, that have ironically alienated Deaf Americans entirely from their efforts. At the very center of the disability rights movement, is the "doctrine of consumer sovereignty," which puts forth the commonsensical assertion that persons with disabilities know best what their needs are and as such, should be empowered to take greater control of services offered. Yet in the case of Deaf Americans (who inadvertently contributed a great deal to the social aspect of the movement in general), their "voice" was silenced again, by those who suggest to know what is best for them. While many lament the aggravation of Deaf persons when called "disabled," neither the dominant Hearing culture, nor disability rights activists have allowed any room for a Deaf perspective in their discussions and efforts. Deaf Americans have pushed for protection under civil rights, for well over a century in this country. This stands as yet another testament to the social effects of the created state of historical exclusion of Deaf Americans in dominant discourse.

This discussion, highlights a few issues I had while working in Deaf education as an interpreter when, during a Life Skills class for Special Education students, I was appalled to learn the lesson for the day was to teach the students about how to receive SSDI benefits when they became adults. Admittedly, I was disturbed and was told this was what their future would invariably hold.

Changes in employment. The impacts of policies and legislation that fail to include Deaf perspectives are not only seen in the education of d/Deaf youth, but influence all areas of daily living, including the world of work. While the ADA has brought with it, some positives for Deaf Americans, legislation that supports disability rights such as SSI, or SSDI, have been detrimental and destructive to the Deaf collective work ethic discussed throughout this study. I asked Walton about her thoughts on these developments.

"That's a constant. That's a constant thorn in our side as VRCs. Even with all the work incentives, trying to explain to them; how you have a nine month trial work period. How you can take off some things and you still might be able to get a little bit of that check but why would you want to be on that check forever? I mean it's truly... but... Our government has set that up that way and they can't look at one 'disability group' different than another 'disability group.' But it's really funny when they tell me that they are not disabled, and then I'm saying, 'And you're getting what? Is there a "D" in that? Excuse me?'"

Walton continued to discuss this topic, pointing out how these influences led her to push her clients to contribute something to their education, whether it was buying their own books, or paying for airfare home, just to make sure they had some responsibilities in their educational endeavors. She also explained how some of these clients returned, thanking her for these requirements, stating they had a very positive effect in their ability to fully appreciate the achievement of these goals, after having contributed personally and financially.

Seeking to triangulate data obtained by informant response, I pointed to the stark differences seen between the sentiments of Deaf youth today, and previous Deaf generations, in that receiving SSDI, as was the case with all four Deaf Informants in this study, was always (since implemented) seen as the ultimate failure in that they would no longer be able to provide for their families.

"Exactly" she replied. I then, pointed out that though these sentiments are still seen, many Deaf from the informants' generation, from my experience, were left with no other choice as they were pushed out of the workforce, to which she agreed, stating; "...and that's ok. We have to let those people know that there is nothing wrong with that," pointing to a potential personal conflict that might need to be taken into consideration by both DVRCs and mental health professionals when working within Deaf populations.

She ended this discussion on a personal note.

"There is absolutely nothing wrong with that but my dad, owned his own business, didn't make a whole lot of money doing it, but he loved doing it. He probably could have been getting SSDI for a long period of time because of his earnings, you know, but he didn't even start drawing it until 65. Yet he could have. He could have done it. But like you said, he would have thought he was a failure, even though no one probably would have known. But he would have known."

Walton here touches on Deaf sentiments common to those who ascribe to the Deaf collective work ethic in that employment and the ability to support one's family is a source of great pride. Unfortunately, the inverse of this sentiment, which occurs when a Deaf worker is pushed out of the workforce, can be detrimental to their self image. This points to yet another challenge for professionals working within Deaf populations, as to be relegated to the margins of

the unemployed, and forced to succumb to a need to collect SSDI was once seen as the ultimate failure for a Deaf worker who possesses a Deaf collective work ethic. Considering that so many Deaf individuals have been left with no other choice but to collect SSDI, the potential sociopolitical consequences for the whole of the American Deaf Community, are particularly alarming when one considers that it is becoming more and more socially acceptable for the Deaf to be unemployed. As stated earlier, prior to the ADA, Deaf people had no choice but to become gainfully employed, as SSDI was not an option.

The Deaf/USPS relationship. The struggles of Deaf collective social action in seeking to end the discriminatory practices of the civil service in barring all Deaf workers from merely taking the civil service examinations were noted by Buchanan (1999) and touched on previously in this study. However, this excerpt from an article printed in *The Silent Worker* (1889, p. 4), and preserved by the Gallaudet University Archives, points to a civil service policy change allowing Deaf workers to take civil service examinations, specifically for entry into postal employ, including, what seems to be the exact same exam accommodations that were repeated through the efforts of Deaf leaders, including Sonnestrahl, and documented in this study, but thought to be the first occurrence with regards to Deaf USPS collective employment efforts.

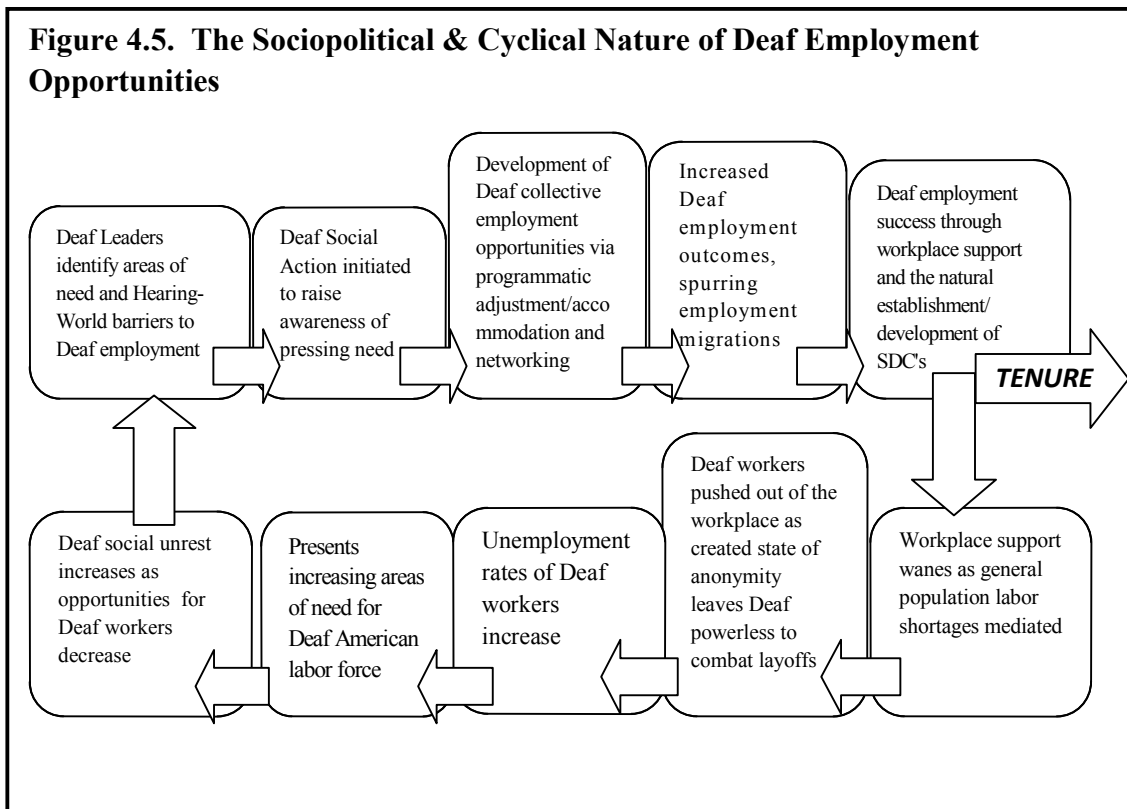
Figure 4.4. The Right Decision

The Right Decision.

President Lyman, of the Civil Service Commission, has just issued an order that deaf-mutes are to be admitted to the examinations for positions in the postal service. The examinations for them will differ in only one or two unimportant particulars from that required of hearing applicants. There are quite a number of deaf-mutes employed in the postal service in various cities, and they are said to give satisfaction.

This article (Figure 4.4) is not the only one found of its kind, but is noted here, to provide evidence of the negative consequences Deaf Americans face when excluded from recognition in the dominant, USPS historical discourse. By eliminating Deaf Americans entirely from postal discourse, the created state of historical exclusion has produced a vicious cycle where Deaf collective efforts in seeking equal opportunities in the general labor force are met with repetitive barriers, well beyond their control. A visual representation of this vicious cycle, which seeks to shed light on the interplay between Deaf social action, various sociopolitical influences, and the availability of Deaf collective employment opportunities, can be seen in Figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5. The Sociopolitical & Cyclical Nature of Deaf Employment Opportunities



Evidence of how changes in policy and practice affected Deaf employment could be seen in the data collected. When asked about the influences that led to the precipitous decline in the number of Deaf postal workers, Informant 2, who has been the union steward for Deaf postal workers in this region, since 1986, offered a few contributing factors. One of the reasons he offered was due to the USPS deciding "*not to hire 'handicapped' people anymore,*" (including Deaf workers). This informant also pointed to the negative impact seen of Deaf interest in postal employment, when the USPS decided to start making Deaf applicants take the entrance exams (unaided), and when the USPS began to openly discourage Deaf workers from applying, explaining to the would be Deaf applicants, that the few Deaf postal workers still in the postal workforce were "*bored.*" Informant 2 also explained how this discouragement led many in the

Deaf community to believe that the post office was no longer a valid option for career based work, instead seeing what few postal opportunities there might be, merely as temporary work. Informant 1 also pointed out that many d/Deaf individuals were turned off by the idea of having to start at the bottom (which he likened to the entry position of a janitor/custodian), to work their way up. This points to a significant difference between the Deaf collective work ethic shared by the informants (where they would take almost any position to gain entry, as they believe if they set a good example, they will be rewarded), and how many d/Deaf today (especially with regard to younger generations) do not share the same sentiments. This frustration is seen by many Deaf to be largely the result of changes in disability policy (IDEA/LRE, and ADA/SSDI), as is seen in his explanation;

I think many Deaf today; prefer living on SSDI, rather than working. That is a big problem. Because schools tell them to get SSDI when they are young rather than to encourage them to get training or go to special schools for certain trades.

Further evidence of these assertions can be seen in the article mentioned in Chapter 3 (as a document of interest in this study), aptly entitled *The Incredible Shrinking Clerks*, by Plilar (2002). The article, given to me by a member of the community (included below in Figure 4.6), also stands as testimony to the influences of a created state of historical exclusion, as my extensive search to find a better copy of the article to include in this study proved fruitless.

Figure 4.6. The Incredible Shrinking Clerks

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THE LOCAL RECORD

OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 2002

THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING CLERKS

Have you ever been slapped in the face by discrimination? Does it make your blood boil to be treated unfairly simply because you are a minority? Do you deserve to be ignored or set upon when the only thing you are guilty of is being different? Each of us must answer these questions within ourselves. You may be surprised to find out that the answer is not all that easy. The first realization that must occur is to discover if you truly are not in the majority. Who gets to boast that they are the group most besieged by prejudice and ignorance? Let me tell you who it is not. You are not in the minority in the U.S. Post Office if you are Black, White, Asian, or Hispanic. Being male or female is still a fifty/fifty proposition. Age is relative. There is no advantage to being older and wiser or younger and less experienced or somewhere in the middle. Nobody can tell if you are Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish from fifty yards away. It's like being Democrat or Republican. You have to ask the person their political affiliations or what religion they belong to before you can dislike them for it.

There is a group of Postal Employees who make up less than one per cent of the work force. How would you feel if you came to work and no one could talk to you because

they didn't know your language? This happens every day. These employees never get to attend stand up safety talks. They don't get phone calls. How many times have you had an important phone call at work? Somebody may have died, or your kid got sick at school. They can not bid by phone. They are the deaf and hard of hearing. In

1979 there were over 200 deaf employees in the Houston Post Office. They ran automated machines at the GPO. Today there are less than thirty. That means there is one deaf employee for every three facilities in the Houston District. If you believe that more deaf people have not been hired over the last thirty years because they are not as intelligent as the hearing then you are as bigoted as the Post Office. They are the incredible shrinking clerks. The Post Office does not want them. Why? It is because that even though we work for the largest communication company in the world, the Post Office does not recognize the need to communicate with them. They are too expensive to keep. Supervisors are not trained to talk to them. Management discovered it was much easier and cheaper to fire a deaf employee than to reason with them. The Post Office feels translators are too costly to keep on hand.



Larry Plilar

Editor

Hard of hearing clerks have been denied jobs because of their handicap. There are higher level bids where the job description calls for the employee to be able to convey verbal instructions to others. This may be only one of several requirements for the job but it is enough to deny any deaf clerk the position. Renovations have to be made, such as flashing lights on tow motors so areas of work could be safer for the deaf. That costs money. Emergency lights for fire drills drains the pocketbook. Don't dare mention training facilities for the deaf. That would be an "uncalled for" expense by the guys holding the purse strings. Have you ever seen a deaf supervisor? How about a deaf station manager? Maybe a general foreman? Postmaster? No. Nor will you. If you're not deaf then you haven't the faintest idea of what true isolationism is. You are alone. You are.....the true minority.

As this example demonstrates, the influence of Deaf postal historical exclusion could also be found in what was not seen. Informant 2 also pointed to being aware of the suppression about early Deaf postal workers, and censorship of current Deaf postal websites, but was unsure why. These same sentiments were echoed by Sonnestrahl, when he touched on some of the first Deaf/USPS relationships formed, but found he was puzzled as to why these events were never recorded. The most salient point here, it seems, is that; of the rich, vibrant and long history of Deaf postal workers I was able to uncover, albeit in pieces, not one person involved in this study, (including all six informants and myself) was aware. Of note, though this article speaks to the Deaf postal worker experience in Houston, it does not represent a Deaf view, as Deaf individuals who ascribe to the Deaf collective work ethic, would typically never take such an oppositional tone with regard to their employers. It is safe to assume this author is not Deaf, as he referred to

a lack of "translators" provided by the USPS, which anyone who is from the Deaf-World would refer to as "interpreters." This article was included, however because it was the only article uncovered through the research process that spoke to the Houston Deaf postal worker experience.

The assertion of the vicious and cyclical nature of control over the employment opportunities afforded Deaf workers is best demonstrated by reviewing the data collected throughout this study in the historical context in which these events took place (yet another reason to exclude Deaf workers from historical accounts). The article *The Right Decision* from the *Silent Worker* (1889, p. 4) presented in Figure 4.3, shows the elimination of the same two sections of the entrance exam that were eliminated again in the 1950's through Deaf social action (and reported by Sonnestrahl). In Chapter 2, the literature review, we saw the civil service "deaf" exclusionary ruling in 1906, which was altered through two years of Deaf social action, where in 1908, the civil service removed "deaf," but as was stated, the barriers to Deaf entry were still left largely in place (Buchanan, 1999). In the 1950's, as Sonnetrahl was advocating for a position with the Navy Department for an engineering position, the barrier seen was in the job description in that the requirement to be able to hear was considered a prerequisite for government positions requiring legislative action to make the alterations necessary for Sonnestrahl's successful entry into his chosen vocation, as he was consistently denied "*due to medical condition.*"

Similar changes were also reported by Sonnestrahl with regard to NASA, as it was just being established during the time in which he sought to secure employment. Similar barriers were seen with regard to Deaf mail carriers and drivers, where trial periods were required (for all

positions Deaf workers applied for). In Plilar (2002) also seen in Figure 4.6, we saw that postal promotions often contain the language of "must be able to verbally convey messages to others." Another barrier experienced by the informants was the expressed requirement of being able to use the telephone as the main reason they were never promoted to supervisory positions. What all of this boils down to is; while significant gains have been made by Deaf Americans in the past (including those explored in this study), they are illusory in nature as those who hold sway over the labor force, continue to treat the Deaf American labor force as the "silent 'B team' of the U.S. labor force."

Changes in community. To better understand the changes seen in community, we return to the interview of Walton, whose views and experiences were so similar to my own that I decided to make this section of her interview central to the discussion about community. Of note, while the concept of a SDC has been established, the SDC we seek to understand is of a small group of Deaf peers. While SDCs can be discussed on a statewide scale, what we touch on here is the much smaller Deaf collective community, of which there could be many, simply in the Houston area alone. This distinction is made here, as Walton will discuss the SDC her father led in its establishment, and the sociological ramifications of changes in policy seen across the three broad themes. Again, as stated throughout, the SDCs we seek to understand are peer based, peer focused, and peer established. In light of this understanding, SDCs will be discussed as such, focusing on Walton's interview responses, due to strikingly similar constructs seen from her responses, based on her lived experiences, and my own personal views based on my involvement in the SDC under study and supported by my professional experiences. As we explore the changes seen in the community from her perspective, we will draw connections to

both the informants' responses and my own experiences again, as a member of the SDC under study.

Walton responds here, to my query of how (in her opinion) the Deaf leadership qualities of the informants and previous SDC leaders (including her father) developed.

"I think that before the changes in schools for the Deaf, before ADA, and all the laws that came up for the 'free and appropriate education.' The schools for the Deaf were the hubs of everything, and well... Great leaders came from the schools for the Deaf.

....that era, probably up until the 70's, those were 'Strong Deaf.' If they came through and they played football and basketball for the school for the Deaf, and did all those wonderful things there; they had leadership qualities, I think.

I met with my parents' best friends who live in Corpus Christi, and about two weeks ago, I wanted to sit down and sort of talk with them because they are the last of that 1944 graduating class. And it was like we hadn't been apart; like it was 'going home week.'

And he's a rice farmer; a very prosperous rice farmer, down in Corpus Christi but we talked about leadership skills and those types of things, and they attribute a lot of that to the school for the Deaf that gave them that power.

And then they all wandered. And then of course, there is the Christian background that came into my parents, you know focus. And it came after they had kids, you know. And they got very active there and then that just enhances those leadership qualities."

I then pressed further in regards to early Deaf learning experiences and whether or not there were any programs today, similar to those reported by the informants, like the Boy Scout troop.

"No, because you know NAD (National Association of the Deaf) had those leadership camps. A lot of our leaders went off to those. We would try to find sponsors to sponsor them to go to those kinds of things. Camp you know, it... It's

a different world now and it has to do with... It goes back to public education. Those kids are not together anymore. They're staying home and we're seeing for example; my counterpart. The girl that took my job here.

Let's just talk about her for a few moments. I've been in this position for about 6 or 7 years. She is seeing so many of the Deaf people that are coming through that stayed here for their public education. They've been in jail. They've got felonies. They've got crimes.

You know; we just deal with their ears, and what you said a while ago about being a mental health counselor. You know; are you kidding me? Deaf people? They're just Deaf. They don't have mental illness. They don't have drug and alcohol problems... You know?"

The changes pointed out by Walton here are significant as we are just now seeing the long term effects of changes seen in Deaf education, moving away from schools for the Deaf to the mainstream. DVRCs must now grapple with addictions and criminal records, which create further barriers for Deaf youth, seeking to enter the world of work. Yet another issue pointed to here, is based on the lack of depth in the development of DVRC's understandings of Deaf persons, in that they have ascribed to the Deaf perspective of not being disabled, but to the point that serious issues are overlooked and merely attributed to their deafness. This points to yet another reason why it is critical to raise public awareness of the Deaf-World, in all its complexity.

The debate over whether or not Deaf individuals are "disabled" has been discussed at length and while Deaf individuals are clearly, legally disabled under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), they do not share the same philosophies that disability populations do in regards to their d/Deafness. As stated, the disability rights movement disallowed a Deaf voice in their efforts, as was seen in the dominant discourse, and by the lack of inclusion in historical accounts. Deaf people, in turn, see rehabilitation assistance as a means by which to "level the

playing field," through intervention on Hearing populations, including employers. This does not mean, however that d/Deaf populations do not experience other disabling conditions that warrant further scrutiny and attention throughout the rehabilitation process.

I then followed up on Walton's comment, restating the point she made in regard to the tendency seen in Hearing populations and many professionals who work within d/Deaf populations to attribute everything to their consumer's deafness.

"EXACTLY! They just look at their EARS! They never look at anything other than their ears, and I think that... I think that a lot of that is why we're not seeing a lot of things. We are just seeing a group of Deaf people that are just floundering."

Walton, when speaking to the VR focus on the "ears only," points to issues seen within the rehabilitation process, in that the focus, often falls squarely and solely upon the "ear" of the Deaf client. The point Walton makes here, is critical in that it speaks to the field of rehabilitation's overreliance on a Medical Model orientation to d/Deafness.

When a Deaf individual comes in for the first contact made with the DVRC, even though there are many other commonsensical methods of certifying one's deafness, including asking for past medical records, the DVRC is required to send the Deaf client to an audiologist to have their hearing checked. This can be extremely problematic and damaging to the whole of the rehabilitation process, when seeking to establish rapport, as it can be seen as the ultimate insult to a Deaf client. Many Deaf adults see audiologists and speech language pathologists as the epitome of the representation of abuses they experienced as children. As stated throughout this study, the main source of the marginalization of Deaf populations comes from the Medical

Model, and the control of information about Deaf populations, so they can, in turn, control the market for all deafness related services.

Deaf persons often see VR as a mere means to an end. The Hearing-World barriers faced in the labor force, often create a dire need for a DVRC's assistance, not in seeking to become more employable (as has often been assumed in the rehabilitation literature due to a pervasive presumption of deficiency attributed to their deafness), but more so as a job placement specialist. If a Deaf client enters into the rehabilitation relationship merely seeking an increase in employment opportunities but is instead met with more of the same Hearing-World barriers they've experienced throughout their lives, not only does this risk damaging the opinion of the individual Deaf client toward the DVRC, and rehabilitation services in general, but this can also lead to damaging the reputations of both in the collective Deaf community.

In the Deaf community, VR is often seen as either a means of obtaining new assistive devices (including a primary focus on hearing aids, or assistive listening devices, for those who choose to use them), or as stated, as a means of obtaining employment opportunities by gaining the DVRC's assistance in "getting their foot in the door." Again, from a Deaf-centered perspective, Deaf workers find themselves in need rehabilitation services, not primarily due to a deficiency of the self, but more so in dealing with Hearing-World barriers inherent to the world of work.

A DVRC may also feel a need to offer auxiliary aids or services as the technology offered a Deaf client raises the cost of service enough to be considered as "significant" toward a successful case closure. If the process is merely one of job placement, without significant cost to

VR, the DVRC will not be able to count the Deaf client as a successful case closure. This also points to yet another complication in collective employment opportunities for Deaf workers in that for DVRCs, there is not a sufficient means by which to gauge, track, and receive credit for closures that do not require significant amounts of money spent on each individual client, or outcomes that may come from within the community, should a shift from the individual focus to the community at large, occur.

While it makes sound fiscal sense to increase the number of successful employment outcomes per dollar spent, and decrease the cost of services for each individual client, to not spend more than is necessary, seeking to optimize expenditures, this could lead to less than desirable outcomes for the DVRC under the present system. During Sonnestrahl's interview, he pointed out that he calculated the VR cost per Deaf client to be around \$67.00, which, under today's system, would not be a sum large enough to be considered a successful case closure. But these more cost effective efforts led to the hiring of thousands of Deaf workers. This understanding brings to light yet another rehabilitation and world of work barrier for Deaf workers, in that the current system does not allow support for Deaf collective employment, which, when attending to the historical patterns touched on throughout this study, seems to historically be the largest employment factor for grassroots Deaf workers. This understanding presents us with a need to reevaluate the manner in which we serve the Deaf community if we are to be the agents of change we seek to be in the labor force toward increasing the number of employment opportunities afforded all Deaf workers. This reevaluation would also have to be revisited if the field of VR makes significant changes (as those suggested in this study) in providing more community based services, where Deaf persons would often be able to succeed

without rehabilitation services, by relying on the collective community for networking and seeking out other viable employment opportunities.

Walton continues the discussion of changes she has seen in Deaf client characteristics over her many years of service in VR and in the Deaf community.

"They don't have access to the role models they used to have... If they went to the school for the Deaf, they just went there for the last 2 or 3 years so they could play football, or be a cheerleader. And that's ok... And they're not all going to Gallaudet anymore. They're going to the local colleges. We have a HUGE program here at Lamar University; a PhD program.

It's just... It's different. I'm not saying they're not leaders. They're just leaders in a different way. I don't think they'll ever be leaders like the Butlers and the Piercys. I just... I don't know. And I might be so out of touch, that I'm wrong."

Walton here, in her discussion of Deaf leaders, points to the examples of the Butlers (which includes Informant 1) and the Piercys (her maiden name) as she expresses concern that she is not seeing the same Deaf leadership qualities in Deaf VR consumers now, that was seen in previous Deaf generations. While this phenomenon could negatively affect Deaf communities on a broad social level, within this study, and in regards to the collective employment migration this study seeks to understand, it is critical to point out that without Deaf leaders, the migrations might never have occurred. Further still, without the inclusion of Deaf leaders in the USPS employment collective, the SDC which supported the informants across the lifespan in work and community, might not ever have been established, much less be maintained to this day.

During the employment migrations touched on in this study, Walton and Sonnestrahl both pointed to the purposeful inclusion of Deaf leaders in the first collective cohorts of Deaf postal workers. While this is understandable from a professional perspective of seeking strong

examples to exhibit a solid, Deaf collective work ethic; we as rehabilitation professionals have to ask ourselves; "are we maximizing the full potential of our Deaf leaders, or are we arbitrarily setting limitations for them," by expecting them to remain in a position that, while it may offer a good career based employment opportunity, it may not be ideal for our best and brightest, if we are to maximize employment outcomes for all our Deaf clients.

Informant 1 pointed out he also saw this employment opportunity as his opportunity to show Hearing employers what Deaf workers are capable of. This points to an understanding that even if presented with greater opportunity, he may have still chosen to remain in the postal workforce, as he felt, at least in part, that to remain an outstanding Deaf example in the workplace, was to serve a broader social agenda. While men like the informants in this study have been silenced in dominant discourse, they still feel a duty to educate Hearing populations, whenever an opportunity presents itself to do so.

Walton continued to discuss changes she has experienced on both professional and personal levels, making note of her feelings of being somewhat disconnected from the younger generation of d/Deaf individuals.

"It was like when I went to Barnes and Nobles the other day and they were apparently sitting down, they were reading stories and there was a sign language scene and I looked and I didn't know anybody. And I thought; 'I'm supposed to know every Deaf person in the world.'

Its like 'PEOPLE, who are you?' You know? So it's just different and the way they communicate now; the access to communication is wonderful, I mean you know. There's so many wonderful things to help them. But I just don't know what we're going to do when we look back and see the people now, thirty years down the road. They'll probably just be blended in. We won't have 'big D's' and 'little d's.'"

While I understand the concern pointed to here, that one day we may not have Deaf leaders, like we have seen in the past, and that one day, d/Deaf people in general, will all be blended in, I strongly doubt it will ever come to pass. The reason I say this has less to do with Deaf views than those attributed to Hearing persons as Deaf individuals will never be able to fully integrate unless the Hearing-World changes significantly. Again, these comments point back to the assertion that the greatest barriers Deaf Americans face are not found within the Deaf, but in the Hearing-World. Until everyone can sign, both Hearing and d/Deaf, there can never be an integrated shift. Physical inclusion (as has been seen in the mainstreaming of d/Deaf students in Hearing environments) does not in any way shape or form, translate to social integration absent significant intervention on Hearing populations toward full access in regards to communication (where all Hearing persons would have to learn ASL) and social interactions between Hearing and Deaf peers would have to be able to take place without a need for ASL interpreters.

We then touched on the influences of Hearing-World views of Deafness, how they form and the sociological ramifications they have on the whole of the American population.

"A lot of it has to do with the media, and the way the media perceives and the stories that you hear in the media. Some of them are very positive, some of them aren't...

When I was growing up, and I'm not sure... And not you because you're so much younger than me. You're my kids' age. Ok... But... Growing up, I was very ashamed of my parents, you know...

You... That was when you went out in public and ate because everybody was staring at us. Everybody was whispering about us. You just see it all the time. But then, all of the sudden Sesame Street came on.

And Linda Bowe came on... You know... And she was doing sign language, and then you would go into a restaurant and people would run up to you and start signing to you, you know?

Because they had seen something positive about those things (that) before wasn't looked at as a positive thing. And I think that's a whole lot of it too. The 'Marlee Matlins' of the world, you know, they're not all like Marlee Matlin though. We can't put everybody in their own little bitty shell, but I think that both (Hearing and Deaf) have something to offer each other, and I think that they're getting it. I think our Deaf people are getting, because of, for lack of a better word; 'integration' into public schools, society, and everything else.

They're a part of everything else, so if they're not in 'Hall C' all the time but they're in all the halls of all the schools and they're all learning from each other, and they're participating. You've still got those leaders that are going to be a cheerleader, or a Deaf football player, on the Deaf, you know, football squad. I think it all has to do with the way they see themselves. And we haven't helped them and if we aren't educating them to give them a good self worth, were going to be right back where we started from. It's; 'how do you feel about who you are and what you do with what you've got?'"

The comment Walton makes here, expressing concern that "if we aren't educating them to give them a good self worth, were going to be right back where we started from," is enlightening, when one considers the cyclical nature of the historical patterns discussed throughout this study. After forty years in the system (and a lifetime of experience in the Deaf community), this may point to her developed understanding of how this cycle has repeated over the years.

I was also intrigued by Walton's comment about Linda Bowe on Sesame Street, then thought of the Deaf President Now (DPN) movement at Gallaudet University and remembering the impact the protests had on me, as a student in high school, seeing it unfold all over the news. I did not have a full grasp of what that meant on a broad, social level at the time, as I did not yet realize the full weight of what it meant, when the world was finally made aware of that which I had experienced my whole life, as I did not understand then, that the rich vibrant Deaf history I

had access to my whole life, was rendered completely inaccessible to the American people as a whole.

As I was writing this chapter, I couldn't help but be reminded of my personal childhood experiences with PBS when a series of shows filmed my family, seeking to shed light on the Deaf-World. I did, however, see similarities between our experiences, when I thought back to how Hearing people would take note of these televised events and alter their reactions when public exposure of Deafness increased. I shared my thoughts about DPN and its personal effect on me, when people started to ask all sorts of questions of me about the Deaf-World, seeking to gain an understanding of something they had never been exposed to before. Walton then explained how the DPN protest influenced public policy in Texas.

"In that same year, we got \$65 million dollars from the State Legislature to redo the (Texas) School for The Deaf. It had everything to do with the Gallaudet revolt. The legislatures had seen it, they didn't want it in Texas, and therefore they gave us what we wanted."

This exchange in regard to public awareness highlights the critical nature of how the created state of exclusion in dominant discourse negatively influences the lives of Deaf Americans and how quickly the Deaf experience can change for the better, once the general public is made aware of the Deaf-World. In this case, the positive affective change was seen in deepening the fiscal support of TSD, but what is the true cost of allowing Deaf recognition in media and discourse? Who profits from the created state of Deaf exclusion? As stated previously, the Gallaudet protests also (ironically) influenced the passage of the ADA, which was set to die in committee during the time in which the protests took place. But by sidelining a

Deaf perspective (yet again), legislatures and disability rights activists, further marginalized Deaf Americans, as the Deaf view, was not congruent with the views of either.

Chapter 4 Summary

This chapter sought to understand the informants' lived experiences, including two interviews, added to offer insights beyond those of the four primary informants. The added contextual, and historical data collected, offered the rich data needed to best understand the phenomenon of USPS Deaf collective employment, which as stated, has altered the presentation of the research findings. This chapter, described the informants' experiences, and explored the changes seen across each of the three broad, preset themes, that relate the research findings back to the historical patterns of Deaf collective employment. In summary, Figure 4.7 outlines the informants' behaviors in regards to the USPS collective employment opportunity and how this opportunity naturally led the informants to establish a new SDC in Houston (as was seen in previous migrations).

The research findings presented in this chapter will now be utilized in answer to the remaining research questions (2-5). In covering research questions 2-5 in the following chapter, we seek to develop understandings of how the informants' experiences led to their respective decisions to enter postal employment, the series of events that led to the USPS Deaf collective employment migration the informants took part in, how this collective employment opportunity led to the establishment of a new SDC in Houston, how grassroots Deaf workers successfully navigate the world of work, and how the collective aspect of Deaf culture influences the process. As stated, to better understand how the USPS/Deaf relationship began, and to add to our

understanding of the Houston Deaf postal worker experience, two additional interviews have been included.

Figure 4.7. Summary of Informant Behaviors in Migration and SDC Establishment/Development

- Deaf USPS collective employment opportunities developed through social action and networking to raise awareness on national, state and local levels.
- Informants' independence tempered by the realities of truncated opportunity structures and Hearing-World barriers in education and employment, leading them to seek out other options.
- Informants learned of USPS employment opportunities informally, via the Deaf grapevine.
- First cohort of 12 Deaf workers migrated to enter postal workforce. VR professionals included Deaf leaders, who they thought would establish strong Deaf examples.
- Trial Period for first Deaf cohort established viability of Deaf workers, leading to second, much larger (over 200) wave of Deaf workers.
- Informants established peer-based organizations (first organizations were sports oriented) in the community, which served to lay the groundwork for the establishment of the SDC.
- As the Informants matured, solidifying their positions in the postal workforce, they began to start families.
- Child rearing, and a need to establish a moral code of conduct for the community, led them to establish a church-based organization- solidifying the establishment of an insular signing community (SDC), which operated like an extended kinship network.
- The SDC became the primary source of strength and the main conduit of information sharing for the informants.
- Increased QOL, including the ability to obtain tenure in the workplace was achieved through collective interdependence, by establishing an ongoing system of social support, and by addressing collective areas of need, or concern, when SDC leaders identified these areas of need, and took action for collective benefit.
- As SDC leaders retired, their collective focus returned to the SDC, where Deaf leaders became increasingly active in the community, seeking to utilize their positions and skills to help those seeking to better understand the Deaf-World (both Hearing and d/Deaf), and encourage those seeking future employment in Deaf services.

Research questions 2-5 will be covered in the discussion section in Chapter 5, under the interpretation of the results. These questions, based on the informants' shared experiences will be explored further through discussion of the collective aspect of Deaf culture from the development of Deaf collective behaviors during the informants' early learning experiences, how this carried over into the collective Deaf work ethic, and finally how this collective aspect of Deaf culture led the informants to establish a new SDC in Houston.

Chapter 5: Interpretation and Discussion

Introduction and Organization

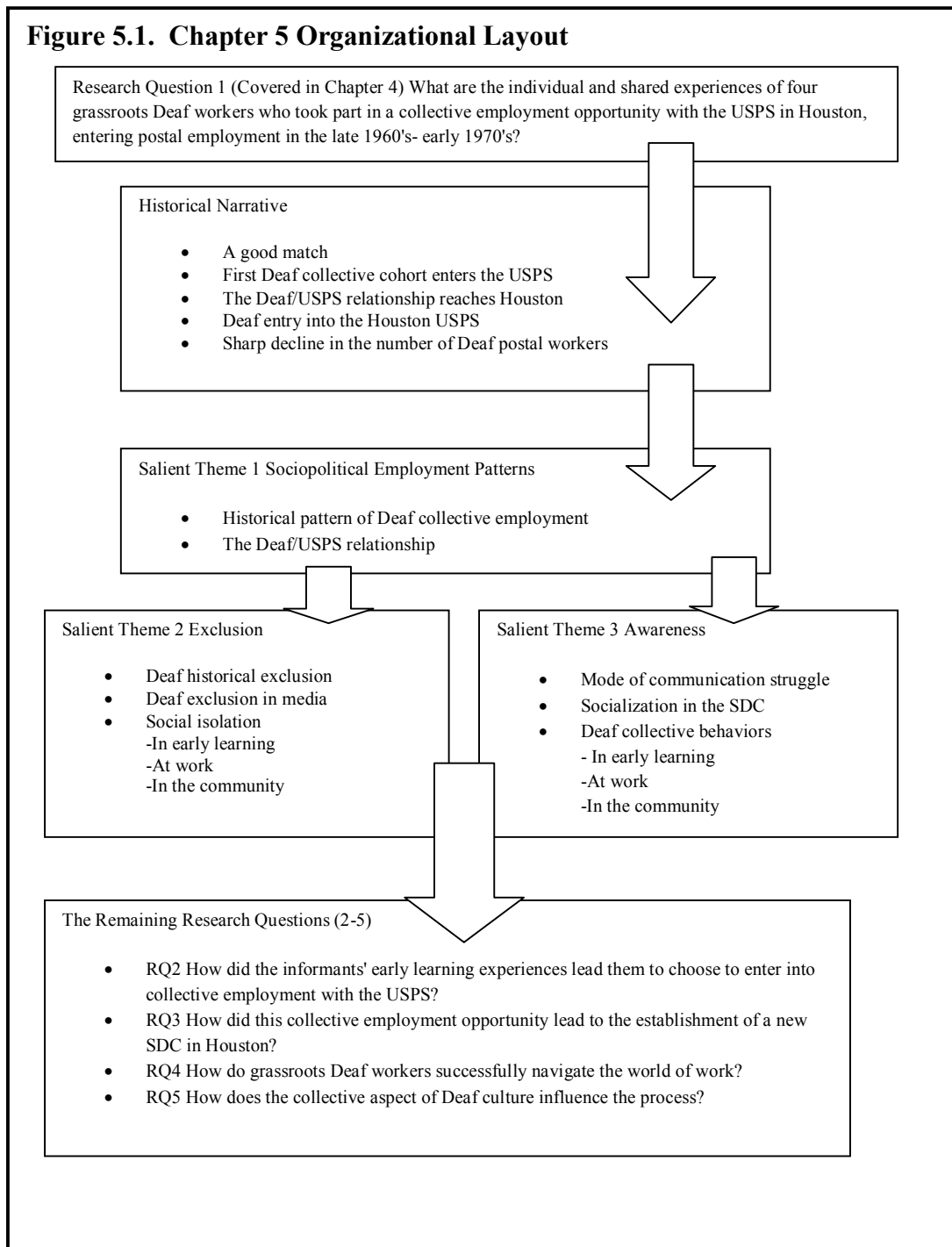
In Chapter 4, we dedicated the discussion to answering the first research question, developing understandings of the primary informants' individual and shared experiences (across the three broad preset themes). We also included two additional informants, who played key professional roles in the development of Deaf/VR/USPS relationships, to add depth to our understanding of the historical contexts in which the events under study took place, and to serve as two additional methods of data triangulation. This study covered a broad range of topics and as such, every tangential theme that emerged from the data cannot be covered. Given this understanding, coupled with the original intent of this study, which sought to develop a holistic representation of the primary informants' lived experiences, only the most salient themes (applicable to the development of the understandings we seek in answer to the remaining research questions) that emerged from the data collected, will be discussed in this chapter, prior to answering the remaining research questions (2-5).

Chapter 5 will be dedicated to exploring the remaining research questions. Of the remaining research questions, RQ2 sought to understand how the informants' early learning experiences led them to choose to enter the postal workforce, and RQ3 sought to understand how this collective employment opportunity led to the development of a new SDC in Houston. The expressed purpose in answering the first three research questions was to develop further understandings of; (RQ4) how grassroots Deaf workers successfully navigate the world of work, and (RQ5) how the collective aspect of Deaf culture influences the process.

As stated, this study seeks to offer the reader a holistic understanding of the events and phenomena under study. As stated in Chapter 3, this holistic approach is supported by the assertion of Lincoln and Guba (1985) that "there are multiple constructed realities that can only be studied holistically" (pp. 37-38). Without a working knowledge of the history behind the events under study, the sociopolitical historical patterns that emerged, the sociological influences, and what Ladd (2009) termed the collective sense of Deaf *Weltanschauung*, the discussion in this chapter would be incomplete. Given the dense nature of the interview findings, the two added informants and the resultant need to widen this discussion considerably as a result of the added data; Figure 5.1 is offered to the reader to assist in framing this chapter.

[In development of the understandings we seek, it should be noted again, that the discussions and interpretations are influenced by my position in this study (as an indigenous researcher/primary research instrument) and in my being a product of this community. I cannot divorce myself from my lived experience, nor has that been my intention. This bias, however, does not change the lived experiences of the informants, nor does it change the facts as presented. In Chapter 4, the informants' first names were decidedly used. This was due to both the impersonal nature of referring to people I have known my whole life with the title of "informant," and that the Deaf typically use of "sign names" that refer to first name only. In this chapter my aim shift toward taking a step back to evaluate the data as a whole. This is reflected in this chapter by my use of "Informant ___" in lieu of first names (as was seen in Chapter 4).]

Figure 5.1. Chapter 5 Organizational Layout



As seen in Figure 5.1, the data collected through interview study in answer to the first research question (presented in Chapter 4), will now be reorganized and presented here, in four main sections. As we move through the discussion of the organizational layout of this chapter,

we will also briefly discuss why each theme is important to the development of the understandings we seek in answer to the remaining research questions (2-5). Also seen in Figure 5.1; the first broad category included in this chapter focuses on the historical aspects of the events under study. This construct is included to offer an historical and contextual framework for the informants' lived experiences. Duran and Duran (1995) assert that;

Without a proper understanding of history, those who practise in the disciplines of applied social sciences operate in a vacuum, thereby merely perpetuating this ongoing neocolonialism. (p. 1)

While this study does not seek to delve into discussions of neocolonialism, if we substitute the "cyclical patterns" uncovered in this study (seen in Figure 4.5), for "neocolonialism" mentioned here, we might see that without including the historical context and the historical sociopolitical influences, we would be operating "in a vacuum" and this study would merely be perpetuating the cycle. With this in mind, we cannot develop the understandings we seek in answer to the remaining research questions without first developing understandings of the historical contexts in which the informants; chose to enter the postal workforce (RQ2); established a new SDC as a result (RQ3); successfully navigated the world of work (RQ4); nor could we understand how their success was influenced by the collective aspect of Deaf culture (RQ5).

Though not a primary focus of this study prior to conducting the informant interviews, the historical data uncovered throughout the research process could not be ignored as it also offers us greater depth of understanding of the sociopolitical influences in which these events under study took place. Within the first section of "historical narrative," we will explore the historical background of the events that led up to the USPS collective employment opportunity

the informants took part in and the historical context in which the informants' lived experiences took place. Once the historical narrative has been presented, we will then explore three broad categories of salient themes based on Sociopolitical Context (broad salient theme 1), Exclusion (broad salient theme 2), and Awareness (broad salient theme 3).

The first broad salient theme of "Sociopolitical Employment Patterns" situates the historical narrative within the greater sociopolitical and historical contexts of collective employment migratory patterns to situate the informants' lived experiences within the historical patterns that emerged through the research process, but also in tying this study directly to the patterns seen in this study's primary line of inquiry (Buchanan, 1999). Under the theme of Sociopolitical Employment Patterns, we will explore the historical patterns of Deaf collective employment and how the Deaf/USPS relationship followed the same pattern.

The historical contextual data (Figure 5.1) gleaned through interviews led us back to the historical patterns seen in Buchanan's *Illusions*, where sociopolitical patterns that had been repeated in the past were seen to have repeated again, leading to the increased postal opportunities afforded grassroots Deaf Americans, including the primary informants. The emergent patterns, of the sociopolitical ebb and flow of collective employment opportunities seen over time, also mirrored the findings of Koch and Rumrill (2003), touched on in Chapter 1, that persons with disabilities are the "*last to be hired and first to be let go.*" Again, while Deaf Americans do not see themselves as disabled, the Hearing-World does and continues to treat them as such. Support for this is seen in one response from Informant 2, when asked if the USPS was still hiring Deaf workers, explained that the USPS decided "*not to hire 'handicapped' people anymore.*"

The second broad salient theme to be discussed, "Exclusion" will be based on the sociological exclusionary themes, occurring within Hearing-World contexts, with which the Deaf must contend. Under the themes of Exclusion, we will explore Deaf historical exclusion, Deaf exclusion in media, and the social isolation (across the three broad themes) Deaf people experience in Hearing-World contexts. This discussion refers to the developed understanding from Chapter 4, of how the experienced Hearing-World barriers encourage Deaf social interactions, including the establishment of Deaf organizations as these venues were seen as the only venues where full communication access was experienced. Within the broad theme of Exclusion, we will explore Deaf historical exclusion; Deaf exclusion in media, and the informants' experiences with social isolation (again, across the three broad preset themes of early learning, the world of work, and in the community). Without a clear understanding of the socially isolating conditions inherent to the Hearing-World for Deaf individuals, one cannot develop understandings of Deaf social behaviors in the Deaf-World. In seeking to understand how this theme is central to the development of the understandings we seek, Higgins (1980) explains;

The point of the brief history which I presented is not just that the hearing have treated the deaf unfairly or even inhumanely. They have. The point is not even that the hearing have largely missed understood the deaf. They have done that too. The important point is that, based on various ideas about what it means to be deaf, the hearing have created a world in which the deaf live but are not fully part of. The bases of that historical relationship continue today. The deaf remain outsiders in a hearing world, and their lives can only be fully understood with that in mind. (p.27)

With this understanding in mind, the theme of Exclusion is presented in this chapter as the Hearing-World context the informants experienced as they ventured out into the world after TSD, and as a result, the catalyst for the collective behaviors that followed.

The early years of the Deaf social movement brought out ideological tensions: the dominant society sought first to segregate Deaf people from society, then to integrate them into the mainstream. The impact of dominant discourses was evident in the reign of oral domination in the education of Deaf people for more than seventy-five years. Members of the Deaf community remained active throughout this period: they were successful in establishing their own insurance company so that Deaf people could buy life insurance; they fought against legislation that prevented Deaf people from driving automobiles; and they continued to build community by establishing their own churches and organizations. But it was not until the 1960s that the Deaf community began once again to play an active role in strengthening their cultural identity in schools for the Deaf. (Jankowski, 1997, p.67)

This quote offers several clues as to why it is critical in the development of the understandings we seek to juxtapose the Hearing-World context with the Deaf-World context as they are closely tied to one another. What happens in the Deaf-World (including the informants' behaviors) is often seen to be a direct result of that which the Deaf experience (or do not experience) in the Hearing-World (as can be seen in the passage above in Deaf responses to Hearing-World barriers). The impact of oralism on dominant discourse is critical as it explains well the lack of Deaf centered discourse in historical accounts (as was seen with regard to the Smithsonian Deaf American historical exhibit that was never actualized due to the influence of oralists), in media exclusion of Deafness, and the mode of communication struggles inherent to the Deaf experience. The final point from this passage is seen in that the 1960's, the Deaf community became increasingly active in strengthening their cultural identity, during the time in which the informants were still students at TSD, and after they left to pursue their employment goals. That Deaf Americans became increasingly active during this period, also points to the considerable influence Deaf leaders had during this period, including social action toward the development of the USPS Deaf collective employment opportunities this study explores.

However, as was seen in Figure 4.5, the gains made were as illusory as those seen in Buchanan

(1999), as control of the discourse allows these Deaf employment gains to be erased, only to force Deaf Americans to repeat the vicious cycle, every time this occurs. This leads us into the next broad salient theme included in this chapter; "Awareness."

The final, third broad salient theme to be included in this chapter; that of Awareness, will be rooted in Deaf-World contexts, attempting to offer the reader both a Deaf sociological perspective (of Deaf/Hearing interaction) and discussion of Deaf experiences (in contrast to the exclusionary themes discussed under the previous broad theme) that led the informants to establish a new Deaf collective community(the SDC under study) that coalesced in part, due to the informants' shared needs to satiate the basic human desires in being able to; communicate in a language that is accessible to them; to converse to their highest level of intelligence; and to create spaces where their personal and collective growth (which directly influences the quality of life for its members) could be nurtured. Again, the views within the second broad theme of Awareness will stand in contrast to those discussed in the first broad theme of Exclusion.

The theme of Awareness (Figure 5.1) was included in this chapter, as it represents the sociopolitical and sociological inverse of the created state of exclusion seen in historical discourse. As was seen in the data collected, the previous theme of Exclusion was not limited to historical accounts, as the informants were all well aware of a pressing need for Hearing populations to better understand the Deaf. The theme of Awareness underscores the importance of seeking answers to the remaining research questions. As stated, the primary informants often saw the challenges experienced between the two populations, not as outright discrimination by Hearing persons, but more so as a lack of Deaf awareness in Hearing populations. In part, this is included in this chapter due to the implications this understanding holds for the field of

rehabilitation, as it points to a need for rehabilitation professionals to advocate on the behalf of Deaf consumers. This was also seen with regard to the informants' experiences with the VR process. Support for this assertion can also be seen in the body of rehabilitation literature from the time in which the informants utilized VR services to gain entry into the USPS. Fisher (1968) offering a rehabilitation administrative view of why Deaf individuals required rehabilitation services (at the time in which the migration under study began) explained;

We have found that the deaf coming here merely need additional preparation about the hearing world. We find that they do not need, as a group, much in the way of vocational training. They need to understand more about what goes on in the hearing world where they must compete for jobs; they need to know what employers expect; they need to know what kind of problems they will encounter on the job. (p.262)

Yet, as Walton explained during her interview, in regards to rehabilitation professionals who still tend to attribute all the complex issues Deaf individuals might face to their deafness;

"EXACTLY! They just look at their EARS! They never look at anything other than their ears, and I think that... I think that a lot of that is why we're not seeing a lot of things. We are just seeing a group of Deaf people that are just floundering."

In any event, raising the level of awareness seems to be the key to increasing both employment outcomes and the quality of life for all Deaf Americans, but in seeking to raise the level of VR awareness, the social aspects of Deaf communities (long ignored in the literature) were seen to be integral to the process of career development. In seeking to understand the critical nature of raising awareness, as stated in Chapter 1, Becker (1987) in her discussion of utilizing the Deaf peer group as a resource in counseling Deaf individuals explained;

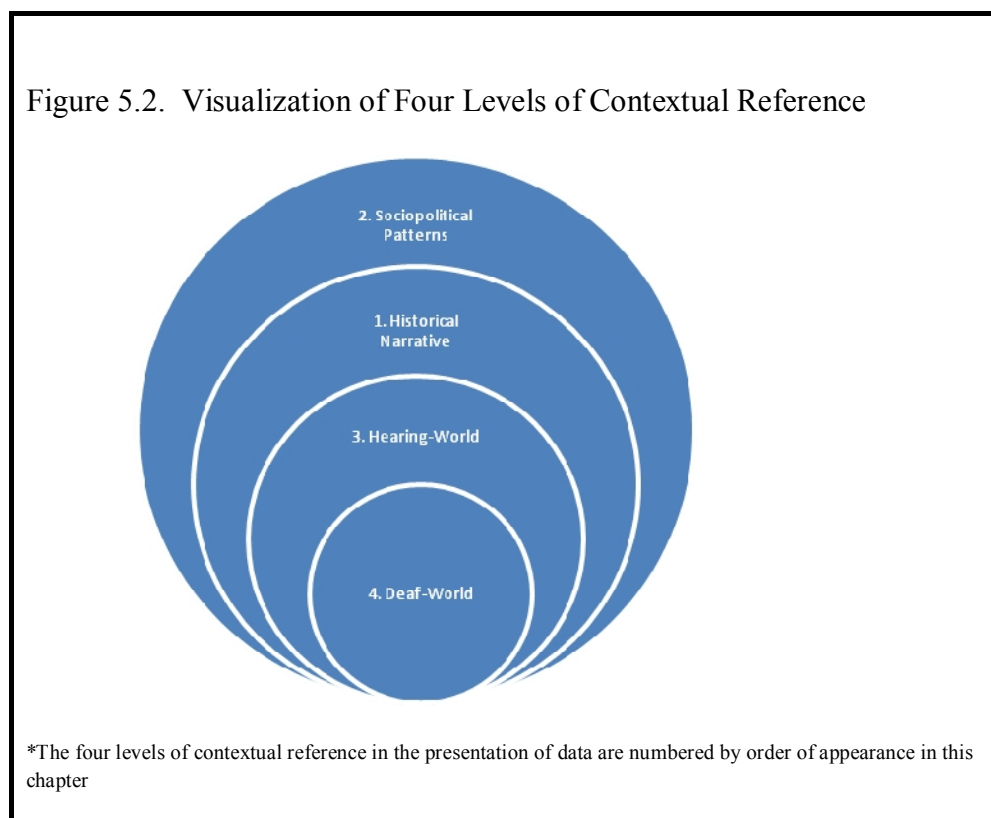
While groups of deaf peers are in the community, not every deaf person may be linked to them, indeed, persons who require considerable intervention by professionals may be those very persons who are isolated from the peer group and the deaf community. (p.77)

This excerpt provides further support, above what was seen in this study, by informant report, that the SDC offers resources the field of rehabilitation has yet to come to understand, or embrace, even though it may hold the key to improving rehabilitation services on a level of awareness that promotes the career development process for Deaf consumers, that could lead to a decrease in the need for formal rehabilitation services.

Seeking to offer the reader a discussion of these two broad salient themes (Exclusion and Awareness) in contrast, that exhibits characteristics akin to the contrast of perspectives between Deaf and Hearing populations. Under the theme of Awareness, we will explore the mode of communication struggles (from a Deaf perspective), socialization in the SDC, and Deaf collective behaviors (again across the three broad preset themes). By exploring these two broad themes in contrast; the social isolation experienced within Hearing-World contexts vs. the collective behaviors (seen to mediate the shortcomings experienced in Hearing-World contexts) that serve in shaping the SDC experience (representing a Deaf-World context), we seek to offer greater depth of understanding of how the Deaf interact with the world, to better understand how they behave in it.

To better illustrate the contextual layout this chapter will follow, a visualization of the four levels of contextual reference can be seen in Figure 5.2. The four levels of contextual reference have been enumerated according to the order in which they will be discussed in this chapter. As can be seen in this figure, we will begin with the historical narrative, establishing the historical influences that led to the migration under study. The next step will be to situate the events under study within the sociopolitical patterns seen in the data that tie directly back into the primary line of inquiry (Buchanan, 1999). Once the historical influences have been established,

we will explore the data through both Hearing-World and Deaf-World contexts to develop the understandings we seek in answer to the remaining research questions.



At this point, we have touched on the four levels of contextual reference we will use in framing this discussion, and all the salient themes we will explore within those contexts throughout this chapter. While every tangential theme seen in the data will not be included in this chapter, we have focused on the most salient themes toward developing the understanding we seek and answering the remaining research questions (2-5). The reader should now have a working knowledge of the framework this chapter will follow. As stated previously, in the discussion that follows, we will begin with a narrative presentation of the historical context in which the events under study took place. As we continue our discussion in this chapter, we will

use the same format seen in Figure 4.3, for the use of quotations pulled from the data collected throughout this interview study.

Historical Narrative

The sociopolitical influences in the employment opportunities afforded Deaf Americans followed closely the patterns of wartime gains and peacetime losses. After WWII, as support for Deaf industrial workers waned, Deaf workers were again unable to preserve the employment gains made during the war effort. The only preservation of Deaf jobs seen was in Akron where most Deaf men were said to still have their positions in 1945, a year after the close of the war (Buchanan, 1999).

During the 1950's, as Deaf Americans experienced a downturn in employment opportunities, some saw gains in access to institutions of higher learning. Though few of these institutions were equipped to handle Deaf students, some Deaf Americans were able to attend and successfully complete their post secondary education without the use of interpreters (as the profession did not yet exist). As was seen in Sonnestral's interview, he was able to succeed in his educational endeavors in part, through the use of funds set aside for blind students, where he was able to receive the accommodation of a "*note taker*."

In the late 1950's, Sonnestrahl graduated from college with a master's degree in engineering. As Sonnestrahl began his job search during his last year of studies, he quickly realized there were sociopolitical barriers in place that prevented the hiring of Deaf workers within government agencies. Sonnestrahl found himself repeatedly determined "*eligible*" for employment due to his academic achievements but he was also consistently determined to be "*ineligible due to medical condition*." During the time Sonnestrahl was struggling to secure

employment in the Washington D.C. area, he learned his friend's cousin who owned a restaurant knew of three "*key players*" in D.C. who frequented his establishment every Friday as they were all old friends from Texas. The key players; LBJ (Lyndon Baines Johnson), who was at the time a Senator, Homer Thornberry, then a Texas Representative, and Sam Rayburn, who was then the Speaker of the House. This restaurant owner happened to be sitting and talking with these three men one Friday afternoon when he learned that Thornberry's parents were Deaf. Thornberry and LBJ were childhood friends and LBJ stated that Thornberry's Deaf parents were like a "*second set of parents*" to him.

These connections, the efforts of LBJ, and the resultant changes in policy (based on the stated policy of an applicant's ability to hear as a prerequisite to be considered for employment) toward hiring Deaf workers ultimately led to Sonnestrahl's success in securing an Engineering position with the U.S. Navy Department. This struggle, which took place in 1958-1959, and the personal concerns Sonnestrahl developed toward the welfare of all Deaf Americans seeking employment as a result (including two younger Deaf generations in Sonnestrahl's family), led Sonnestrahl to become active in the human rights of all Deaf Americans. Sonnestrahl explained;

During that time there were many Deaf people around me who were attending colleges and we were all training to prepare ourselves for the world of work. There was a setback for many of us Deaf people in the working world with Hearing oriented rules. This Deaf group of people were frustrated that these Hearing oriented rules excluded them from the working world without meaning to. This made me decide to get involved with advocacy for the Deaf. I was doing that while I was working as an Engineer for the Navy Department.

These events led Sonnestrahl to attend his first NAD (National Association of the Deaf) conference in 1962, where he found Deaf leaders were already discussing the lack of a Deaf

presence in the post office. Due to Sonnestrahl's connections made during his own job search, he was asked to take the lead on this issue. Sonnestrahl explains how the leaders of the NAD:

... called me in to take the lead on that. So, I went there and they showed me what the entrance exams looked like for the Hearing people who wanted to work in the post office.

I remember very well that the test had five parts. The first one; was about numbers related to the post office. The second one was about memorization because of letter sorting. The third one was related to locating addresses. The fourth one was reading paragraphs (reading comprehension). The fifth one was about poems.

I was puzzled and I asked "what does this have to do with working in the post office." They said "the jobs for clerks were very boring so they need to be able to appreciate and enjoy the music while working."

I asked "What about the Deaf?" They did not realize that it was a barrier.

The exam barrier was eventually mediated, eliminating two unimportant aspects of the entrance exam and the groundwork was laid for Deaf entry into the USPS. Deaf entry into the postal fold however, did not come without challenge and the Deaf postal experience varied considerably, depending largely upon the views of postal administrators (typically the postmasters in each region but variability was also seen depending on representation in Washington).

Up in Flint, there were about 35 to 40 Deaf people working in the post office. The postmaster in Flint was very supportive of the Deaf workers driving. He also allowed them to drive. In Detroit, the postmaster was not supportive of Deaf workers driving. Three women were allowed to drive as carriers in Flint. In Detroit they allowed Deaf to be carriers but only to walk, not drive. One Deaf was allowed to drive in a six month trial. That carrier was observed.

Sonnestrahl, after having to navigate governmental procedures to successfully secure his position as an Engineer with the Navy Department, had not only made crucial allies within the Civil Service Administration, but his job was also in the Washington D.C. area, where the initial

Deaf/VR/USPS relationships were forged and where the first cohort of Deaf workers entered the USPS on the first trial period offered to Deaf Americans. Sonnestrahl explained when issues did arise; he was able to simply walk over to the Civil Service Administration office on his lunch break to address them.

In Washington D.C., at the Civil Service Office, Rose heard about it. I lived in Washington D.C. at that time. I spent my time shuttling between Detroit and Washington D.C. every two weeks. When I came to Washington D.C., I would visit Rose and give him the updates so he was aware of what was happening in Michigan.

Observational trial periods were common to all postal positions for Deaf workers, but greater scrutiny was given to positions not specific to the position of clerk. It seems as though the working relationship of key players like Sonnestrahl, and Rose directly led to increased opportunities within the USPS for Deaf workers. Sonnestrahl offered one example in reference to an increase in opportunities for Deaf carrier drivers and how his close working relationship with Rose played an integral role.

Those updates were good because in the last two weeks of that six month trial period for the Deaf carrier drivers, one carrier parked on the street to get out and deliver his mail. This carrier was Hard of Hearing but he heard the accident when another vehicle crashed into his postal truck. When they investigated the wreck, the other driver found out that the postal worker was deaf and blamed the wreck on his deafness.

However, the policeman investigating was aware that the deaf worker had parked correctly with the tires slanted toward the curb. The other vehicle that hit it knocked the postal vehicle over the curb. It was obvious that the Deaf postal carrier's truck was parked at the time of the wreck. Everything was fine for the Deaf carrier.

However, the post office was still skeptical about Deaf workers being very vulnerable in case of accidents. There was much discussion about it. I went to Washington D.C. to meet with Rose. We discussed it and agreed to try a one year trial. The post office people were nervous about that. One year passed and with the same two people, and there were no accidents. After that one year passed it was more acceptable for Deaf workers to drive post office vehicles nationwide.

Finally, they allowed the Deaf people to drive! True enough, more and more Deaf people were working in the post office everywhere.

The same concept (a trial period for Deaf postal drivers) was established in Lansing, Michigan with 30 Deaf people; then in Grand Rapids and in Kalamazoo. Hiring Deaf workers became more widespread. It spread to Chicago. It was a ripple effect that spread nationwide.

A good match. The first cohort of Deaf workers to enter the post office occurred in 1966-1967, in the Washington D.C. area with the support of Burke, the Washington D.C. area VR Director at the time. Deaf workers were said (as was seen in previous Deaf collective employment migrations) to have matched well the requirements of the job (this assertion is also supported by the understanding that the initial migration, occurring in Washington D.C., led to the hiring of hundreds in various large cities where LSM technology had been implemented). Additional support for this assertion can be seen in that all d/Deaf workers were given trial periods, in every city explored in this study there were two cohorts (small cohorts of roughly 12 first, then second cohorts a year or two after, where over 200 were hired in each location). Yet another positive characteristic attributed of to the informants that may have influenced the USPS to hire more Deaf, but also may have led to their being taken advantage of was seen in regard to their superiority in hands on work.

"Because everybody else was jabbering and ours didn't jabber, because if they jabbered, they wouldn't be able to do their jobs. And so there was, you know, unfortunately, there was some who used them, because they would work almost nonstop."

Further evidence that Deaf workers matched well the postal workforce demands can be seen throughout the informants' interview responses. In regard to early learning experiences, all four informants reported they were exposed to a wide array of vocational programs that were atypical to what was seen in the education of the general Hearing population.

The informants all reported to have learned a host of transferrable skills that aided them in their employment experiences before and after leaving TSD. Further discussion of the informants' early learning experiences, coupled with the informants' experienced limitations in the world of work, and how these experiences led them to enter into the postal workforce, will be seen in this chapter, in answer to research question 2.

[Subsequent conversations with my parents yielded new knowledge of active postal recruitment in Washington D.C., while they were students at Gallaudet University in 1968. I was surprised to learn that my parents both took the civil service exam during this time. My mother passed, but found herself disinterested in the opportunity, while my father was not as fortunate. He described the process as confusing without having an interpreter present (at the time they were not readily available) and all the directions provided were administered verbally by a Hearing postal employee. My father also pointed out the differences between this exam (which he took first) as opposed to the one he took later in Houston to gain entry into the USPS. With regard to the second exam he took, he explained that an interpreter was provided for the exam directions only and that the exam was specifically designed to match the labor demands of operating the LSM (letter sorting machine). The active recruitment of Deaf American laborers by the USPS also offers support for the assertion that Deaf workers matched well the demands of the positions postal administrators sought to fill.]

First Deaf collective cohort enters the USPS. The first cohort of Deaf workers entered into a trial period (common to all Deaf workers in this study including Sonnestrahl, when his application to the Navy Department was finally accepted) in Washington D. C., seeking to prove the worth of "hiring Deaf." The working relationships forged during this time between Deaf leaders, rehabilitation professionals, postal administrators, and the civil service office, strengthened. As these working relationships solidified and expanded, further alliances were made in locations across the country. These early efforts (which began in the nation's capital during 1966-1967), rapidly spread to the USPS migration under study, reaching the Houston area in 1969.

The Deaf/USPS Relationship Reaches Houston. Walton was a teacher in the Houston area prior to being recruited by Texas VR administrators in October/September of 1969. She was hired to take the lead as the DVRC who would be responsible for all the Deaf postal hires during the timeframe under study (late 1960's-early 1970's) specific to the Houston area. Walton's direct supervisor was White (who Informant 4 pointed out was previously one of his teachers at TSD, and the DVRC professional who alerted him to the USPS opportunity). Walton worked closely with White, Postmaster Elder, and "Elder Jr.," the postmaster's son who Walton explained "just happened" to also be the Human Resources Director in the Houston area at the time.

Deaf entry into the Houston USPS. Walton reported (as did the informants) that the Houston Deaf/USPS working relationship began with the first cohort of 12 Deaf postal workers entering the postal workforce in June of 1969 along with a second, much larger group of 125-200 Deaf workers entering in 1972. Walton stated she thought it was "125 or so," all four primary informants reported "over 200," while Plilar offered "over 200" in his article but offered no cited source for this estimate. Though the USPS does not maintain data on d/Deaf workers, Plilar (2002) stated that in 1973, there were over 200 in Houston alone. The numbers of both cohorts also followed the numbers seen in previous migrations of Deaf workers into the USPS and reported by Sonnestrahl.

Deaf leaders and Deaf workers who it was thought would exhibit a strong Deaf collective work ethic were purposefully selected for the first collective cohorts by professionals who sought to establish a strong Deaf presence in the USPS, seeking to encourage postal administrators to hire more. This endeavor was successful according to the data collected from both added

informants, as the first cohorts in each location discussed in this study were seen to have led to further Deaf hires in large numbers. This was mentioned by both Walton and Sonnestrahl as an integral aspect in the development of further employment opportunities for Deaf workers in the USPS. Walton explained how;

"You have to do a good job when you do it first. Your (Deaf) leaders have to be there."

This same influence (of a key professional with a solid understanding of both Deaf employment behaviors and how they are perceived) was also seen in previous locations, as was echoed by Sonnestrahl;

Well, I always picked the best Deaf people and placed them upfront; those who I knew would set a good example.

In 1969, 12 Deaf workers were hired in Houston as postal clerks to work on the newly installed letter sorting machines (LSM). By the time the second, much larger cohort of Deaf workers entered in 1972, the technology had evolved from the LSM to the ZMT (or zip mail translator which was for reasons unknown also referred to by some of the informants as "ZDT," apparently in error) requiring retraining of those who entered initially and increased workplace support in the training of those who came after. While the formal exams were waived for some of those in the second cohort of Deaf workers, Walton expressed she also created a modified exam by pulling two subtests from the GATBY (General Aptitude Test Battery) to assist her in weeding out some d/Deaf workers as "everybody wanted to work at the post office." The knowledge that there was such a strong response from grassroots Deaf workers during this period may point to shared experiences with limitations with the world of work for Deaf workers (as was reported by all four informants).

In Houston, the Postmaster at the time (Elder), his son (referred to as "Elder Jr."), who worked in the human resources office, along with Walton developed strong working relationships where workplace support from VR was central.

"So that didn't hurt us because that was really our connection because they were doing this in other cities in Texas, before it hit Houston. But just like you said if the top person doesn't want it to happen, it's not going to happen."

"I was there just to do 'hands on' because I wanted to make this work with Elder. And I promised him I would be there most of the time. I also had other interpreters there too, but I was there to watch it and make sure we weren't having any flubs.

They all went to work in the middle of the night. So, I went to work with them, so that they could understand the process and make sure the support was there."

Workplace support was not limited to Deaf workers, as Walton explained, there was also support offered to Hearing postal workers, seeking to bridge the communication gap.

"I know that we taught sign language classes there. I had someone come in, it wasn't mandatory that anyone take them. It was done 30-40 minutes before their jobs started and after for the ones that wanted to learn, we were able to combine that also."

The working relationships forged between postal administrators, grassroots Deaf workers and rehabilitation professionals led to increased opportunities for Deaf workers in Houston (as was seen in prior locations). These working relationships were critical in the training of Deaf consumers for postal employ, but as technology changed, there was no longer a support structure in place (as rehabilitation professionals had closed all Deaf consumer cases) to assist Deaf workers in training for other positions within the postal workplace. As changes in the work environment increased, so too did miscommunications, misunderstandings, and confusion over workplace demands.

While Deaf workers in other locations were allowed to assume various positions within the USPS, all of the informants in this study remained postal clerks for the duration of their careers. Sonnestrahl pointed to support for Deaf positions as mail carriers and drivers, but no similar cases were reported of Deaf postal workers specific to the Houston area. In part this seems to be due to the lack of representation in the nation's capital for Deaf postal workers specific to the Houston area. As was seen in Sonnestrahl's interview, when issues did arise during the trial period for Deaf postal workers entering into these other positions, he was able to walk over to the Civil Service Administration Office on his lunch break to resolve them. Given this same level of advocacy was not seen in Washington for postal workers in Houston, it is assumed that this may be the greatest contributing factor in the informants being confined to the positions of clerks for the duration of their careers.

As young Deaf men, the informants migrated to the Houston area to enter the postal workforce, supporting each other in various ways, by living together, pooling their resources and by offering each other a system of social support that would follow them throughout their lives. Soon after the informants arrived in Houston they quickly began to establish Deaf-centered sporting events and organizations, seeking to bring Deaf individuals together, mediating the telecommunication barriers Deaf individuals experienced during this period.

The first organizations established were based on sporting events, serving as an extension of how the informants interacted with each other as students at TSD. While there was an established Deaf community in Houston from the previous Deaf generation, the informants were not yet entirely connected to it and a peer based focus was seen as integral to the development of the SDC under study. The various organizations the informants established evolved over time,

as did the needs of the informants, which will be further discussed in this chapter, in answer to research question 3.

Sharp decline in the number of Deaf postal workers.By informant report, we learned that support for Deaf postal workers waned as postal technology changed, decreasing the amount of "hand work" available. The positions based on "hand work" were thought to be the only positions Deaf postal workers could assume and the USPS reportedly had no interest in retraining Deaf workers for other positions. As Informant 1 explained;

Many Deaf back then were not allowed to do work other than working with the LSMs because of a lack of communication. The post office thought the Deaf couldn't do other jobs because with the lack of communication, the post office couldn't train them for other positions. We didn't have interpreters. Therefore I had to prove, time and time again, that I could do other work by moving around and actually doing the work.

By this time however, rehabilitation support was no longer present in the USPS, as it had been well over a decade past the point of successful case closures (90 days post successful placement). The economic downturn experienced in the 1980's (mentioned by Informants 1 and 2) also contributed to increased challenges for Deaf workers (which also reportedly led to the demise of the large Deaf congregation at Westbury Church of Christ).

The issues faced by Deaf workers during this time led Informant 2 to assume the role of a union steward for Deaf postal workers in 1986; a position he still holds today. Along with these changes in the workplace came the regression of gains made previously. The USPS examination policies (once amended to allow for Deaf entry) were reinstated (as a significant barrier to postal employment for many Deaf Americans). This assertion of control over the examination process was found to be cyclical in nature as one article from *The Silent Worker* (1889, p.4), which

was provided as evidence in Chapter 4 (Figure 4.4), showed the same exam accommodations made in the past for Deaf workers. Informant 2 also mentions this shift in policy and of the general change in the USPS deciding "*not to hire 'handicapped' people anymore*" (including Deaf Americans). Informant 2 explained;

My concern is that the post office is waiting for the number of Deaf employees to dwindle. I am not sure about the future of Deaf employees in the post office. That is something that worries me.

Other contributing factors reported were the reinstatement of periodical exams to continue in the workplace, miscommunications, lack of training of postal administrators in regards to d/Deaf populations, confusion over postal policies/procedures, the USPS actively discouraging the employment aspirations of d/Deaf workers in the community and the unwillingness of postal administrators to train or retrain Deaf workers for other positions within the post office. All four primary informants in this study also pointed to d/Deaf workers entering in 1972, who did not exhibit the same Deaf collective work ethic they possessed as having a negative impact, creating conflicts between both Deaf postal workers who did exhibit this collective work ethic, and postal administrators who initially assumed all d/Deaf workers were the same.

Once the USPS reinstated periodic exams for Deaf postal workers Informant 2 explained there was a process that allowed those who failed to retake the exam and continue working but many of those who did not pass thought they only had 30 days to work and then would be out of a job. He also explained how the lack of d/Deaf understanding of postal policies and procedures led him to become more active in the union, as he sought to assist those who were losing their jobs, in essence, due to misunderstandings/miscommunications.

As previously stated, based on the data collected throughout the interview process, there once were over 200 Deaf postal workers in the Houston area. Presently, few remain and most of those who are left are nearing retirement. Similar numbers were seen in Sonnestrahl's responses in regards to the migrations he was involved with in Washington D.C., where this phenomenon occurred first and in Detroit.

It is assumed, based on the data collected, that similar numbers (including the sharp decline) were seen in other geographic locations where Deaf workers were hired in similar fashion. The events that occurred in Washington D.C. seemed to have served as a model for subsequent migrations. Without data specific to every city in which Deaf migrations occurred, we cannot answer how many cities saw similar migrations, nor are we able to offer the exact numbers seen in these various locations.

Now that we have presented the historical data uncovered during the research process in narrative form, we will now situate this historical narrative in the context of the sociopolitical employment patterns of the opportunities afforded Deaf Americans, tying the migration under study to previous migrations seen in this study's primary line of inquiry (Buchanan, 1999). By broadening the historical discussion to include the historical patterns of Deaf collective employment, we will be adding greater depth to the discussion, as this will offer the reader a deeper understanding of the systemic barriers, external to the Deaf worker, that were seen to be the greatest challenge to gainful employment for the Deaf.

Salient Themes

The salient themes discussed in the following sections, all tie directly into influences that contributed to the informants lived experiences in school, work and community. As was seen in Figure 5.1, the salient themes to be discussed in the following sections will be split into three broad contextual themes. The first, seeks to offer the reader the sociopolitical employment patterns based on the ebb and flow of the collective employment opportunities afforded Deaf workers, which this migratory experience followed. The second theme of Exclusion, based in a Hearing-World context, explores the exclusion of Deaf Americans in discourse, and the informants' experiences with social isolation (across the three broad preset themes) in the context of a Hearing-World not of their making, but one with which they had to contend. The third theme of Awareness, based in a Deaf-World context, explores the mode of communication struggle (from a Deaf perspective), socialization in the SDC (again from a Deaf perspective) and Deaf collective behaviors (again across the three broad preset themes), which stand in contrast to the Hearing-World contextual themes that will be discussed under the broad theme of Exclusion. When we have reached the end of the discussion based on these three broad themes, we will use what we have learned to answer the remaining research questions (2-5). As we move through our thematic discussion, we will tie the themes back to the literature where applicable to add depth and clarity to the discussion.

Sociopolitical employment patterns. Exploring the sociopolitical employment patterns uncovered throughout the research process allows us to situate the findings from this study in the broad historical context we explored, as the patterns seen were derived from Buchanan's *Illusions* (1999). These patterns allow us to develop broad understandings of the sociological

and sociopolitical influences that directly impacted the informants' lived experiences. As seen in Figure 5.2, by adding the contextual information, this study seeks to understand the influences these contexts had on the phenomenon under study. Once we have explored the patterns, we will then shift our discussion to the Deaf/USPS relationship this study explored, tying the findings from this study to those historical patterns, demonstrating how the migration under study, mirrored those of previous Deaf collective employment migrations.

Historical pattern of Deaf collective employment migrations. The historical patterns of Deaf collective employment were established by the work of Buchanan (1999) who outlined what I've termed "Deaf collective employment migrations" occurring during WWI and WWII, where Deaf Americans were actively recruited during wartime labor shortages. As stated throughout, this study picks up on Buchanan's line of inquiry as the events under study point to the phenomenon of Deaf/USPS collective employment being the next migration after the time period covered by Buchanan (1850-1950).

Buchanan also documented the Silent Colonies that coalesced around these collective employment opportunities, established by Deaf laborers after migrating to enter the workforce. These Silent Colonies, as named by those who established them, represent patterns of Deaf behaviors in that once Deaf Americans migrate to a new geographic location for employment, they seek to develop Deaf-centered organizations that offer Deaf workers not only a vibrant social life, but also serve as the main conduit of information sharing (as evidenced by data collected in this study).

In this study, I refer to these Silent Colonies as Strong Deaf Communities (SDCs), borrowing the term from Groce (1985) who discusses SDCs as insular signing communities after

explaining she was unable to locate one at Martha's Vineyard where everyone, both Hearing and Deaf, could sign. While the concept of an SDC could be defined in a number of ways (local, city, state, or nationwide) I use this term in this study to represent peer based collective communities where collective growth and extended kinship networks are seen due to the significance these insular communities hold for the field of vocation rehabilitation.

A newly developed peer based SDC resulted from the Deaf/USPS migration under study in the Houston area. The SDC was born from the organizations the informants established and maintained throughout their careers, continuing to this day. The SDC will be discussed further throughout this chapter and how this particular SDC came to be as a result of the Deaf collective employment migration will be discussed in detail, in answer to research question 3. The Deaf collective behaviors seen in the SDC will also be further discussed under the broad theme of Awareness, where we will explore Deaf collective behaviors across the lifespan (by again using the three broad preset themes) to be used in answer to research question 5.

Buchanan (1999) found that leaders of Industry who once embraced Deaf workers, due to labor demands eventually pushed all Deaf workers out of their labor force and the Deaf-established "Silent Colonies" disappeared save those in one location (Akron, Ohio). In Akron, most Deaf men were found to have maintained employment one year after the end of WWII, in 1945. The collective successes of Deaf workers in Akron were seen by Deaf leaders of the day, to be the prime example of Deaf industrial employment success. While some jobs were saved, the Silent Colony established in Akron, was left fractured and weakened. In this study, we learned that the informants were all able to maintain employment and achieve tenure in the

workplace. The SDC the informants all worked to establish and maintain,also remains to this day.

[Interestingly, Informant 1, whose Deaf uncle who influenced his feelings of responsibility within the Deaf community, was also one of the factory workers in Akron who was able to maintain his position in Akron. This uncles eventually left Akron to assume larger leadership roles as both a coach and teacher at TSD. He also later became a superintendent of the vocational training school at another state school for the Deaf, where he worked until retirement. Informant 2 (the other Deaf of Deaf Informant) also had ties to the previous Deaf generation's employment experiences as several of his Deaf family members (including his parents) also worked in the factories during WWII. This points to the potential for significant intergenerational influences in Deaf populations in regards to cultural transmission of Deaf epistemic knowledge of the world of work and how to achieve success in it.]

The Deaf/USPS relationship. In seeking to understand how grassroots Deaf workers successfully navigate the world of work (as will be explored in answer to RQ4), one final but fundamental influence that affects the employment experiences of all Deaf Americans is seen in the Hearing-World barriers inherent to the U.S. labor force in general. While the body of rehabilitation research has focused largely on individual deficiencies in Deaf populations the greatest barrier the informants faced was seen by the SDC, not in their personal characteristics or deficiencies in the process of career development, but in the limitations imposed upon them by the Hearing-World contexts in which they lived and worked.

The data collected through this study would suggest that this study documents the breaking of the postal service entry exam barrier for the first time in U.S. history within the USPS but upon further inspection and research this was found to be false. It has long been known that various entities (including the United States Civil Service) utilize examinations in their endeavors to control the labor force. The struggles of Deaf collective social action in seeking to end the discriminatory practices of the civil service in barring all Deaf workers from merely taking the civil service examinations were noted by Buchanan (1999) as occurring in

1906-1908 (ending when Deaf leaders were successful in achieving their goal of the removal of "deaf" from the exclusionary ruling) and touched on in Chapter 2 of this study.

What has yet to be documented is that this phenomenon has occurred specifically with regard to Deaf Americans and postal employment on at least one occasion prior to the migration under study. Evidence for this assertion was seen in Figure 4.4, which pointed to the possibility of at least one previous Deaf/USPS collective employment migration as the entrance exams were amended (in similar fashion, eliminating the same two sections Sonnestrahl reported eliminated previously though Deaf social action in the 1950's) to allow for Deaf entry into the USPS in 1889.

As was discussed in Chapter 2, evidence was uncovered during the research process of a long history of Deaf postal workers dating back to the Railway Mail Service, including anecdotal reports of several Deaf postmasters and a Deaf postmistress, though all well outside the timeframe under study (articles found were from 1800's-early 1900's). Unfortunately no one involved in this study was aware of there ever having been a Deaf postmaster, pointing to yet another negative impact the historical exclusion of Deaf postal workers has had on the informants. The long, rich history of Deaf postal workers uncovered throughout the process (but again, well outside the time frame under study), which included multiple Deaf postmasters, and one Deaf postmistress, was unknown to us all.

Exclusion. Exclusion is a common theme seen throughout this study. While the exclusion of Deaf Americans comes in many forms, we seek to understand how experienced exclusion (based on Hearing-World barriers) leads to the development of insular signing communities that seek to offer full inclusion to all people (d/Deaf or h/Hearing and everyone in between). While

the Hearing-World is full of Deaf experienced social barriers(both created and otherwise), the Deaf-World is far more connected as a collective community for its members. While this study centered on the small insular signing community (SDC), the Deaf-World is often seen as global in its construct by an international Deaf community, connected to each other through shared struggles in seeking acceptance of their revered signed languages and respective Deaf cultures. Joined by the similarities of a shared visual/manual language, all Deaf cultures share the same struggles within their respective Hearing-World contexts. Linguistically, all signed languages share a common base in manual/visual communications that affords Deaf populations of the world greater access to a unified global Deaf community than that which is seen in regards to spoken languages. In terms of linguistic and intellectual aptitude, within the Deaf-World, there are few limitations experienced by the Deaf, but in the Hearing-World, the exclusionary practices of dominant populations have created a world in which the d/Deaf must contend, but are not allowed full access to.

Deaf historical exclusion. Exclusion is a common theme seen throughout this study. As stated in Chapter 4, this exclusion leaves many Deaf Americans feeling powerless to combat the vicious cycle represented in Figure 4.5. Lane (1999) opined the main source of this to be the medical community, which stands to lose thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of dollars per deaf child, if Deaf views were readily accepted by the general public. Ladd (2009) also pointed to the manner in which the medical community via the Alexander Graham Bell Association (the leading oralist organization) silenced the entire American Deaf Community by successfully suing the Smithsonian to block what would have been the first Deaf American historical exhibit in 1993, once again silencing the "Deaf voice." To this day, the endeavor to establish a Deaf American exhibit in the Smithsonian has not yet come to pass. However, the history of

oralist technologies (the advent of hearing aids, and cochlear implants) has been documented through Smithsonian historical exhibits. Yet the medical community and oralists do not stand alone in their endeavors to silence Deaf Americans, as their worldviews are all congruent with that of the general American (Hearing) public (whether through shared ignorance, feelings of English/speech/hearing superiority, or broadening the application of a long history of expectation toward immigrants to assimilate upon arrival).

Most people do not realize the full weight of how discourse has shaped their opinions and worldviews about Deaf populations. To understand the "Deaf-Way," or Deaf-World views, one would have to imagine Deaf Americans as yet another native American population cast as "the other" (Lane, 1999). This population of early Deaf Americans lived in communities where everyone (both d/Deaf and hearing) could sign (Groce, 1985). Social isolation was not a common Deaf experience then, because deafness and a natural/manual-based language for a visually oriented people were accepted by all as natural occurring phenomena. Sign language in this community was commonsensical, necessary, and the *only* language that was, *fully* accessible to everyone. Unfortunately, soon after the "discovery of the Deaf American other," the population, hereditary deafness, and sign language became looming threats to be feared by American society. These early Deaf/Hearing interactions led to Deaf Americans ultimately having to concede to a position of charity in exchange for an education (Buchanan, 1999). This point marked the beginning of a deafness discourse, which was entirely created by Hearing people investigating the quintessential native "other." Deaf Americans not having documented much in written form were vulnerable to the image that was created for them that placed them on the defense from *discourse about them*, seeking to increase *awareness of them*. This marked the

beginning of what Lane (1999) referred to as "the disabling of the Deaf community" in dominant discourse.

While the 1960's- 1970's was a time of progress for many minority populations from both civil and disability rights movements (including increased opportunities within the postal workforce as mentioned in Chapter 2), Deaf American gains during this time (in part, recorded in this study) were as illusory as those mentioned in Buchanan's *Illusions*. Given the understanding that Deaf Americans are still not yet documented, they are still left vulnerable to discourse they have never been able to gain control of.

Without a working knowledge of these events, without a clear understanding of how Deaf Americans were once the experts of their own "ways of being in the world" (including clearly owning, without contestation, the status of being the experts in both their education and employment), only to have it all stripped away through control of discourse, one barely has a working knowledge of what it means to be Deaf in America today.

Unfortunately, this study was not meant to offer an inclusive sociopolitical account of Deaf history (or Deaf postal history), but these influences are mentioned here with hope that some will seek to further their knowledge of the Deaf-World, beyond what is offered here. It is also hoped this will also lead others to call for further research. It is not known for certain every possible influence that has contributed to the exclusion of Deaf documentation on such a grand scale, other than the negative influences of oralism, a lack of (or allowance of) a Deaf presence in either the civil rights or disability rights movements. With regard to the USPS, the National Postal Museum and the Smithsonian, were Deaf postal workers to widely possess the knowledge of their own postal histories, it might lead them to aspire to greater heights within the postal

workforce. If Deaf gains in education and employment were not only developed but secured (and documented), the disabling of Deaf Americans might cease, and true social integration might begin.

In Chapter 4, we pointed to a few examples of past Deaf experiences in the USPS. While we may not have a full grasp of the whole of Deaf postal history, we do know that Deaf workers were actively recruited by the USPS several times throughout history. Informant 2 offers yet another example of a Deaf presence prior to the informants' time at entry, speaking of an older Deaf man he met at a Deaf social event, likening his brief conversation to this one, much older Deaf postal worker to others he has met over the years.

When those Deaf employees became older, they would talk about their experiences in the post office. I met one, much older, Deaf man who used to work in Virginia. I was shocked. I said "WHAT?"

I asked him "when did you start working for the post office?" His reply was "1930's." I was shocked because I had never heard of that before. I asked how he got a job with the post office. That person said a friend pulled him into working at the post office. The post office liked him because he never wasted time talking and he never complained. He said he never even said he needed to go to the restroom. He stayed on the job the whole time. The post officereally liked his work and kept him. That is how the post officestarted hiring more and more Deaf. They thought all the Deaf people were the same as that man. In fact, it is not always true. They're not always the same.

This excerpt is of interest for several reasons. The first is the manner in which he describes a common behavior of older Deaf generations, in that it wasn't until they "*became older*" that they would talk about their experiences. Often, as was seen in past Deaf generations, (and related to a collective orientation to the world of work), they often chose to blend in as much as possible, by never "sticking out," or drawing too much attention to themselves. This assertion is also supported by the language the older Deaf postal worker uses in describing his

work experience in that the post office *"liked him because he never wasted time talking and he never complained,"* and that he expressed that *"he never even said he needed to go to the restroom,"* pointing out that he *"stayed on the job the whole time."* From an "older Deaf" perspective; to have discussed their experiences while they were still employed, could have cost them their position.

The next point seen here is the obvious excitement with which the informant learned of elder Deaf postal workers having entered the USPS previously, which points to an immediate and positive emotional response from the informant, in knowing of Deaf postal successes that came before him. While there are obvious negative consequences for those eliminated from discourse, this points to a potential positive influence that future historical inclusion could have for the informants, for all Deaf postal workers, and also possibly Deaf Americans in general. In light of this understanding, seeking to include Deaf successes in historical discourse isn't necessarily confined to seeking social justice. As can be seen here, regardless of answering the "how" or "why," sometimes an improved quality of life for others should be the only consideration given in the quest to raise the general public's level of Deaf awareness.

The last point of interest in this passage, is seen in that this discussion points to yet another active recruitment of Deaf workers for postal employment during the 1930's in Virginia, based on the "Deaf collective work ethic" example where one Deaf worker was seen to represent all Deaf workers, leading to what could have been another collective employment migration.

Whatever the reasons for not documenting Deaf postal workers, we do know that the USPS treatment of their d/Deaf workers is very different than the manner in which they treat other minority groups, as can be seen (or not seen) in Saunders (2010) and Plilar (2002). This

point was also made evident in Informant 2's response to a query of why he felt there was such a sharp decline in the number of d/Deaf postal workers.

Because the post office itself decided not to hire "handicapped" people any more. That conflicted with their contracts. The union is fighting with USPS about that. The post office hired other minorities like; Indians, and black people. Right now, there is a large number of black people in the USPS. Also the post office hired Hispanics for equal employment. The number of Deaf employees continues to decline. The post office decided to make the Deaf people take the tests (unaided). The Deaf people were failing the tests. So Deaf interest in the post office declined because of the testing requirements.

Again, regardless of how d/Deaf individuals see themselves, the USPS sees them all as "handicapped." This distinction is rather telling, in that as a disability group, the Deaf have no power to combat discriminatory practices (as the USPS is exempt from the ADA), and since Deaf Americans are not widely accepted legally, as anything other than a disability group, they experience little (if any) protections under civil rights statutes either. This also allows the USPS the authority to use the examinations (at entry and periodically post-hire) to control the number of d/Deaf postal workers in the postal workforce, at any given time. While we are unable to offer a full historical account, we have seen in this study a pattern of a consistent ebb and flow of Deaf postal employment opportunities, where presently, demand for d/Deaf workers is on the wane.

The post office decided they no longer wanted to hire Deaf people. The post office is stuck with the Deaf employees that they have now. However, the number of Deaf employees is dwindling.

As was mentioned by Sonnestrahl, and as will be further discussed in Chapter 6, the USPS was not the only federal agency during the timeframe under study to actively recruit d/Deaf workers. Unfortunately, this could point to the exact same methods of control in other federal agencies as well. This may also have played a significant role in the rate increase of

d/Deaf unemployment discussed in Chapter 1. Seeing that Informant 2 also points to a no hire policy for all "*handicapped*" workers, coupled with the understanding of postal ADA exemption, this could also point to another contributing factor in the disproportionate effect of the economic downturn seen in the general disability population (also mentioned in Chapter 1).

Deaf exclusion in media. Unfortunately, exclusion in discourse was not seen to be limited to a lack of historical recognition. Deaf media exclusion seems to be yet another tool with which information about d/Deaf postal workers is regulated, long before it can be compiled into an historical account. Informant 2, when asked about the facebook page established by Deaf postal workers replied;

It's individual people who establish their own websites about their gripes, complaints, and so forth. The Hearing postal workers do that often, as well. But when Deaf postal workers establish one, it only lasts a short time and is taken down.

This passage indicates a double standard, where general population employees are allowed to voice their complaints, but when Deaf postal workers do the same, their words are often silenced. As discussed in the previous section, we know that there were Deaf postal workers prior to the migration period during which he entered the USPS, as he explained.

There were several Deaf people working in the post office in the past. But information about them was suppressed.

While Deaf exclusion in the media is not a primary concern in this study, by controlling the amount of information available to the general public, historical exclusion is ensured. If no one is made aware of Deaf postal workers, or that they have been blocked from historical recognition, it is safe to assume no one will seek to document it. This is included here to make clear that if we seek to mediate the exclusion surrounding Deaf postal workers in greater society,

penetrating the historical discourse, would only partly address the Deaf challenge to exclusion. As stated in Chapter 4, I was able to uncover evidence of an extensive history of Deaf postal workers (primarily outside the timeframe under study), of which no one in this study (myself included), was aware. Sonnestrahl also found himself puzzled over a lack of documentation, stating; for "*some reason it was not documented.*"

While I was able to locate one study (Manning & Stansbury, 1969) that discussed Deaf postal employment as clerks, it offered only anecdotal evidence, as Deaf postal employment was not the main focus of the study and the study merely mentions the position of clerk as being a viable option for Deaf workers. This gives rise to an understanding that if we are to change the status of Deaf postal workers in dominant discourse from exclusion to full inclusion in seeking to raise the level of public awareness, the Smithsonian is but one target of many that would require intervention. Vigilance in combating the exclusionary status of Deaf postal workers would require attention to media, postal discussions, rehabilitation document preservation, and further ethnographic case studies of Deaf postal workers, in addition to seeking to establish a full historical account by both the National Postal Museum and the Smithsonian.

While the Hearing-World is left largely unaware of how Deaf Americans continue to be excluded from the media, the Deaf are unfortunately very aware. One poignant example of a current event in which this media exclusion occurred can be seen on the front page of the March 2012 (Vol. 9, Issue 3) of SIGNews (which as stated is the largest Deaf periodical still in print), where Miss Deaf America (who was supposed to appear on television during the Super Bowl, signing the national anthem and "America the Beautiful") was slighted (along with the entire American Deaf Community), when she was not seen once, during the whole event (Whyte,

2012). The article explains how she was positioned far away from the performances and was said to have been forced to leave immediately after her performance. To the Deaf authors and Deaf readers, it was no coincidence that this exclusion occurred just after oralist organizations had just testified in support of; "HB 1367, a bill that will close down and replace Indiana School for the Deaf's current outreach system with a new system regulated by the government and by unknown hearing people (pp. 1-2)."

Unfortunately, the Deaf struggle to "be heard" comes with great challenge from the medical community, oralists and the general public who continue to unwittingly allow for the continuation of overt, discriminatory actions on the part of those who ascribe to the oralist ideology. The effort of those who continue to seek to silence the Deaf at all costs, are perpetuated by shared views of deafness, shared physiological characteristics of persons with hearing loss, and the assumption that oralists speak for all those with hearing loss. They clearly do not speak for the benefit of all d/Deaf Americans, and should not be allowed to persist in promoting their bias (while putting forth the notion that neither Deaf culture, nor ASL exists) but until the Deaf "voice" is "heard," the barriers Deaf Americans face as "outsiders in a Hearing-World," will persist. Gains made will continue to be illusory in nature, and Deaf History will continue to be lost with each passing generation.

Social isolation. Social Isolation is an ever present reality for Deaf Americans and as such it should be no surprise this theme was repeated throughout this study, along with examples of social isolation across the lifespan. In the following sections, we will explore a few of these examples seen in the data, across the three broad preset themes of; early learning, work, and community.

Social isolation in early learning. Informant 2, who again was born into a Deaf family with both Deaf parents and all Deaf siblings, still felt the sting of isolation during times when he was the only child in the home as his siblings had entered TSD much earlier, leaving home for nine months out of the year. He explained how he was the only deaf child in his neighborhood as well, forcing him to learn how to communicate with his hearing peers.

Residential schools, often cast as entirely Deaf and ASL focused, have shifted back and forth between oralist and manualist philosophies but a proactive Deaf focus has not been seen since the rise of oralism when Deaf educators were pushed out. Depending on which side has the most influence at the time the child attends, the educational experiences of a d/Deaf child can differ considerably. Informant 4 touched on the social isolation he experienced when he first entered TSD, and was placed in an oral classroom for two years before he was allowed to learn how to sign.

I eventually stopped the oral program and I was transferred to the sign language program when I was about 8 years old. When I was 6 or 7, they thought I had some hearing. I tried to tell them I had no hearing at all.

As seen here, signs were not introduced until after determining the informant would not be able to communicate orally before he was sent to the signing program at which time his education began. Unfortunately, he had been deprived of all language exposure (both English and ASL) until he was 8 years of age. Unfortunately children are still divided into either "oral" or "sign" based programs to this day and preference is still given to the acquisition of speech over language and content matter.

Informant 4 also touched on the vast differences between communicating with his Deaf vs. Hearing peers.

I finally was able to associate among the other Deaf students. My associations with Hearing friends and Deaf friends were so very different. With the Hearing people I was more frustrated; especially with (regard to) communication. It was very frustrating.

With my Deaf friends, it was so much easier to communicate and make friends with them. Later when I was about 11 or 12; I started to associate more with the Hearing kids in the neighborhood. It was still frustrating with communication. It was a hard time.

Here we see further social isolation in that while he was in the oral program, he was not allowed to socialize with d/Deaf peers who were in the sign program. A few years prior to his entry, TSD was still a military school where there were separate oral programs with their own dormitories and sign based programs with theirs. During the time in which oralism held influence in residential schools, it was common to segregate d/Deaf children by the designations of either "oral," or "oral failures" (Gannon, 1981).

[Though I have yet to mention this; my mother was born into a Hearing family, and her initial educational experiences were with oral based programs. While my mother speaks and can read lips extremely well, she was completely isolated socially and some of those experiences were rather abusive (it was common to see a teacher slapping the deaf child's hands with a ruler if they pointed and gestured, which was also reported by Informant 3 with his mother, trying to force him to speak at home). Frustrated with a teacher who made clear she did not want my mother in her class, and concern of the lack of socialization my mother experienced during this time, my grandparents decided to send her to TSD as a teenager. She was adamant about not going, feeling like her parents were abandoning her, but almost as soon as she arrived, she felt like she was "finally home," later becoming home coming queen and valedictorian, and was dating a young Deaf leader (my father).]

Early in their educational experiences however, the oral program at TSD was terminated, giving way to increased use of ASL in the educational experiences of all four primary informants. Both Informants 1 and 4 mentioned experiences as children, attempting to communicate with Hearing individuals with use of speech, where the negative reaction they received left lasting impressions. Informant 4 gave an example of a teacher who told him he

"had a voice that sounded like a pig"right before he exited the oral program. That he remembered this exchange from when he was only 8 years old shows the lasting impressions he harbors toward oralism.As can be seen throughout the data collected, the feelings of social isolation were not confined to the classroom, or the community and often feelings of social isolation begin in early childhood for deaf children born to Hearing families, as was touched on by Informant 3.

Oh, yes, during the summer time, my parents left me out, because my parents were Hearing, and they liked talking with their friends and liked to play cards with their friends. I just sat around, with nothing to do because of my d/Deafness. My brother was also Hearing and he could socialize with them. I couldn't. So I decided to start working outside, first mowing the lawn, then knocking on friends and neighbors doors to earn money. I mowed lawns, and washed cars for money too.

He also followed up on this discussion by touching on the mode of communication struggle within his family of origin, which will be included in the "Mode of Communication Struggle" theme included under the next broad theme of Awareness. But the social isolation Deaf Americans face is not limited to childhood, schools attended, or families as these experiences follow the Deaf throughout their lives.

Social isolation at work. Deaf Americans often work in environments where they are the only d/Deaf person in the workplace. In this study, we have used the commonly applied term of "Deaf solitaire" that has been used to represent the sole d/Deaf individual in work, and since the onset of mainstreaming, the solitary deaf student. Though it is not known where the term originated, it signifies well the Deaf experience in Hearing-World contexts in that the solitary experience translates into social isolation. The solitary experiences of Deaf individuals are common in education and in the world of work.

Informant 2 pointed to feelings of complete social isolation at his first job out of high school on the assembly line with Texas Instruments, as largely responsible for his seeking to enter the postal workforce. He explains;

I had no social life there. I was lonely watching other Hearing people interact with each other. I was not able to understand any of them. I needed to communicate with other people. At the post office I had a chance to chat with my Deaf peers and I worked better and faster too. It made it easier because we all could understand more together, in what we are doing at the post office. With Hearing people there was always more of a communication problem especially with regard to directions. It was difficult to know what I was supposed to do when communication was a problem.

As this passage suggests, social isolation for the Deaf worker also influences their ability to master job requirements, their level of productivity and their level of satisfaction with their chosen occupation. Informant 2, who is also the union steward, also discussed his learning how to communicate with the hearing children in his neighborhood, and pointed out that he had no problems communicating with hearing people. Yet here, he still expresses how isolated he felt being a Deaf solitaire and how strong his desire was in seeking to communicate with others as he watched others socializing but felt he could not join. This excerpt points to a potential distinction being made by this informant, between simply communicating effectively (one-on-one) and that which constitutes true socialization. This also points back to the understanding that for the d/Deaf, the level of difficulty in effective communication with the h/Hearing increases exponentially when multiple speakers are present, and nearly impossible to follow in group settings. He also points to the experiences of social isolation in the workplace being a contributing factor in his seeking to enter the USPS, as he knew several Deaf (including the other informants) friends already in the postal workforce.

While there were other Deaf workers at the post office, with whom he was able to communicate, during work hours they couldn't, as they worked with their hands. With this understanding in mind, feelings of social isolation were still inherent to a work environment that never adapted to their communication needs. Feelings of social isolation were perpetuated within the postal workforce by postal policies and practices. Deaf postal workers were rendered unable to participate in safety meetings (no interpreters provided). There was no installation or accommodation of accessible technology so Deaf workers could make or receive calls at work. The USPS bidding system was made accessible only by telephone. Also seen was the refusal of postal administrators to include d/Deaf workers in furthering their training (as they felt they could not communicate with their d/Deaf employees) and persistent automatic disqualification toward upward mobility written into various job descriptions requiring the ability "to convey verbal instructions to others" (Plilar, 2002).

Informant 2 offered the most poignant example of his personal struggles with social isolation in the postal workforce;

Like me; I struggled because I never had an interpreter in my station; for so many years; since 1986. Just recently, they finally brought interpreters in. I was so happy! Then I told my supervisor, "Really there were so many issues I've held onto for so long, that have accumulated, that I know you will not like me anymore because I may seem more negative than before in communicating my frustrations. You will wonder why I was fine before, until the interpreter showed up. I will tell you everything that I had to suppress through so many years.

I wanted to throw it all at them. My supervisor asked me 'you've been doing so well for so many years with no complaints, why is it now that we hire interpreters (and you should be happy), that you're now so upset?'

I told them; 'This is what I've wanted to say for all the years I've been here, it's just that now, I can actually TELL you!'

I unloaded on them, and now they are cold to me. I showed them that I still have some sense left!

This passage shows the mixed emotions Informant 2 felt when he finally had the opportunity to communicate with his supervisor with an interpreter present, in that he was happy to have the interpreter present, but his frustrations from years of forced social isolation caused him to "unload" it all at once. The reaction of the supervisor shows a lack of understanding (or awareness) of all the years of "suppression" this informant felt as a result of being a Deaf worker in a work environment that "does not recognize the need to communicate with them" (Plilar, 2002).

[Further discussions on this topic with the informants yielded new information in this regard, based on misunderstandings between Deaf workers and postal administrators. Within the USPS workforce, Hearing workers are able to chat while they work. Deaf workers are not as they are working with their hands and cannot do both at the same time. This leads Deaf workers by nature, to work harder and faster so they can chat after their work is done. Postal supervisors saw this as completely unacceptable and further isolated Deaf workers from each other so this would not occur. Most of the Deaf workers still employed within the postal workforce here in Houston (as Informant 2 mentioned about Informant 1) are, and have been for years, working as Deaf solitaires, being the only Deaf person at their station. Walton touched on this issue as well, when she explained how Deaf postal workers were often taken advantage of "because they would work almost non-stop." If the Deaf worker finished early and had time to chat, supervisors would often take the work of their Hearing counterparts and make them do their work as well as their own.]

The sentiments of social isolation seen in the data collected were echoed by Plilar (2002) "If you're not deaf then you haven't the faintest idea of what true isolationism is. You are alone. You are.....the true minority."

Social isolation in the community. To develop an understanding of the social isolation Deaf populations experience out in the (h/Hearing) community, one must first come to the realization that the Hearing-World has created a world in which Deaf people live, but are not offered the opportunity to fully become a part of. As Higgins (1987) pointed out, the Deaf are;

...outsiders in a world largely created and controlled by those who do hear. The deaf live within a world which is not of their own making, but one which they must continually confront. (p.23)

Deaf Americans were once simply a native population unto its own. Deaf then saw what would later be cast as "their affliction," as a naturally occurring human variation. Untouched by Hearing views about deafness, they have existed for thousands of years but when efforts toward forced assimilation on a global scale began, Deaf populations responded with unity. The more barriers experienced in the Hearing-World, the greater Deaf cohesion became in response. One example of this was seen in the establishment of the NAD (National Association of the Deaf) in 1880, almost immediately after the Milan conference where A. G. Bell successfully advocated for the rise of oralism and an international call to forced linguistic and social assimilation of Deaf populations, by stoking fears of a "Deaf variety," that he argued would contaminate the world gene pool (Buchanan, 1999). It was at this point that efforts mounted to isolate every d/Deaf person from any semblance of a Deaf community with hopes that no two deaf people would ever meet. While the Hearing-World and Hearing communities were not a primary concern in this study, these constructs are mentioned here, as these views are still prevalent today. Without a working knowledge of the seemingly endless number of barriers inherent to Hearing-World contexts for the Deaf, one would be rendered unable to grasp the full weight of the centrality of the concept of a collective community in Deaf populations.

At the time in which the informants migrated to Houston for postal employment, no telecommunication technologies were available for the informants to use in maintaining correspondence. They were forced to either rely on the mail or simply driving to friends' houses only to find out they were not home, leaving a note on their door, and return home to await a response. This lack of telecommunication access was seen to be a driving force behind the

informants' motivations in seeking to establish various organizations to enable them to maintain correspondence with each other. This influence and the utility of the organizations established, along with a completely different perspective (where those who cannot sign are seen as isolated from the community), will be discussed further in the next broad theme covered; Awareness. Under this final broad theme to be discussed, we will explore Deaf "ways of being in the world," seeking to increase the readers' level of awareness of Deaf views.

Awareness. Social awareness in the general Hearing population of Deaf Americans might best be characterized as the sociological and sociopolitical inverse of the created state of exclusion discussed throughout this study. As the general public's exposure to Deaf Americans increases, the quality of life for Deaf Americans improves. Walton offers this poignant explanation of how the media and the increased level of awareness seen in the general public influenced her on a personal level;

"A lot of it has to do with the media, and the way the media perceives and the stories that you hear in the media. Some of them are very positive, some of them aren't...

When I was growing up, and I'm not sure... And not you because you're so much younger than me. You're my kids' age. Ok... But... Growing up, I was very ashamed of my parents, you know...

You... That was when you went out in public and ate because everybody was staring at us. Everybody was whispering about us. You just see it all the time. But then, all of the sudden Sesame Street came on.

And Linda Bowe came on... You know... And she was doing sign language, and then you would go into a restaurant and people would run up to you and start signing to you, you know?

Because they had seen something positive about those things (that) before wasn't looked at as a positive thing. And I think that's a whole lot of it too. The 'Marlee Matlins' of the world, you know, they're (d/Deaf individuals) not all like

Marlee Matlin though. We can't put everybody in their own little bitty shell, but I think that both (Hearing and Deaf) have something to offer each other, and I think that they're getting it. I think our Deaf people are getting, because of, for lack of a better word; 'integration' into public schools, society, and everything else."

Here, Walton points to the role the media plays in the lives of Deaf Americans. This example of Walton's personal experience with changes in public awareness, where people who once stared and gawked over the sight of her family communicating manually out in public altered their behaviors, seeking to interact with things they might have learned through a television program. The comment Walton makes here of "for lack of a better word; 'integration,'" is telling in that physical inclusion does not equate to social integration, as most d/Deaf students are now in the mainstream, but from the Deaf view (as was seen throughout this study) this has historically translated to further isolate the d/Deaf socially.

[This passage brought up two personal experiences for me in that I saw some similar responses before and after the show "Signing with Cindy" aired on television. As stated previously, my parents met Cindy through the Deaf church group at Westbury (established by Informant 1, my father). My mother worked with Cindy, teaching her ASL and in particular, how music translates into visual form. This working relationship led to our family being filmed in our home to show how Deaf families lived. I also remember another show for which my sister and I, as young children, were filmed at the zoo. After the shows aired, I noticed more people came forward, asking questions, attempting to better understand something they had never been exposed to before. The second personal experience this reminded me of was the 1988 Deaf President Now (DPN) revolt at Gallaudet University, and how it was a source of pride for all of us, while I was still in high school, elated that the whole world took notice of the Deaf-World.]

I touched on this personal sentiment I had felt as a result of DPN and Walton explained;

"In that same year, we got \$65 million dollars from the State Legislature to redo the school for the Deaf. It had everything to do with the Gallaudet revolt. The legislatures had seen it, they didn't want it in Texas, and therefore they gave us what we wanted."

This exchange in regard to public awareness, as stated in Chapter 4, highlights the critical nature of how the created state of exclusion in dominant discourse negatively influences the lives

of Deaf Americans and how quickly the Deaf experience can change for the better once the general public is made aware of the Deaf-World. As stated in Chapter 2, the literature review, the DPN protests also led officials from the Smithsonian to reach out to Deaf leaders, seeking to establish a Deaf American historical exhibit in 1993, though as Ladd (2009) pointed out; oralists and the Alexander Graham Bell Association sued the Smithsonian, in essence, once again blocking all Deaf Americans from historical recognition.

Yet another example of the influence of raising the level of awareness in this study was seen in regards to politicians who were knowledgeable about the Deaf from personal experiences (Thornberry was a CODA, while LBJ was his best friend growing up), but failed to see the barriers to gainful employment, until they learned of Sonnestrahl's personal struggles to overcome governmental policies to obtain an engineering position with the Navy Department. Though this has yet to be documented, and requires further historical exploration, the influences the three D.C. power players (Rayburn, LBJ and Thornberry) may have had on the development of the Deaf/USPS relationship might have played a large role in the development of increased Deaf employment opportunities.

Yet another example of the emergent theme of Awareness was seen in that Deaf individuals (as can be seen from the data collected from each of the four primary informants) often seek out opportunities to raise the level of Deaf-awareness within Hearing populations. The informants' establishment and involvement with the Deaf program at Westbury Church was one of the primary methods the informants used in connecting with both Deaf and Hearing populations. Hearing individuals were always welcome to join Deaf church services, often attending in search of understanding the Deaf and in seeking to learn ASL (as was mentioned earlier, with regard to my mother working with Cindy, leading to our family's involvement with

her show on PBS). Many of the Deaf/Hearing relationships that began at Westbury persist to this day and all of the informants continue to take part in various organizations such as the "ASL Socials" mentioned in Chapter 4 (established by Informant1).

The informants also sought to raise the level of Deaf-awareness with their postal administrators and Hearing counterparts as well. Informant 1 explained well how he viewed his job at the post office as his opportunity to educate the Hearing about the Deaf.

Really, I had to learn to accept the kind of work I had and to show Hearing people what Deaf people could do. The Deaf can learn. Many Hearing people thought that Deaf people couldn't do the work. Then I proved to them that I could do the work. They then knew that I could do more work. Many Deaf back then were not allowed to do work other than working with the LSMs because of a lack of communication. The post office thought the Deaf couldn't do other jobs because with the lack of communication, the post office couldn't train them for other positions. We didn't have interpreters. Therefore I had to prove, time and time again, that I could do other work by moving around and actually doing the work.

Informant 2 echoed these sentiments as well, expressing feelings of responsibility in assuming the role of union steward for d/Deaf workers when issues arose between d/Deaf workers and postal administrators. These issues unfortunately persisted as Informant 1 explained;

I remember while I was working at the post office, that I noticed that supervisors were always moving every six months to different stations. Maybe some stay one or two years but never longer than that. When I got a new supervisor, I struggled with him/her until he/she would understand. The cycle repeated itself, over and over. That is still a major disadvantage for Deaf postal workers.

As this passage suggests, regardless of how much progress was made between a Deaf worker and his supervisor, the teaching/learning process was cyclical in nature, forcing the Deaf worker to start over, each time a new supervisor was brought in. When one considers over forty

years of maintaining his position, and that this cycle repeated every six months to a year (on average), one can only imagine how frustrating this must have been every time a new supervisor came in. Yet another challenge in this regard is seen by informant report in the following passage.

Another problem is that the post office does not keep employees in the same place. They are moved around and when that happens the new department who gets a Deaf employee must learn how to communicate with them.

This point brings to light yet another issue seen in that all workers, including the d/Deaf are often moved around, forcing them to repeat the cycle of learning/teaching how to communicate effectively, which must be achieved before awareness can be achieved. While effective communication, and mutual understandings are possible, they both require time and effort (from both parties) to be developed. As frustrating as these policies might be for the d/Deaf postal worker, Deaf individuals still seek to be understood by their Hearing coworkers, and seem to be keenly aware of how raising the level of awareness in the general population can lead to improved conditions in both work and community. Informant 2 summarized well this sentiment.

It is important for Hearing people to understand the Deaf people. They need to understand how we live, how we talk, how we work, how we think, and more important; how we feel. Hearing people many times do not understand us and still do not understand the Deaf people.

Yet another example of evidence that Deaf individuals are keenly aware of the pressing need to be active in efforts to raise Hearing awareness of the Deaf-World is seen in the willingness of the informants to participate in this study. Informant 2 pointed out;

I guess we need more leaders to lead other Deaf people. I really appreciate that you are doing this and asking these questions for your study. I hope that your study will influence the Hearing people to understand the Deaf people more.

As can be seen in this passage and throughout this study, one of the informants' primary concerns is based on the lack of Deaf awareness in Hearing populations and the Deaf held social desire to influence affective change by raising the level of Deaf awareness in Hearing populations. The informants were all well aware of a pressing need in the general public in developing d/Deaf awareness (which again, seems to have been a primary motivating force in their respective decisions to involve themselves in this study). Yet, they have no accessible platform through which to influence affective change on a broad social level. Instead of seeking in vain to influence discourse, in a language not their own, these sentiments seem to serve as a driving force in increasing their feelings of responsibility not only to fellow Deaf community members, but also in seeking out opportunities to connect with Hearing persons to educate them on an individual basis.

With this understanding in mind, the following salient themes based on Deaf collective behaviors (across the three broad preset themes) are touched on here as yet another method of seeking to raise the level of Deaf awareness in Hearing populations (including professionals who work within Deaf populations) through discourse. But before we begin the discussion of Deaf collective behaviors, we will explore the mode of communication struggles occurring between the two populations to better understand how this struggle has played out in the dominant discourse, and how it continues to play out in the daily lives of the informants. By exploring the communication conflicts the Deaf find to be inherent to Hearing-World contexts, we set the stage for the development of further understandings based on the stark contrast of the full access to

effective communication the informants experienced in Deaf-World contexts, through the establishment of the various organizations discussed throughout this study.

Mode of communication struggle. The mode of communication struggle Deaf Americans face in the Hearing-World is a constant factor that must be considered in all areas of health and human services for the Deaf. While Deaf Americans have always pointed to the use of sign language as central to Deaf linguistic and intellectual development, this concept was not widely accepted (again) until the 1970's. In 1968, the field of rehabilitation was just coming to realize the full weight of how sign language should play a critical role in the rehabilitation process.

Sternberg (1968) discussed this issue at length (from a Hearing perspective).

More and more people today—the deaf, the hearing, both lay and professional—are turning their attention to the language of signs as a possible answer to the age-old problem of a truly and universally effective medium of communication for the deaf.

Thoughtful workers in the field of the deaf today do not refer to deafness as a disability *per se*. Rather, it is a disability insofar as it imposes limitations on the deaf person's ability to communicate, both receptively and expressively, and thus restricts the extent to which he may involve himself in the mainstream of life's experiences. Deafness may therefore be described as a communication disability.

Language impairment is the most common and most direct manifestation of this communicative disability. It is the single greatest problem faced by the deaf, for deafness interferes with the normal acquisition of language skills (p. 58).

This passage (while somewhat insightful for the timeframe), is indicative of the challenges faced by the informants (and all Deaf Americans) in that the discussion seen here, was (as it continues to be today) still approached from the Hearing-World perspective. This quote offers six points of interest toward developing understandings of the mode of communication struggles the informants faced. The first point is seen in the first paragraph in that Sternberg points to the raising of Deaf awareness of the potential utility of signs to answer

an "age-old problem." While this may be news for the author, Deaf Americans have always been aware of this. The second point is seen in the discussion of deafness only being a disability in the context of communication, but the author fails to point out the only communication context he considers here is within the Hearing-World. The third point is seen in that the author only considers the Hearing-World context (yet again) as representing "the mainstream of life's experiences." The fourth point is seen in "for deafness interferes with the normal acquisition of language skills," in that the only language considered to represent "normality" in the acquisition of language, is *spokenEnglish*. The fifth point is seen in how the author framed this discussion with; "thoughtful workers in the field of the deaf today do not refer to deafness as a disability *per se*." The author's use of "thoughtful workers," points to the author's paternalistic view of the Deaf in that the consideration of Deafness not being a disability, which he sees as being merely based on the professionals' kindness to extend acceptance of the Deaf view (in a pitiable manner), and not acceptance of a Deaf worldview.

This passage and the five previous points discussed, point back to the manner in which dominant discourse shapes the views of both Hearing persons in the general population and professionals in the field of rehabilitation working within Deaf populations. Had there been room in the discourse for Deaf perspectives, these "realizations" would look quite different and the onus of effective communication might not (as is seen here) still fall squarely (and only) on the Deaf individual. Again, as stated throughout this study, within Deaf-World and Deaf community contexts, the Hearing are seen as deficient in that they do not possess the necessary linguistic skills to effectively communicate in ASL. This brings us to the final point seen in the last paragraph in that "the single greatest problem faced by the deaf" is not "language impairment," it is the refusal of Hearing persons to accept the fact that "language" is not

synonymous with "spoken language," and that language acquisition is not confined to the acquisition of English.

The integrationist philosophy adopted by Hearing populations, seeking forced linguistic assimilation of Deaf individuals is faulty in its design, by the very nature of Deaf individuals that the dominant society still refuses to recognize. Most Deaf people will never be able to hear and speak, much less converse entirely in spoken English. Yet these faulty concepts still drive services as rendered to the Deaf. The Deaf position on how this struggle should be mediated by the Deaf was best represented by Sonnestrahl in 1995.

Hearing people can learn to use their eyes and hands to communicate with deaf people through sign language. Deaf people cannot learn to use their ears to communicate with hearing people through hearing and speech. Deaf people should not be held responsible just because many hearing people choose not to exercise their option! Therefore, hearing people should assume the responsibility of bridging the communication gap.... deaf people should use this and any other strategy to make sure that interpreters are provided, with no cost to them. Hearing people have the option of learning sign language, but if they choose not to, it is their responsibility to find other alternatives that will facilitate communication.(As cited in Jankowski, 1997, pp. 153-154)

While this represents a view in stark contrast to those presented previously, unless the Hearing-World adapts to their Deafpopulations, the mode of communication struggles Deaf Americans still face today will persist and Deaf related services (including the rehabilitation process) will continue to be partial and incomplete. With this understanding in mind, the single greatest issue faced by the Deaf is not seen in "language impairment" but in the refusal of Hearing populations to admit the limitations of their own linguistic capabilities(and multicultural competencies) in the service of their Deaf populations.

Unfortunately, these same issues are often also seen within the family of origin. While Deaf Americans are often referred to as if they live lives in complete isolation from h/Hearing people, in reality; all d/Deaf families are mixed in their composition, possessing h/Hearing as well as deaf or Deaf family members. Informant 3 described this struggle, occurring within his family of origin.

I did ask them to learn sign language. They said; "no, you can talk." I asked them; "what if I do not understand you, like when you use big words?" We had to write. My parents later realized, and told me, that they should have learned sign language when I was a little boy. My brother, while we were growing up; I taught him sign language. I often depended on my brother to tell me what our parents said. That's how we communicated in our family.

This mode of communication struggle is part and parcel to the mixed d/Deaf and h/Hearing experience. While this struggle could be considered similar to those seen in other language minority communities (Lincoln, 2001), care must be taken whenever comparisons like this are made because the isolating experiences are extremely different when one takes into consideration the manner in which Deaf individuals communicate by visual/manual means. This understanding, however, is not easily developed, and can take a lifetime to fully grasp within mixed families, as can be seen throughout Informant 3's discussion about his family of origin.

When I was in school at TSD, from fall to May, I would sign. During the summer time, my mother would teach me how to speak. Whenever, I would gesture, or point at things to communicate she would slap my hands and tell me it was not nice to gesture. She said "you have to learn to speak."

While other language minorities possess the physiological prerequisites to learn to communicate with speech and auditory input in another language, most Deaf do not. Either way it is a constant struggle, with which all d/Deaf individuals must contend. Inherent to the deaf experience is the ever-present reality of communication barriers even within one's own family.

As Informant 3 points out, simple conversations without the use of signs are possible but when the complexity of conversational content increases, the probability of miscommunication increases as well; hence the need for Informant 3 to utilize his brother as the family interpreter or communicate in writing. The complexities of effective communication touched on here, also increase when the Deaf individual is unfamiliar with the Hearing person, or the content being discussed. Further complications arise when communicating within groups (as is often the case in school, work and community), where even the most talented lip-readers fall short.

Another point brought up in this passage that should be discussed here, is the Deaf reliance on reading and writing when communication breakdowns occur. This is seen not only in mixed families but also in the workplace and community as well. During our discussion about Deaf postal workers not being included in various meetings in the workplace, Informant 2 pointed out that they (the postal administrators) "*could inform the Deaf in writing,*" implying, they do not take the time to do so. In work and community, written communications can serve multiple purposes. The obvious purpose would be to effectively communicate, but the other purpose served can often be to protect the rights of a Deaf individual from those who might seek to take advantage of them, possibly seeing them as vulnerable to exploitation.

[An example of this is my father's story of shopping around for a new car. He found a car he wanted, made a deal with a car dealership, which included a "five year bumper to bumper warranty," and the car dealer's promise to detail the car to a "like new" condition (as it was a demo car). After all the paperwork was signed, the dealership took the car to be detailed but when my father went to pick it up, there were white spots all over the leather dashboard. When he asked why this wasn't fixed, it was blamed on the car being a demo and he was told the car was sold "as is." The salesman and manager refused to fix the problem and when they reached this part of the conversation, both the salesman and manager refused to continue the conversation in writing (opting instead to insult my father by trying to force him to read their lips). My father expressed he would only accept this explanation and the car "as is," if they would agree to "put it in writing." They refused, finally accepting responsibility and chose to fix the car instead. This transaction is mentioned because this is one of the methods my father and

other Deaf postal workers used when conflicts would arise in the workplace. Given the inability to communicate effectively (due to communication barriers in the workplace), if conflict did present itself, only one side of the story would be "heard" unless the transaction was recorded in writing. My father, presented with multiple challenges in the workplace over the course of his long postal career, kept meticulous records of these hand written conversations to protect him and secure his position. Though not a focus of this study, this method of communication was seen with the other informants as well and often, Deaf individuals will choose to communicate in writing instead of using an interpreter if they feel a pressing need to document a conversation. The drawback to this however, is often seen after a Deaf worker has protected himself by preserving the written conversation and upon presenting it, the Hearing supervisor from that point on, refuses to communicate at all, for fear of there being a written record of whatever might be said.]

As stated, (from a Deaf-centered perspective) Hearing individuals are seen to be the ones who are linguistically deficient; as most are unable to communicate with Deaf individuals in ASL. This understanding is one of the main influences seen in the development of a Deaf sociological perspective. When interacting with Hearing persons in the SDC, any inability to communicate falls on the Hearing; not Deaf person. In the SDC, the Hearing individual (not the Deaf) is considered to be "linguistically disabled" and/or "intellectually deficient." Yet in discourse *about* the d/Deaf (from the perspectives of Hearing researchers), the assumption of Deaf deficiency remains dominant.

For example; it has often been said (by Hearing persons) that Deaf individuals think in concrete terms, or in "black and white," lacking the ability to understand abstract thought.

Sternberg (1968) offers a Hearing perspective on Deaf linguistic deficiency.

But most important, this verbal developmental retardation in the deaf individual imposes a severe limitation on his ability to form concepts, to think and express himself in abstract terms. This is readily observable in his generally poor performance on verbal tests of all types and in particular on reading achievement tests, which often require reasoning (conceptual thinking) in the verbal comprehension sections. Because through linguistic impoverishment they have faulty or underdeveloped conceptual frames of reference upon which to rely, it is a small wonder that the deaf are so widely considered the most severely handicapped educationally of all groups of disabled individuals. (p. 58)

This Hearing view of Deaf "linguistic retardation" is not based on consideration of linguistic aptitude, in as much as it is based on the level of linguistic assimilation. This "retardation" is based on acquired spoken or "verbal" English (or lack thereof) and this assumption of "a severe limitation on his ability to form concepts, to think and express himself in abstract terms" is based on the faulty line of reasoning that intelligence is tied to speech, and speech alone. This distinction is critical in that it has shaped the deafness discourse in terms of linguistic deficiency. This can still be seen today with the continued use of terms such as; "unintelligible speech" or the inclusion of Deaf education programs at institutions of higher learning under "communication disorders." This implies that an inability to hear and speak, somehow translates into an inability to think. The issue here is seen in that this author, as intelligent as he might be, if he lacks the ability to effectively communicate in ASL at or above the level of the Deaf individual, the Deaf individual could be much smarter than he, and yet the Hearing author would still have come to the very same conclusion, as the Deaf individual would also be required to adjust his level of linguistic aptitude, in effect, "breaking down" his linguistic abilities in ASL, to match that of the h/Hearing (or deaf) level of functional linguistic ability in ASL.

This understanding is critical because within d/Deaf education (and all d/Deaf related professions), preference has long been given to those who are deaf, or h/Hearing but are not fluent in ASL (nor are they experienced in Deaf cultural norms). The linguistic deficiencies of those who continue to educate d/Deaf children perpetuate this stereotype and as an unfortunate result, these professionals are rendered unable to offer the exposure to the complexities of abstract thought necessary to increase the level of aptitude within critical thinking domains (with particular regard to standardized achievement tests) for d/Deaf children. Yet, rarely (if ever) is

consideration given to the skills of professionals who serve within d/Deaf populations to ascertain whether or not they possess the prerequisite level of skills that would be necessary to gauge the aptitudes of the Deaf consumer.

[In my experience as the gatekeeper of this community and as a child; the trusted communicator, I remember very well that more often than not; Hearing persons oversimplified content in communicating complex ideas not because of an inability of the Deaf person to understand, but more so because of the inability of the Hearing individual to communicate these complexities in a manner accessible to Deaf persons, and an underlying assumption that d/Deaf persons would not be able to understand the complexities inherent to abstract concepts. Yet another issue I experienced as a child, Hearing individuals often dismissed my questions, seeking clarification on certain topics, seeing me as merely a child, and not as the main conduit of information sharing, as I was seen by my Deaf elders. However, my role in the community was to research and learn about these complexities and bring this new knowledge to my elders, who would in turn, relate this new information to others in the collective community.]

In regards to the hiring of professionals to work in Deaf populations, administrators typically do not possess the skills necessary to evaluate whether or not applicants (whether h/Hearing or d/Deaf) are skilled in ASL or knowledgeable about Deaf culture. If the applicant is deaf, it is often assumed they have the necessary skills, when in reality; the deaf professional may never have even been exposed to ASL, or Deaf culture. This phenomenon, though unfortunate, point back to the h/Hearing tendencies to stereotype all d/Deaf or Hearing Impaired people as being the same. If this is the case, the administrator may come to the conclusion that any d/Deaf applicants would be similarly ineffective in that position. While Deaf Americans have tried to make these influences known and understood in Hearing populations, Deaf views have always run contrary to those who continue to seek to define them.

The salient themes discussed in the previous sections focused on a few of the many challenges Deaf Americans face in regards to historical exclusion, media exclusion, social isolation (across the three broad preset themes) and the mode of communication struggles

inherent to the Deaf-World experience, we will now shift our focus to center on how these challenges were mediated by the informants. The final two salient themes to be discussed in the following sections toward developing the understandings we seek in answer to the remaining research questions include; socialization in the SDC and Deaf collective behaviors across the lifespan (again, by using the three broad preset themes).

Socialization in the SDC. Within Deaf communities, it is the Deaf who have full communication access and the Hearing who are linguistically deficient. As was seen throughout the data, the cohesion of the various events and organizations afforded members of the community everything they lacked access to in Hearing-World contexts. Mottez (1993) describes the centrality of these events.

Social events are integral to deaf communities. They provide an opportunity for deaf people to come together among themselves, relax, converse easily, exchanging gossip, and otherwise focus on issues of particular interest to them as a class apart. Together with the residential schools and religious congregations, social events have provided the context for cultural continuity and remembrance that allow deaf people to maintain cohesion and a sense of a shared self-interest in the face of an often hostile hearing society. Unfortunately, because of their nature, social events have not been documented well. The conversation and, camaraderie that occur are not usually written down or otherwise recorded for posterity. (p. 27)

As this passage suggests, and as was stated previously, the Deaf community is where the quality of life is measured for Deaf Americans. Again, in the SDC under study, only those who lack the ability to communicate effectively in ASL are seen as socially isolated. As stated throughout this study, in the general population, Deaf individuals have been blocked from historical recognition and effectively silenced in discourse. While the social isolation of Deaf Americans in the Hearing-World was previously discussed, the intent of this study was to focus on the topic of community in the SDC under study. In Chapter 4, we learned that the main venue

where Deaf-Hearing interactions took place within this SDC was seen in the Deaf church congregation established by Informant 1. Informant 3 touched on both the influence of church fellowship and one Deaf established organization (again established by Informant 1) where Deaf-Hearing interactions were central to the purpose of the gatherings.

At our church, we continue to meet and study with both Deaf and Hearing people. I do enjoy that. I also enjoy the ASL Socials for both Deaf and Hearing people who are learning sign language.

Some of those people who go to ASL Socials are students who take ASL classes at school. That is radical! I enjoy meeting so many different people. I do enjoy fellowship with other Deaf people, especially our church fellowships. We have fellowships with both Deaf and Hearing people. It is so important because Hearing people have a lot more knowledge than the Deaf. I learn so much from these fellowships.

This informant discusses both of these Deaf established organizations together, in part, because the ASL Socials were established through the interactions of Informant 1, and a Hearing member of the church who interprets for the Deaf members of the church, but who is also an ASL teacher at a local private school. As stated in Chapter 4, this organization (ASL Social) was established to offer Hearing high school students seeking to improve their signing skills and learn about Deaf culture from those who have first hand information, a safe environment in which they can interact with Deaf community members. The ASL Socials, as stated in Chapter 4, take place once a month at a local Houston area Chik-fil-A near the church and is open to all those who seek to either teach, or learn about the Deaf-World. While these socials were established to teach Hearing youth, as can be seen in the above excerpt from Informant 3, Deaf individuals also learn from their interactions with Hearing attendees as well, opening up access to new funds of knowledge for both populations. While Deaf communities have been cast as

completely isolated, this is not the case as there are many organizations where Deaf-Hearing social interactions are made central.

At the time of arrival the informants had no telecommunication access (the TTY had not yet been invented), but within the SDC today, the Deaf are more connected to each other than ever as advancements in technology have drastically changed the lives of all Deaf Americans.

As Informant 1 explained;

Now, with the videophone, I don't have to drive and can save on gas. I can talk with so many people. Also text messaging is nice. TV has more captioning than ever. I can understand and enjoy TV better. One problem we still have; some videophones have poor alert signals. There are many things that still need to be developed and improved. Some captioning needs to be improved too. Right now, they are better than nothing; compared to when I was a little boy.

With advancements in technology, the informants now have videophones, text, email, instant messaging, and the use of portable videophones (e.g., on laptops, iphones and ipads) to maintain correspondence. They can also call h/Hearing friends, and can conduct business with hearing populations as well through use of a well developed system offering access to ASL interpreters over video relay, allowing them to make telephone calls, eliminating the need for them to have a hearing person makes these calls for them. The various telecommunication technologies touched on here, have afforded the Deaf a freedom they have never known as they now have been enabled to connect with old friends from school across the country and across the globe. These influences have radically altered the manner in which members of the SDC socialize. While advancements in technology should have also afforded the informants greater opportunities for upward mobility in the postal workforce, by informant report, advancements in technology have had a negative(not positive) effect, largely due to the assumption of postal administrators that their Deaf workers could not be retrained for other positions. The reason

offered by the informants for this was; a lack of communication access that would be required to effectively train Deaf postal workers to assume other positions in the USPS.

Advancements in technology often bring new challenges for the Deaf. One example seen here is with regard to captioning. The recent switch to digital television vastly degraded the quality of captioning. Now, it seems television captioning has switched over to voice recognition software (which requires significant "training" of the software on a person by person basis). This change has created a captioning system that is accurate to the tune of about 15% of overall content (by my estimates). Not only is captioning completely inefficient now, but most commercials are not captioned, the captions are censored (apparently by those who pay to provide this service, but are not comfortable with allowing curse words in text), and much of the information that is accessible to h/Hearing subscribers is not accessible (as is required by law) to the d/Deaf.

As stated in Chapter 4, two of the informants have retired while two still remain in the postal workforce but both are nearing retirement as well. As senior citizens the focus of these Deaf community elders has turned back to the community. One pressing concern brought up by the informants seeking retirement community options where Deaf socialization would be available to them was mentioned repeatedly by three of the informants as they currently see no viable options for Deaf elderly seeking communication access and Deaf socialization in retirement communities or nursing homes. Again, this social focus is seen as a dominating characteristic in the development of Deaf behaviors across the lifespan and by informant report, central to one's quality of life. While all four primary informants mentioned concerns about the

welfare and retirement options of Deaf senior citizens, Informant 3, who was the most independent (or least social) of the four, surprisingly also expressed similar concerns.

My concern is when I get old, who will take care of the elderly and Deaf senior citizens? Like a nursing home? Or something like that? It would be nice to have a place for Deaf to associate with each other.

As stated in Chapter 4, all four informants mentioned community based service needs for the Deaf where communication access is available, where socialization is central, where people from all walks of life (regardless of beliefs, how one identifies with d/Deafness, etc...) can come together to continue to grow collectively. While this passage points to the personal needs of the informants as Deaf senior citizens, in a collective community, what benefits the few, benefits all. Considering that all four informants share similar concerns; this passage also points back to the establishment/development of the SDC, the continued peer based focus offering further evidence of the critical nature of the SDC in its utility to the informants. All four informants continue to be active in the SDC and all are also active in the Houston Deaf Senior Citizens' organization. Efforts are also underway to reestablish a statewide Deaf senior citizens' advocacy based organization that was established by a group of CODAs, but tapered off as the founding members have all since died.

Central to the Deaf-World experience is the responsibility of community elders (Deaf of Deaf) to prepare the next generation by imparting the life lessons learned, the history of members (as Deaf have always been the keepers of their own history), their language (ASL), and Deaf culture. While the above passage touched on the informants' personal concerns of the potential for social isolation in one's golden years (as they have seen from the current experiences of the

previous Deaf generation), the informants also touched on community based needs for the whole of the community to be offered in one central location. Informant 1 explained;

I feel that every state should have something called a "Deaf Community Center." Maybe you wonder what I mean. For example; maybe the center could give information about various services for the Deaf; information about Deaf Clubs and organizations. Maybe the center could give websites or encourage Deaf people with special needs. The center could be a place that parents of deaf children could rely on for more information about d/Deafness. Maybe some Deaf are not well educated, and they may need more training. The center could provide information about where they can go for more training. Suppose you as a parent have a deaf child, and do not know what to do, the center can provide information and resources. Often doctors will tell parents to get cochlear implants and not even give any other options for them to consider. Doctors are not well educated about d/Deafness themselves. The center can help guide the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late Deafened, or Hearing Impaired people. I think it would be nice for every city to have that.

As this quote suggests, the informants are not only concerned with their personal needs. The community center envisioned by the informants would offer all those with hearing loss and those who seek to understand the Deaf-World a venue to come together in one central location to be used as a resource for all interested parties. This passage also points out how aware Deaf leaders are with the needs of the entire population of persons with hearing loss. As was mentioned both in Chapter 1 and previously in this chapter, Becker (1987) discussed utilizing the Deaf peer group as a resource in counseling Deaf individuals explained

While groups of deaf peers are in the community, not every deaf person may be linked to them, indeed, persons who require considerable intervention by professionals may be those very persons who are isolated from the peer group and the deaf community. (p.77)

As Becker suggests here, the community itself, may be the most powerful tool d/Deaf individuals have at their disposal. While Deaf individuals like the informants seem to be keenly

aware of this understanding, it has not yet translated into altering plans of action from traditional methods based on seeking out and mediating individual deficiencies to more appropriate community based services, that could eliminate the need for many formal services, by supporting the nature of the Deaf collective community, which in turn, supports the whole of the population served. To better understand the nature of Deaf communities touched on above, that can (and often do) serve as a system of informal support services for community members, we will now shift the focus of this discussion to Deaf collective behaviors. By exploring Deaf collective behaviors across the lifespan, we will have completed our discussion of the salient themes pulled from the research findings and use the themes to answer the remaining research questions (2-5).

Deaf collective behaviors. The collective aspect of Deaf culture might be the most critical aspect in developing understandings of Deaf social behaviors, Deaf collective employment migratory behaviors and the various functions of the SDC for Deaf members. As stated in Chapter 1, the field of rehabilitation has become increasingly concerned with offering culturally appropriate services for all consumer populations. In seeking to offer culturally appropriate services to Deaf populations, the collective aspect of Deaf culture is at the heart of the conflict, as the field of rehabilitation has been established on individualistic values and is still heavily influenced by the Medical Model orientation to deafness. In light of this understanding, the collective behaviors of Deaf Americans should drive the rehabilitation process. In the following three sections, we will explore Deaf collective behaviors across the three broad preset themes of early learning, work and the community.

Early Deaf collective behaviors. Deaf culture has historically been transmitted either from Deaf parents to their children (both hearing and deaf) or from peer to peer in the Deaf residential

school setting. While many deaf individuals are said to convert to a Deaf-centered world view later in life, they typically do not share the same collective behaviors, as they are oriented to a different set of cultural values and behaviors that they learned from their Hearing families.

However, these converts are just as complex as those within the Deaf community and as such no assumptions should be made based simply on personal characteristics, attributes or the family of origin. Considering that two of the informants were from Hearing backgrounds, but entered the Deaf residential school setting at an early age, they are both seen as being raised in the Deaf-World, and are not seen as converts. The remaining informants were both Deaf of Deaf, and as such, Deaf collective behaviors were acquired from both their Deaf families and reinforced in the Deaf residential school setting. The two DoD informants served as cultural role models for their peers in school, learning early their responsibilities in carrying these behaviors with them into work and community based environments.

In a way, while growing up, I felt fine mingling with other Deaf students because we all had the same Deafness. If I had stayed home, I may have felt awkward because my mother and father were adults and I was just a Deaf kid. At school, I had peers and we grew up together. We knew each other like brothers and sisters.

Here Informant 2 points to the shared experience of Deafness with his peers at TSD, where the connections made followed the informants throughout their lives. This also points to the residential setting as the primary environment in which the peer based bonds between the informants were established. The second point in this passage is seen in that they "*knew each other like brothers and sisters.*" This points to the understanding of the influence of not only being peers, and sharing the same "*Deafness,*" but also the residential Deaf school setting, where three of the informants lived together "*like brothers*" (Informant 1 lived in Austin and

commuted), adding greater strength to the bonds they formed. These bonds were strengthened further through the endless number of games, extracurricular activities, and team sports. The Deaf teachers at TSD also played a role in the development of the informants' collective behaviors both in and out of the classroom (Informant 1 pointed to strong Deaf role models who were Deaf teachers but also scout masters. He explained how his involvement in the Boy Scout troop added to his feelings of responsibility to become a Deaf leader, and helped him to become more independent. These feelings were reinforced by his Deaf family, where he was also expected to be a Deaf leader.

Really, my parents were Deaf and my uncle who was a football coach at TSD was also Deaf. My Deaf uncle and his wife were both teachers at TSD, and both were strong role models in the Deaf community in Austin. I was sort of trained to be a leader. I felt responsible to serve the Deaf.

Informant 2 also touched on the influences he experienced with Deaf teachers, who also served as strong Deaf role models.

Then when I went to TSD, teachers said we must help one another. You are all the same; Deaf.

The Deaf lessons learned were then reinforced by the contrast experienced in how Hearing people would not reciprocate these same collective behaviors.

Many times I have obstacles. But from what I learned at TSD about helping one another; I also helped Hearing people. But the Hearing people would just say "thank you" and not help me. I was puzzled that I helped them and they did not help me.

These behaviors also seem to have been further reinforced by negative experiences from feelings of isolation in Hearing-World contexts and a lack of communication access afforded the informants in their interactions with Hearing people. Once the informants graduated, they (as Walton said was seen with her father's generation) "all wandered," independently seeking to

make their way in the world of work. The experiences during this time seem to have reinforced the collective behaviors, and the lack of access in attempting to connect within Hearing-World contexts, led the informants back to the lessons learned, reinforcing the sentiment that they could only rely on each other.

Deaf collective behaviors in the workplace. In seeking to understand how Deaf collective behaviors influence the world of work experience for Deaf grassroots workers, the most influential aspect is seen in what I have termed the "Deaf collective work ethic." This concept has been discussed throughout this study, in regards to the Little Papers that have historically been utilized in the transmission of appropriate Deaf employment behaviors, in informing Deaf Americans of the climate for Deaf workers in the labor force, and in the mobilization of grassroots Deaf workers when Deaf collective employment opportunities arise.

The Deaf collective work ethic is based on a Deaf understanding, that all too often (as has historically been the case); Deaf workers are stereotyped by Hearing employers as either "all good," or "all bad." The sensitive nature of the development of Hearing views of Deaf workers has largely shaped Deaf employment behaviors in the labor force. The Deaf solitaire who enters the workplace knows all too well their performance on the job is directly tied to the Hearing employers' views of all Deaf workers as viable candidates for sustained employment.

Within the USPS Deaf collective under study, the Deaf workers who entered the postal workforce initially, served both as; examples of the viability of Deaf workers to postal administrators, and as working role models for the numerous Deaf workers who followed. Both Sonnestrahl and Walton expressed, when selecting their first USPS Deaf collective cohorts, they purposefully sought out Deaf leaders initially, in seeking to establish a strong Deaf presence in

the workplace and to offer postal administrators prime examples of the worth of hiring Deaf. The reasoning behind this purposeful selection was to encourage postal administrators to hire more Deaf workers in the future. While this certainly seems commonsensical to those in the field of rehabilitation, the roots of this endeavor are situated firmly in both professionals' past experiences in being members of Deaf culture.

Informant 1 echoed these sentiments in seeing his position with the USPS as his opportunity to show Hearing people what the Deaf are capable of if given the opportunity.

Really, I had to learn to accept the kind of work I had and to show Hearing people what Deaf people could do. The Deaf can learn. Many Hearing people thought that Deaf people couldn't do the work. Then I proved to them that I could do the work. They then knew that I could do more work. Many Deaf back then were not allowed to do work other than working with the LSMs because of a lack of communication. The post office thought the Deaf couldn't do other jobs because with the lack of communication, the post office couldn't train them for other positions. We didn't have interpreters. Therefore I had to prove, time and time again, that I could do other work by moving around and actually doing the work.

This passage points to his understanding of the importance of his role as a worker in setting an example of a solid Deaf collective work ethic, and in his framing this employment experience as a broader, sociological opportunity for him in educating Hearing populations about the Deaf. While Informant 1 lacks the desired prerequisites to have a "voice" in dominant discourse, he saw this as his opportunity to educate others, pointing to yet another foundational characteristic seen in Deaf populations, of seeking to be understood.

The long held Deaf desire in educating Hearing persons about the Deaf was a common theme seen in the data collected. One example offered by Informant 2, in regards to a lack of understanding of Deaf related issues was seen in his discussion of Hearing postal administrators

who were hiring ASL interpreters from out of state, vastly inflating the cost of offering communication access to Deaf postal workers. This can also be seen here, in this Informant 2's comment in regards to the hiring of interpreters from out of state, which only served to inflate the cost of hiring interpreters for Deaf postal workers.

Wow! Louisiana is a huge waste of money! Having to pay them for travel and hotel! It was obvious; Hearing postal workers really are not educated about things related to the Deaf community.

While many of these misunderstandings may seem nonsensical, it is important to note that Deaf individuals (including the informants in this study), often do not see the issues that arise between Deaf and Hearing workers as outright discrimination, but more so, as a complete lack of education on the part of Hearing persons in regards to Deaf populations.

Yes, there are still (communication) barriers because of a lack of training of postal administrators. People themselves, need to understand how Deaf people can communicate. They need to be aware of the many different ways of communicating with the Deaf. It is still a problem.

These misunderstandings may also point to a need from rehabilitation agencies to better educate employers, and Hearing populations, especially in light of the understanding that Deaf individuals have historically been blocked from recognition in dominant discourse.

Deaf workers who exhibit a strong Deaf collective work ethic typically strive to avoid conflict with their employers but this does not translate into standing idly by when they or fellow Deaf workers are treated unfairly. When unavoidable conflicts arise; the greater the conflict, the greater the likelihood Deaf leaders in the workplace will take action, as was seen with Informant 2 as he assumed the role of union steward once the number of Deaf workers in the Houston area postal workforce declined precipitously. While many Deaf workers may choose to avoid outright

confrontations, as discussed earlier in this study; as a collective community, the Deaf of Deaf individuals who "fit the bill," for the task at hand, are typically the ones to step forward to mediate issues that arise. Evidence of this assertion can be seen by looking at which informant in this study stepped forward, the early experiences he was exposed to and how these experiences led him to "fill the void" by establishing a Deaf presence within the postal union. In Chapter 4, Informant 2 explained;

I love to have debates/arguments with post officesupervisors. Sometimes I have to do that by writing and often people will stare at me when I walk in to talk with supervisors where problems are. I don't care, I am not afraid to talk with Hearing people.

This exchange reflectsInformant 2's early learning experiences of living in a Deaf family but having been left alone when his siblings were off living at school for nine months out of the year, prior to his own entry into TSD. He expressed, he had to learn how to get along with the Hearing children in his neighborhood, which he pointed out, later influenced his decision to become union steward. His comment of not being afraid to talk with Hearing people also reinforces a common sentiment among Deaf workers who have reservations about creating conflict in the workplace, preferring instead to model the Deaf collective work ethic and not "rock the boat," for fear it may result in negative stereotypes toward all Deaf workers. While the first Deaf postal workers (including all four informants) exhibited a strong Deaf collective work ethic, some of those who came in with the second, much larger wave of d/Deaf postal workers did not. This created conflict, not only between postal administrators and all their d/Deaf workers, but also between d/Deaf workers who did adhere to the Deaf collective work ethic, and those who did not.

Informant 2, who was one of the two DoFD informants, upon learning Deaf postal workers were struggling in a myriad of ways, recognized a need in the collective community, and felt he could best serve his fellow Deaf workers as the union steward for all Deaf postal employees in the Houston area. His entering this position seems to also have been heavily influenced by the sharp decline of Deaf postal workers in Houston, occurring in the early 1980's, shortly before he assumed the position of union steward in 1986. During this time, the Houston area was also hit hard by the economic downturn in the 1980's, where numerous layoffs occurred (which also reportedly led to the Deaf church organization's demise) and added to Informant 2's sense of urgency to stem the flow of Deaf job losses.

While Informant 2 sought to address the needs of Deaf postal workers from within the postal system, Informant 1 set his sights on the collective needs of both Deaf postal workers and those in the Deaf community outside the work environment. While this was in part, due to his being the first in the SDC to start a family, all four informants pointed to issues related to those d/Deaf workers who came in with the second, much larger cohort of d/Deaf workers, and did not exhibit the same Deaf collective work ethic. By informant report, many of the new d/Deaf recruits were "*playing and partying*." It seems the issues seen in the workplace during this time also contributed to Informant 1's feelings of responsibility in seeking to establish a moral code of conduct in the community and an alternative to the problems seen in the Deaf Club scene at the time.

In seeking to understand Deaf collective behaviors in employment, Sonnestrahl and Walton both, also exhibited these same characteristics. Sonnestrahl, once he was finally able to secure employment in his field, explained how he became concerned for the futures of his Deaf

children, and grandchildren. This sentiment, indicative of the Deaf collective work ethic, also led to his involvement with the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), and the struggles of all Deaf workers seeking employment, only to be met with Hearing-World barriers. Walton, also felt the responsibility of service to the Deaf community. These feelings of responsibility led her to leave her teaching career, accept a position with VR when recruited, and ultimately continue the work she began some forty years ago to this day. It should also be noted here, that Walton's experiences are strikingly similar to the feelings of responsibility I have always felt, but never fully grasped until conducting this study. She is one of very few CODAs I have felt such a strong connection to. Indeed, we both detest the label of CODA and do not share the sentiments of those who establish CODA organizations. She likened the experience of her only visit to one of these organizations like going to an "AA meeting."

[CODA is yet another label that comes from the Hearing-World control of the deafness discourse. The term "Child of Deaf Adult," feels as if it was intended to displace me from both adulthood and my own culture. The term was never used in the SDC I was raised in and I had never heard the term until I met an interpreter when I was about 19 years old. I had to ask my parents that evening what it meant, and to this day I am still not comfortable with it. Though others wear the label like a badge of honor, I see myself, as did my father and my community elders; Deaf. While I can hear, and am not deaf, I have always been oriented to a Deaf worldview. While I've never been comfortable with being called a "CODA," to call me "Hearing," was even worse. I will never forget the first time I had to fill out a form that required me to check off my ethnicity (in grade school), and I was confused when I didn't see the option of "Deaf," and had to ask my parents why I was considered "Caucasian" instead.]

Deaf Collective Behaviors in the Community. The collective aspect of Deaf culture is learned early in life and follows the Deaf throughout the lifespan. Deaf persons tend to utilize the strengths of individual members in the collective community to mediate any individual deficiencies that might be experienced and in addressing the personal needs that emerge in the context of daily living. Deaf initiated organizations are not merely seen as opportunities for socialization, as they serve to offer the Deaf stable venues where critical information exchanges

are made possible, offering central locations where Deaf community members can go if they experience a pressing issue that needs to be addressed. The various organizations touched on in this study, as a whole, served as the main conduit of information sharing for the informants and as such were seen as integral to the career development process, including the maintenance of employment, and in the ability to achieve tenure within the postal workforce.

As a collective community, the informants reportedly learned best socially, within group based dynamics. This was reported to be the case in the informants' early learning experiences, which the informants carried over into the areas of both employment and community through the organizations they worked to establish. These various events and organizations offered the informants further exposure to new learning experiences throughout the lifespan. Connections made in the community with new people (both Deaf and Hearing), offered the informants access to new funds of knowledge. While various community members would explore differing interests based on exposure to these new funds of knowledge, the new information learned by each individual, was brought back into the collective community. The personal growth for one Deaf individual would in turn, lead to further the knowledge base of the whole of the collective Strong Deaf Community.

[It should also be noted here, in regards to my own lived experiences, including my educational endeavors, and in my choosing to conduct this study, how my experiences have also contributed to the collective knowledge base of our SDC, in serving to raise our collective awareness of the events under study, including how they have escaped historical recognition.]

Yet another positive growth experience seen in the SDC under study, which was touched on in Chapter one, is based on the understanding that Deaf Americans represent a traditionally underserved population. As such, due to the lack of available mental health services seen for the Deaf in the general population, the informants created their own informal, community based

services, as a means of coping with the stressors they experienced in their daily lives, accrued simply by living and working in a Hearing-World. The informal services touched on here within the SDC, might also be more appropriate for Deaf populations as the profession of mental health counseling has yet to adapt to a Deaf cultural perspective.

The organizations the informants established served as their primary system of social support but, as stated, they were also utilized by the informants in mediating the inadequacies of formal Deaf related services. Often this meant turning to the church in times of moral crisis, when personal, marital, or family problems would arise. In the SDC under study, community members have often turned to two Deaf members in particular, Informant 1 and his wife, who have remained in the church and are seen as pillars in the community. Deaf men in the SDC would approach Informant 1, while Deaf women would approach his wife.

Reputations are critical in regards to maintaining positions of leadership in the SDC. Maintaining a neutral position can prove to be a rather difficult endeavor in a collective community, and by avoiding private discussions with members of the opposite sex, these two community leaders, work to ensure there can be no assumptions made by others, or opportunities for those who like to gossip. Fairness and equity in the treatment of SDC members, over time, are highly regarded. Maintaining a neutral position when conflict arises between community members, establishing clear boundaries in one's interaction with others, and exercising the ability to maintain consistency in one's patterns of interaction with SDC members, are a few of the personal characteristics that are highly regarded with respect to Deaf leaders in the SDC.

Yet another reason for their long standing positions of leadership in the SDC is seen in their ability to put aside personal differences, swallowing pride and exercising humility, to

remain consistent in their feelings of responsibility in the service of all members of the SDC.

While it has often and accurately been stated, that secrets are frowned upon in Deaf culture, a Deaf Leader's ability to remain neutral in times of conflict often hinges upon their ability to serve as a vault of sensitive community information.

The concept of a Deaf leader in the SDC does not follow the same criteria seen in the general population. White coats, degrees, or titles, mean little to SDC members as the focus is on the local community and those who serve within. To better understand this distinction, of the difference between how Hearing and Deaf populations see what constitutes a d/Deaf leader, Higgins (1979) explains;

The well-educated deaf, especially those who are post-lingually deaf and have acquired intelligible speech, are likely to become leaders in the deaf community (Furth, 1973; Jacobs, 1974). My own research suggests that these "leaders" would be more appropriately characterized as people who assume positions of influence in deaf organizations and often serve as spokespeople for the deaf to the hearing world. Although many are dedicated workers for the deaf, often they are not leaders in the sense that deaf people follow them and their ideas. Some may not even be well respected within the deaf community, especially when they refrain from mingling with the "average" deaf members at clubs and social affairs (Block, 1968; Sussman and Burke, 1968). (p. 55)

Often those from outside the SDC, experience a great deal of frustration with what they think are deficiencies in community members (which they attribute to their deafness) when their professional efforts to make contact, produce their credentials and expect Deaf community members to follow their lead, fall short. As can be seen here, d/Deaf, or h/Hearing individuals who obtain higher levels of education, and feel they are "above" commerce with grassroots Deaf workers, yet expect Deaf individuals to follow their lead in professionally based endeavors, will often find that those in the Deaf community will not "follow their lead." Walton, in our discussion of Deaf leaders, aptly pointed out; "you can't be a Deaf leader, and not associate with

Deaf people." When working within Deaf populations, it is of paramount importance for professionals to understand the critical nature of making contact with, and involving Deaf leaders from the local SDC, if they wish their professional efforts to be successful.

Now that we have discussed the research findings from Chapter 4, along with some of the most salient themes toward developing answers to the remaining research questions, we will now use the data gleaned from the six informants' interviews to answer them. The remaining research questions (2-5) sought to develop understandings of how the informants' early learning experiences led them to enter collective employment with the USPS, how this employment opportunity led to the development of a new SDC in Houston, how grassroots Deaf workers successfully navigate the world of work, and how the collective aspect of Deaf culture influences the process.

Introduction to the Remaining Research Questions (2-5)

The shared early learning experiences the informants were exposed to as students at Texas School for the Deaf (TSD) offered them a broad range of subjects and activities which ultimately led them to develop specific interests. These interests, seen in SCCT to be subjected to constant revision via the informants' environmental feedback loop, led to specific vocational goals each informant pursued upon graduation, leading into the next preset broad theme based on the informants' experiences with the world of work.

While still students at TSD, each of the informants gained work experience through summer jobs while home for the duration of summer breaks. Upon pursuit of the informants' respective vocational goals, all four informants experienced truncated opportunity structures

which led them to seek out alternative employment options. During the time in which the informants were still in school, we learned through the interview of Sonnestrahl, that the groundwork was being laid on a national level for the Deaf/USPS relationship that led to increased opportunities within the postal workforce for d/Deaf workers. By informant report we found that, upon learning of this collective employment opportunity, the informants migrated to the Houston area. Upon arrival to the Houston area, the informants entered the postal workforce with the assistance of rehabilitation services (as was required to "certify their deafness" and to be considered for postal employment). This was confirmed by the DVRC (Walton) responsible for the hiring of all Deaf postal workers in the Houston area during the timeframe under study.

Once the informants had migrated to the Houston area they quickly began to establish Deaf-centered peer-based organizations, which served as the foundation for the SDC under study. Within the SDC we found that these organizations served as the main conduit of information exchange, the main source of social support for community members, and as a means of establishing a moral code of conduct for community members (including Deaf postal workers).

At this point, we have now discussed the historical background to the informants' lived experiences, the sociopolitical patterns of Deaf collective employment, the development of the relationships that led to the postal migration under study, and the most salient themes toward the development of the understandings we seek in answer to the remaining research questions. We will now use the data collected and presented in Chapters 4 and 5 to answer the remaining research questions (2-5).

The data collected, which was presented as the research findings in Chapter 4, and the salient themes previously discussed in this chapter, will be now used in this chapter to answer the remaining research questions, which can be seen in Figures 5.3 and 5.4 below. The remaining research questions have been split and paired because the second questions in each figure relate back to the first. Research question 3 relates back to research question 2, and research question 5 is a sub-question of research question 4.

Figure 5.3. Research Questions 2 & 3

2. How did the informants' early learning experiences lead them to choose to enter employment with the USPS?
3. How did this collective employment opportunity lead to the establishment of a new Strong Deaf Community Houston?

The expressed purpose in seeking answers to the three primary research questions; the first (which sought to understand the informants' individual and shared experiences across the three broad preset themes) was covered in Chapter 4, along with the two research questions (2 & 3) listed above, was to add to our understanding of the final two underlying, yet fundamental, research questions (4 & 5), which are listed in Figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4. Research Questions 4 & 5

4. How do Grassroots Deaf workers successfully navigate the world of work?
5. How does the collective aspect of Deaf Culture influence the process?

While these topics were discussed in the previous chapter, we will recap what has been learned by exploring answers to research questions 2 and 3. The answers will then be used to develop the understandings we seek, in regards to; research question 4, which seeks to

understand how grassroots Deaf workers successfully navigate the world of work, and research question 5, which seeks to understand how the collective aspect of Deaf culture influences the career development process of grassroots Deaf workers.

Research question 2: How did the informants' early learning experiences lead them to choose to enter into collective employment with the USPS? The second driving research question in this study sought to understand how the informants' early learning experiences led them to choose to enter collective employment with the USPS. In seeking to understand the informants' early learning experiences, questions regarding the informants' families of origin were included, because that factor influences every decision made in regards to the environment in which the child will be educated, whether or not the parents are influenced by the Medical Model (also referred to as the Deficiency Model) orientation to d/Deafness, whether or not the d/Deaf child will be isolated from other d/Deaf children like them, and what mode of communication will be chosen (manual/use of ASL, or oral, where use of any manual form of communication is vehemently opposed).

While an in depth discussion of these influences lies outside this study's purview, in seeking to develop understandings of d/Deaf individuals' lived experiences, it becomes critical as it is possibly the most fundamental influence in a d/Deaf person's life. While these two competing models are crucial to understanding the Deaf-World experience, they are not discussed in greater depth in this study because, as stated, all four Deaf informants were raised in the Deaf residential school setting, offering them early exposure to both ASL and Deaf culture. Though, as discussed, one informant was enrolled in an oral classroom for his first few years at TSD, prior to his exposure to signing teachers, role models and peers. However, while these influences can

be critical in developing understandings of the informants' lived experiences, this section will focus on the various skills, trades, and activities the informants were exposed to as they culminated to enable the informants to not only secure a position within the USPS, but also assisted them in successfully achieving tenure in a work environment that sought to exclude them.

As was seen in previous Deaf collective employment migrations (Buchanan, 1999) the informants were ahead of their Hearing counterparts in regard to industrial labor skills that were acquired from their exposure to the myriad of vocational training programs they experienced while students at TSD. The transferrable skills learned during the informants' formative years spent at TSD made them all prime candidates for postal employment and specifically, for working with the USPS LSMs. Having been raised in the Deaf-World, the informants also had greater access to Deaf working role models and professionals. All four informants possessed a solid working knowledge of the world of work experience for Deaf Americans prior to leaving TSD.

The four primary informants in this study shared a great deal of early learning experiences as all attended school at TSD. The informants grew up together as family, and in the process, developed a tightly knit, extended kinship network. Their early learning experiences in large part, served to teach the informants the value of maintaining the Deaf collective bonds that followed them throughout their lives and careers. The interdependence learned in the residential setting ultimately led to the informants' independence later in life, serving as a system of social support that aided them not only in the community, but also in achieving career success, career stability and ultimately tenure. While the informants' early learning experiences fostered

interdependence, upon graduation from TSD, all of the informants followed independent employment goals, leading them to new geographic locations. The early learning experiences at TSD, afforded the informants strong feelings of independence, but the interdependence became necessary in dealing with Hearing-World barriers.

Upon graduation, as each informant left to pursue their respective, primary vocational goals, they found limitations in opportunities within their chosen fields. The most common of these limitations by informant report, was a lack of availability in obtaining benefits through their employers, even when benefits were offered to their Hearing counterparts.

When I finished school and graduated, I got out in the world, what did I want? Oh, first after school, I found a job as a draftsman. That required me to go to college. But I didn't want to do that. I wanted a blue-collar job, and I wanted to be able to work outside. I quit that job and transferred to another college to be trained for welding work. I liked working outdoors.

When school was over, I studied Welding at Lee College in Baytown. When I got my certification by passing the certification exams, I made the best scores in the tests I had to take to pass. My goal was to work with oil field pipes, but I had a problem. Insurance companies would not accept coverage for me because I was Deaf. They said if something happened to me, I may sue them. That was the reason they did not want to cover me. The only job I could get was in a small shop on the floor, and not outside. It was frustrating.

Then I heard about the Houston Post Office opening jobs for the Deaf. I decided to apply for that job because the post office offered good benefits, a good job, and a good retirement plan. I thought it would be better than welding because of the dangers it may pose for my eyes or my body. I decided to try the post office and I stayed with it ever since.

This passage offers several clues in developing an understanding of the process that led the informants to enter into postal employment. As stated in the beginning of this chapter, the informants all developed strong interests prior to leaving TSD, which led to expressed vocational

goals in different content areas that each informant pursued after graduating from TSD. While the informants mastered the skills necessary to secure employment in their chosen areas of developed vocational interests, they were met with less than ideal world of work experiences that forced them to seek out alternative vocational goals. As this passage suggests, Informant 3 achieved mastery of welding. Even though he made the best scores in the certification exams required of him, he was still limited in the application of those skills due to his deafness. He was limited to working indoors on the floor in a small shop. He also found frustration when he learned the insurance company would not cover him in the workplace, because of his deafness.

The lack of insurance coverage Informant 3 touched on here was a common theme seen for Deaf workers during this time. All four informants pointed to the availability of benefits as a primary motivating factor in their developed interest in postal employment. Truncated opportunity structures were seen again in this exchange, which was yet another common theme during the time frame under study. Also, while certain dangers must be taken into consideration for all workers, the danger to the eyes Informant 3 touched on here, are compounded by his natural orientation to visual stimuli. Deaf individuals, as a visually oriented people, who have had to deal with social isolation their whole lives, are keenly aware of how isolated they would be should they also lose their eyesight as well.

Informant 1 pointed out while attending Gallaudet College (now Gallaudet University), he felt limited in options and was disappointed he was unable to find any post secondary institutions that offered the major he chose to pursue, toward his future employment goal to become a draftsman, along with support services for Deaf students. Informant 3 expressed the only options he saw at the time, in reference to post secondary educational opportunities for

Deaf students, was either to become a Teacher or a Counselor (neither of which appealed to him). Walton, when asked about this particular assessment, of only two options seen at the time, confirmed the informant's assessment and pointed out, that this sentiment is still a common misconception within Deaf populations seeking to further their training and education through rehabilitation services.

Informant 2 pointed toward the influences of low pay and feelings of complete social isolation at his first job while working on the assembly line for Texas Instruments, in seeking out other employment options. He explained that after having to borrow money to make ends meet from friends and family who were all Deaf postal workers, he finally made the decision to also enter into postal employment. Informant 4 was able to enter his chosen field of printing, but was concerned by advice he received from family that the printing field's outlook looked grim, and that it was not a good field for Deaf workers, citing the rapidly changing technology. Informant 4 expressed a great deal of disappointment and felt all his time spent training to become a printer was time wasted, until he learned of the USPS opportunity for Deaf workers. This sentiment was also echoed by Sonnestrahl, who reported similar sentiments when he learned no one wanted to hire him because of his deafness. Informant 4 was also unable to obtain insurance at his first job as a printer, as was the norm at the time for Deaf workers.

The one problem I did have was not being able to have health insurance coverage. Health insurance companies did not want to cover Deaf printers. They were concerned that the Deaf would sue them if injured on the job. Health insurance also did not trust Deaf printers.

Again, all four informants pointed to the availability of health insurance as a primary consideration in choosing to enter the postal workforce. All four informants were dissatisfied with the realities of their chosen fields and the limitations they experienced upon entering the

workforce. All experienced truncated opportunity structures in pursuing further education and in the world of work. When employment opportunities for Deaf workers opened up within the USPS, they all saw the value of the opportunity as the best option at the time for Deaf workers.

As Informant 1 explained;

Really the post office was not really my dream job. I just needed to work for my "bread and butter"

Upon entering the postal workforce, the two Deaf of Deaf (DofD) informants (1 & 2), still retained plans of returning to college at some point, but soon after their arrival, they started families of their own. This ultimately served to reinforce the informants' main determinate in choosing to work for the USPS initially—the availability of benefits. However, the demands of working 12 hour days, 7 days a week, the grim reality that even if they were able to return to college their employment opportunities would likely still be limited, and the understanding that the USPS offered a level of job security not typically seen in the world of work for grassroots Deaf workers, seemed to be a few of the main influences in choosing to maintain postal employment to the point of tenure.

The first assertion, that demanding hours and starting a family led the informants to seek to maintain postal employment, finds support in Informant 1's experiences in attempting to remain in college while working the demanding hours at entry and start a family. The second assertion, that the informants felt their options would be limited even if they returned to college, finds support in the responses touched on earlier, where initial employment experiences with the world of work ultimately led all four informants to begin seeking out other job opportunities. Further support for this assertion can be seen in Informant 1's inability to find an institution of higher learning that offered his desired major, along with support services for the

Deaf, and Informant 3's comment of only seeing two options for Deaf workers with college degrees (counselor or teacher). These limitations were also confirmed by Walton.

The last assertion, that the informants understood the value of postal employment as one of the best opportunities afforded Deaf workers at the time finds support in the responses from Informant 2, who not only supported the idea of having a union to fight for USPS workers in general, but in that he also assumed a larger role by becoming the union steward for Deaf postal workers (in 1986); citing the stability of his position through the economic downturn experienced in the 1980's. Again, all four primary informants mentioned the availability of benefits as the main determinate in seeking to enter postal employment, which at the time, was a rare occurrence for Deaf workers.

As stated previously, upon taking positions within the USPS, the informants soon married, starting families of their own. The USPS offered a competitive salary, job stability, job security, and health benefits. While the opportunity to work with other Deaf individuals had some influence on the informants, it was not seen as a main determinate in their respective decisions, choosing to enter the postal workforce.

However, once on the job, developments in the community, initiated by the informants, helped to solidify a Deaf presence in both the USPS and the Houston area Deaf community. While working with other Deaf individuals was not the driving force for any of the four informants, it certainly seems to have had a profound impact on their respective decisions to maintain postal employment to the point of achieving tenure, and ultimately retirement. Having other Deaf postal workers within the community and consistently involved in the various

organizations established by the informants did however, help to enable the informants to achieve tenure with the postal service.

While the USPS retirement plan was somewhat influential initially, its influence increasingly became a driving force in achieving tenure; further reinforcing and strengthening these sentiments, the longer the informants remained employed with the USPS. Further informant influences in seeking tenure were seen in relation to the economic downturn of the 1980's, the resultant layoffs, the continued stability of the USPS and in having a union to fight for them in maintaining their positions. The economic downturn experienced in the early 1980's, which for the Houston area included the effects of the oil crisis, and the subsequent layoffs that resulted (also mentioned by Informant 1 as the main influence that led to the Deaf congregation's demise), helped to solidify the informants' feelings of job security within the USPS. The effects of the economic downturn also seem to have had a significant impact on Informant 2, who, during this time, recognized a pressing need for Deaf representation within the union, becoming the union steward for Deaf postal workers in 1986; citing the issues other d/Deaf workers (particularly the ones who came in the second, much larger cohort) were having at the time as the impetus that led him to assume this role. Also of note, while the USPS and professionals in the field of rehabilitation were formally recruiting Deaf workers, all four informants learned of the USPS collective employment opportunity through friends or professionals previously known to them from within the Deaf community or by way of what has often been referred to as "the Deaf grapevine."

Yet another community connection was seen with regard to Walton (Informant 6 in this study), the DVRC who was responsible for all the Deaf workers hired during this timeframe, was

also a CODA. Walton's parents were both heavily involved with an established Deaf program in a local Houston area Baptist Church. All three were well respected members of the Houston Deaf Community and previously known to the informants; if not personally, then certainly by reputation. My father (Informant 1) expressed had this not been the case, there would not have been such an enormous response from Deaf workers, as respect for her family's reputation, brought with it, the trust of members in the collective Deaf community.

In summary, the informants' Deaf collective behaviors(learned early in life from Deaf family and as students at TSD), were reinforced by experienced Hearing-World barriers, Deaf vs. Hearing cultural conflicts, and systemic/discriminatory practices experienced in the world of work. The limitations of experienced truncated opportunity structures upon leaving TSD(in educational and vocational pursuits), led all four informants to seek out other employment options as their initial employment goals were met with less than ideal world of work experiences. In an environment that sought to exclude Deaf workers, the USPS was seen by the informants as the best opportunity for Deaf workers at the time. All four Deaf informants were well aware of the job market conditions at the time and what this opportunity held for them.

Now that we have covered the discussion of how the informants' early learning experiences led to their involvement in the USPS collective employment opportunity, we now seek to answer how this collective employment opportunity led to the establishment of a new SDC in Houston.

Research Question 3: How did this collective employment opportunity lead to the development of a new Strong Deaf Community in Houston? During the time in which this collective employment migration took place, there were no TTYs, video phones, or any

accessible telecommunication means available to Deaf individuals to maintain correspondence with each other save face-to-face interactions (and the mail, which was reported to have taken seven days to reach its destination at the time). The various organizations established by these Deaf men offered them a means by which to remain in contact with each other, learn of Deaf successes, share tips, share opportunities, help each other, learn from each other, and to mediate the ever present feelings of social isolation experienced in their daily lives. These early organizations also offered avenues through which the new Deaf community members could connect with Deaf individuals already living in the Houston area, as there was a Deaf community present in Houston prior to their arrival, but the new Deaf postal recruits were not yet connected to it.

The USPS collective employment opportunity, as was seen in previous collective employment migrations (Buchanan, 1999), brought together a large number of Deaf individuals to what was, for most of them, a new geographic location. The historical patterns of grassroots Deaf workers; in migrating for collective employment, in establishing Deaf centered organizations, and in the establishment of new SDCs in locations where Deaf employment opportunities were plentiful, were repeated yet again, in Houston, as the informants arrived to enter postal employ. The simple answer to the question of how this collective employment opportunity led to the establishment of a new SDC in Houston is; "naturally."

Deaf individuals have historically gravitated toward one another in school, work and community. In part, this is due to the strong collective bonds formed early in Deaf of Deaf families, Deaf residential school settings, and in the Deaf community at large. These bonds are solidified through shared cultural norms, shared communication (in ASL) and through shared

experiences with discrimination by living/working in a Hearing-World. Social isolation for Deaf individuals is an ever present reality as most Deaf Americans live and work in predominately Hearing environments where they are typically the only Deaf person in the workplace. While the informants were initially hired to work in large clusters of Deaf workers, the majority of their careers were spent as Deaf solitaires in the workplace. This stark reality, of the social isolation experienced in the daily lives of Deaf Americans, ultimately serves to encourage social interaction with fellow Deaf community members whenever, and wherever possible.

The countless number of social situations the informants experienced in the Deaf residential school setting, carried over into the community as well. The various programs, activities and clubs the informants were exposed to during their early learning experiences, at TSD, followed the same patterns of behavior seen as these young Deaf students ventured out into the world as young adults. Support for this assertion can be seen in how the SDC itself evolved over time. The first organizations established by the informants were sports oriented. As young men, this was in part, due to the need to remain connected to other Deaf youth, but the various sporting events the informants took part in, also served as an extension of the manner in which the informants interacted as students in TSD.

As the informants' needs changed, the organizations they established evolved to meet those needs. During the time in which the second wave of d/Deaf workers entered the postal workforce, there were multiple issues that surfaced from those who did not exhibit the same Deaf collective work ethic as the first collective group of twelve. During this time, Informant 1 married and his first child was born. He and his wife sought out church programs that offered ASL interpreting for the Deaf, seeking a wholesome environment in which to raise their children.

While the influence of child rearing was profound, it seems as if Informant 1 was also responding to the needs of the collective community in seeking to establish a moral, ethical, and generally speaking, a more positive alternative to the "Deaf Club scene." As the informants pointed out, there were repetitions of the same old problems at the Deaf Club, many of which carried over from early years spent at TSD, and were mostly based on "*old grudges*." While the Deaf congregation at Westbury was in part, established for personal growth, it was also established for the collective good of the SDC, and the newly recruited Deaf postal workers as well. The influence of child rearing and the resultant Deaf establishment of a Deaf church based congregation was also seen in Walton's interview in regards to her father (who was of the previous Deaf generation in Houston and whose position in the collective community he established mirrored that of Informant 1, where he too established a Deaf congregation after he was the first in his collective community to have children as well).

Within the SDC under study, the Deaf congregation established at Westbury Church of Christ was established in part, as a means by which to establish a moral code of conduct for Deaf individuals who migrated to Houston for postal employ, and particularly; for those who were also peers. By extension, the establishment of this moral code of conduct also reinforced the Deaf collective work ethic for Deaf postal employees as the congregation was comprised of mostly Deaf postal workers initially, until the numbers of Deaf members swelled, encompassing other Deaf community members in Houston not employed with the USPS. Informant 1 explained how the experience at Westbury altered his views and behaviors, from that of being an "*egoistic leader*," to learning how to lead by serving the Deaf community. All four informants reported, prior to this experience, they were "*mischievous*," and all saw this as a time of positive, personal growth.

Yet another benefit for the informants was the opportunity to socialize with Hearing church members as well, opening them up to new funds of knowledge. The church offered increased opportunities for Deaf members to interact with Hearing individuals in an environment more conducive to the development of Deaf-Hearing relationships than Deaf people typically experienced outside in the real world. It seems probable that this is largely due to the similarities between the collective aspect of Deaf culture and the nature of how a church congregation functions. Regardless of the "how," or "why," many of the relationships forged during the early 1970's, between the informants and the Hearing members of this church persist to this day.

As stated previously, during the time in which the USPS migrations under study occurred, the informants had no means of accessible telecommunication technologies through which to maintain correspondence. As Informant 1 pointed out, the mail took seven days to travel to its destination. As Informant 2 related, this meant a great deal of driving to friends' homes, only to find they were not home, leaving notes on the door, returning home and waiting for some kind of response. In the SDC under study, the myriad of clubs, activities and organizations served as the informants' primary means of maintaining correspondence with each other, which was also seen as the most critical aspect of information exchange. Informant 2 pointed out that many of the SDC organizations offered the informants a means by which to learn about other Deaf individuals' successes, to share tips with each other, to learn from each other, to help each other with the problems of daily living, and to alert each other of opportunities.

Considering by informant report, all four informants learned of the USPS Deaf collective employment opportunity through informal means, these community events served purposes far

more critical to the lives of community members than mere social events. While these various organizations were once established as the only means by which to maintain contact and correspondence with fellow community members, they are still seen as an integral aspect of the Deaf-World experience today, even though advancements in technology now offer a myriad of ways for Deaf people to communicate without ever leaving home.

Often attendance to certain events was expected. If one family or members of a tightly knit kinship network (similar to the one under study) was unable to attend, at least one member of the SDC would, informally acting as a “representative” of sorts. The member upon return relayed the information back to the other members of the SDC. The Deaf grapevine has always been an extremely useful aspect of the Deaf community, and is still one of the most effective avenues by which to mobilize Deaf community members for collective employment or for collective action (if necessary).

By scheduling events in advance, the informants were able to plan for camaraderie, giving them something to look forward to as they returned to lives lived often in isolation. The SDC and the organizations the informants established as stated, were not mere social events. The times, in which the gatherings took place, offered the informants something they did not experience much of in their daily lives; full communication access. By gathering with each other the informants created spaces where they could express themselves at the highest levels of intelligence they possessed, pushing the boundaries of knowledge by learning from one another through socialization in a language (ASL) that allowed them to exercise their full linguistic capabilities. As such, these gatherings were seen as a source of strength and served to aid Deaf

individuals in perseverance, as Informant 4 pointed out in his discussion about a group of retired Deaf workers;

I enjoy the Deaf retired men's breakfast. We would eat and chat. I enjoy that so much! Before when I was working, it was so busy, with work and home responsibilities. Going to those breakfasts help me to forget the past problems and just enjoy. That is an awesome thing!

As this passage might suggest, even the most informal of these organizations, serves a greater purpose in mediating the problems of daily living for Deaf community members. While coping behaviors are an important aspect of any population, for a population as traditionally underserved as the d/Deaf, the benefits of participation in these various organizations can, and often do, include benefits that within in the general population, are thought only to be gained through formal services.

In search of a clear understanding of how SDCs form, and how Deaf Communities as a whole behave, an old proverb comes to mind; "nature abhors a vacuum." The driving force behind the behaviors discussed here, might have less to do with experienced discrimination and more to do with that which is inaccessible to Deaf persons. Deaf communities have persisted where dominant populations have sought to assimilate them in large part, because Deaf people find the Hearing-World lacking the required "space" for them to make the social, linguistic and intellectual connections they seek. The same connections we all seek in some way, shape or form. The barriers experienced by Deaf individuals in the Hearing-World create a void in some of the most basic of human needs for Deaf individuals; to have the opportunity to effectively communicate with others, to be understood, to have a "voice," to have the opportunity to assume leadership roles, to work toward common goals with other like-minded individuals, to be accepted, to be loved, to be cared for by others, to feel like one has a place in the world, and to

be supported in the challenges we all face in our daily lives. The rejections, and isolation Deaf persons feel in the Hearing-World, serve to reinforce the acceptance they all find in the Deaf-World. In other words, how a SDC is established, is in part due to Deaf characteristics and behaviors, but it also has much to do with that which is found to be lacking in the Hearing-World. This understanding points to a greater need of social action and intervention, not in Deaf populations, as is often assumed in the rehabilitation literature, but in educating the Hearing-World about the Deaf.

Yet another influence found in the current study that should be noted was in regard to the two Deaf of Deaf Informants and their connections to the previous Deaf generation. Both Informants (1 and 2) had Deaf family members who worked in the factories during WWII. Informant 1, who was responsible for the establishment of the Deaf congregation at Westbury, has a Deaf uncle who (as was mentioned earlier in this study) he described as a major influence in his being groomed to be a Deaf leader. This Deaf uncle took part in a previous Deaf collective employment migration when he migrated to Akron, Ohio, and took part in one of the largest Deaf collective employment migrations recorded in Buchanan's (1999) work. As discussed, the Deaf collective employment experience in Akron was seen by some Deaf leaders of the day as the perfect example to serve as a model in the development of a National Deaf Labor bureau that never came to fruition.

The patterns seen in the establishment of a Silent Colony (referred to in this study as the SDC) in Akron as a result of the collective employment opportunities seen in Akron's factories were also seen in Houston. It should be noted, however, that no contact was made between this uncle and Informant 1, during the time in which he was working to establish the SDC in

Houston; pointing to a primary influence of the natural tendencies of all people, Deaf and Hearing, to congregate with like-minded peers, being a driving force in the establishment of the SDC under study. Further support for this assertion, can be found in the answer Informant 1 gave in response to the question of how the church congregation was formed, which was; "*it's a mystery.*"

The Deaf tendency to congregate in the establishment of SDCs does not seem to be limited to the influences of Deaf collective employment migrations, as there was evidence in the data collected to also support the assertion that this cultural phenomenon is also a natural Deaf tendency. Walton explains her father's role in the previous Deaf generation of TSD graduates in the Houston area, which again mirrored that of Informant 1;

"And then they all wandered. And then of course, there is the Christian background that came into my parents, you know focus. And it came after they had kids, you know. And they got very active there and then that just enhances those leadership qualities."

Of note, while I had not aimed for verification from Walton in regards to the influence of childrearing in the establishment and involvement of Strong Deaf Community members in religious settings by Informant 1, what Walton describes here, is that her parents' lived experiences mirrored those of the informants. Specifically, her father's role and actions in the Deaf community, including the establishment of a Deaf congregation, in part, influenced by having children, mirrored those of Informant 1, my own father. I couldn't help but wonder how much of a role these cultural norms played in the development of both our worldviews as Walton's sentiments throughout her interview, echoed my father's and therefore, my own.

She also pointed to yet another similarity between the two generations when she pointed out that the fellow Deaf residential classmates spread out once graduated and "wandered," until they had children, bringing their focus back to the collective community. Again, this points back to the assertion made earlier, that experienced barriers in the Hearing-World, merely serve to reinforce Deaf collective behaviors, ultimately resulting in tightly knit, kinship networks as Deaf learn from "real world experiences," that they can only depend on each other.

Research Question 4: How do grassroots Deaf workers successfully navigate the world of work? The four grassroots Deaf workers who served as the primary informants in this study, all gained a host of transferrable skills while students at TSD that assisted them both in their daily lives and in the world of work. As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the many tools Deaf workers utilize in navigating the world of work is seen in the various Deaf periodicals referred to by Vickery Van Cleve and Crouch (1989) as "little papers." These Deaf centered periodicals have served to inform Deaf workers of Deaf employment successes and opportunities for well over a century. The various organizations the informants established upon migrating to the Houston area also served these same purposes.

Much of the information that is gained by individual Deaf workers comes to them by way of the Deaf grapevine. The interdependence of the collective community also serves to inform Deaf members of available services, various resources in the community, professionals who can be trusted, Hearing allies, the strengths of various members, and who should be approached for assistance depending on the area of need. Again, as stated, all four informants learned of the USPS collective opportunity for Deaf workers, through friends or community based contacts and not by formal means.

Walton, the DVRC responsible for the hiring of all the Houston area Deaf postal workers during this migration, was also a CODA. Her family was well respected in the Deaf community, and the rapid mobilization of Deaf workers in migrating into postal employ was said to be due, in large part, to the DVRC's community membership status and the respect the collective Deaf community extended to her family. As stated several times in this study; Informant 1 expressed this collective employment migration may not have happened, had it not been for the respect the community had for the DVRC and her Deaf family.

In the maintenance of employment, the informants pointed to Deaf collective behaviors, the responsibility of the DofD (Informants 1 and 2) in leading by example, the assistance they shared in learning new tasks, in training each other, in learning their roles, in learning their responsibilities, and in their collective ability to navigate through the ever-changing maze of postal policies and procedures.

Yet another influence that cannot be ignored was the role of Hearing allies in the workplace. Informant 1 pointed out the influence of the Postmaster (Elder) who was eager to hire Deaf workers. This was confirmed by Walton, who also pointed to this Postmaster's son, "Elder, Jr.," who was also the Director of Human Resources at the time, as yet another positive influence in the inclusion of Deaf workers.

The thirteenth member of the first collective cohort, who was initially mistaken for Deaf, was a Veteran who had just returned home from the Vietnam War. He developed strong working relationships with the first cohort of Deaf workers, and became good friends with the twelve Deaf recruits. Eventually, he learned how to effectively communicate with his fellow

workers, and as a result, he was promoted to a supervisory role. This strong working relationship continued until he was rotated out as per USPS policy.

Hearing allies also played a large role in the development of the relationships leading to this migration, as this collective employment migration would never have occurred without support from outside the Deaf community. While this study's focus is on the Deaf-World experience, the world of work still exists within the larger context of the Hearing-World. As was seen in the interviews of both Sonnestrahl, and Walton, there were numerous examples of Hearing persons who were open to working with Deaf individuals, some of whom had positive experiences with Deafpersons, some could sign, a few had d/Deaf family members, some were politicians, some worked within the various offices that contributed to the opening of doors to Deaf workers across the country. There were also numerous examples given, of Hearing individuals working within the USPS, who could also sign, and contributed to the Deaf collective employment experience in other locations. In seeking to understand the interplay between Deaf and Hearing populations in the world of work, there is one more influence, possibly the greatest influence uncovered, that affects the world of work experience for all Deaf Americans.

A discussion of how grassroots Deaf workers successfully navigate the world of work, cannot offer the depth of understanding sought, without returning to the historical patterns of Deaf collective employment, to touch on the greatest Deaf employment barrier uncovered throughout the research process. The greatest barrier to Deaf employment seen, was not found in informant characteristics, or deficiencies due to their d/Deafness, but in the Hearing-World itself. An in-depth discussion of these influences can be seen at the beginning of this chapter.

Research Question 5: How does the collective aspect of Deaf culture influence the process? The collective aspect of Deaf culture influences all areas of daily living for members of Deaf culture. Deaf cultural behaviors, learned early in life, have historically been transmitted from Deaf parents to their children, or peer to peer, within the Deaf residential school setting. While the collective aspects of Deaf culture have been previously discussed in detail under the second broad theme of Awareness, we will highlight a few of the main points here in answer to this final research question.

Within the context of early learning experiences, we learned that all four informants attended TSD, offering them access to Deaf role models, from Deaf of Deaf peers, Deaf teachers, Deaf coaches, and in the pursuit of extracurricular activities. The two Deaf of Deaf informants also had access to Deaf parents, and as such, also served as Deaf role models and Deaf leaders to their peers.

Really, my parents were Deaf and my uncle who was a football coach at TSD was also Deaf. My Deaf uncle and his wife were both teachers at TSD, and both were strong role models in the Deaf community in Austin. I was sort of trained to be a leader. I felt responsible to serve the Deaf.

In TSD, the informants learned best socially, learning early the interdependent behaviors that assisted them in learning socially. Within the domain of social learning, the informants learned how to gauge others' abilities, and their deficiencies; which were either tapped as a resource for the collective (based on abilities) or as a target of social intervention (for individual deficiencies). These collective behaviors were nurtured by Deaf teachers who understood from personal experiences how critical these developed behaviors would be later in life.

Then when I went to TSD, teachers said we must help one another. You are all the same; Deaf.

While the collective behaviors the informants learned fostered interdependency, the lessons learned, and the strong Deaf role models the informants were exposed to ultimately culminate to lead to their feelings of independence. As stated, all four informants, upon graduation from TSD, followed independent vocational and/or educational goals, leading them to new geographic locations. No two informants moved to the same location, nor did they follow similar employment goals. It was not until they all experienced both truncated opportunity structures with their chosen vocations, and the social isolation inherent to living/working in the Hearing-World, that they altered their respective employment goals. Once the informants had altered their vocational goals, all seeking to enter postal employ, they migrated to the Houston area, where the establishment of a new SDC began. These understandings point to a socially created need to fill voids the informants experienced in Hearing-World contexts. The limitations imposed upon the informants from within Hearing-World contexts, ultimately led to solidify the lessons learned from their days at TSD, in that they could only depend on each other. The lack of access to socialization in Hearing-World contexts, led to developed social needs (based on basic human needs and desires) that the informants quickly learned could only be addressed in Deaf-World contexts.

With regard to the career development process, the informants learned a host of transferrable skills while students at TSD that made them all prime candidates for postal employment. In part, the skills learned were acquired through collective behaviors (as the informants all expressed that they learned best socially; in both early learning and world of work experiences). Once the informants entered into the postal workforce, the informants relied on each other to maintain their positions, through their learned collective behaviors when lines of

communication broke down, and they had to work together to know what was being required of them.

At the post office I had a chance to chat with my Deaf peers and I worked better and faster too. It made it easier because we all could understand more together, in what we are doing at the post office. With Hearing people there was always more of a communication problem especially with regard to directions. It was difficult to know what I was supposed to do when communication was a problem. They could have informed the Deaf group in writing.

While interpreters were seen to be offered for this first cohort for exam directions, prior to entry, as Informant 1 explained, there were no interpreters after that point. This may have been due to some of the issues seen with the much larger, second cohort of d/Deaf workers, where greater workplace support was necessary, shifting the rehabilitation focus on workplace support, to those who were struggling most.

As the issues with the second cohort mounted, the economic downturn of the 1980's occurred, leading to increased challenges in the postal workplace, and layoffs were common. The issues d/Deaf workers were experiencing during this time, led Informant 2 to recognize a need for union support (pointing back to his responsibility to the collective as one of the Deaf of Deaf members, and as a result; a Deaf leader).

The union started in 1970. Sixteen years later, I became a steward in 1986, after I saw what was happening to Deaf post office employees. When I realized that I was doing fine, but the other Deaf employees were complaining so much, I wondered why. Then I found out there were many misunderstandings, and that they did not understand the procedures. They had different levels of education. I felt sorry for them. Many Hearing people took advantage of the Deaf. The Hearing people couldn't use me, just like your Dad (Informant 1). We, the two of us, were two of the few Deaf people who fought back and spoke out. That is what made me want to become a steward to fight for Deaf employees' rights.

This passage points back to the two Deaf of Deaf informants (1 & 2) and their shared feelings of inherited responsibility in the expectations to assume leadership roles in the Deaf

collective community. As seen here, Informants 1 and 2 felt the responsibility to take action, and while both stood up to those who tried to or did take advantage of d/Deaf workers (which was confirmed by Walton), they both interpreted their feelings of responsibility in different ways. While both took action within the USPS, Informant 2 saw the need for Deaf representation in the union, interpreting his responsibility to assume a larger role in the workplace, Informant 1 set his sights on the needs of the collective outside the workplace, in seeking to address his responsibilities of Deaf leadership in the community. In part this was seen to be due to the needs of Deaf postal workers, but also in seeking to establish a moral code of conduct for both the workers, and members of the SDC.

As was discussed throughout this study, the informants pointed to the organizations being central to both career development process, and as the main avenue by which information exchanges were made possible. Again, the endless number of organizations and activities established by the informants served purposes far greater than mere social events.

The Deaf community is really like a family. We see each other almost every day. It does influence us because when we hear about other Deaf people's successes in their lives, we learn from them. I find I can give tips to other Deaf people who have problems. We all pass around tips to each other, and help each other. I do learn things from other Deaf people. I stayed with the group. Now that many started to retire, they seem to be more spread out and we are not as close as before.

As seen here, as the informants all aged and started to retire, they started to spread out, becoming more independent in their activities. This is not to say the informants are not still very close, or that they do not see each other and maintain correspondence; they do. But this understanding points to the utility of these activities as central to the career development process

when one considers that their leaving the postal workforce has decreased the driving need for the same level of continued correspondence the informants maintained throughout their careers.

Understanding the centrality of the concept of collectivism in the SDC, this gives rise to a need to better understand the various functions of the SDC in developing future plans of action where the strength of the collective community (the SDC) is made central to the rehabilitation process. The strength of the collective community also serves to strengthen the resolve of the individuals within in dealing with daily problems and major negative life events. As was previously reported, the collective behaviors often serve as an informal system of social support for members throughout the lifespan in mediating the lack of formal services for the Deaf. As was discussed in Chapter 1, the Deaf of Deaf community members are the ascribed leaders within the Deaf community and serve as the core of the SDC. Deaf of Deaf responsibilities are learned early in life; where leadership is often both expected and inherited. This understanding gives rise to the need to not only make the SDC central to the process, but also to include Deaf leaders from within the SDC in the development of these plans of actions, to maximize the potential of both the collective community itself and the individuals within.

Limitations and Suggestions for Transferability

This study required a purposive sample of grassroots Deaf workers, who directly took part in the USPS collective employment migration, and in the process, established a new SDC in Houston. While this certainly limits the generalizability of the research findings, there are many Deaf postal workers and grassroots Deaf workers in general, whose experiences are sure to have been similar in many respects. For those for whom these resonate, further documentation is called for. While the USPS has changed their policy and is no longer recruiting Deaf workers,

this is not to say that, as was mentioned by Informant 2, that the USPS never hires workers with hearing loss. The decision of whether or not to hire/Deaf workers is still largely left up to individual postmasters, district managers, and supervisors. While the Deaf postal worker experience was not ideal in every aspect, the USPS may still be a viable option for DVRCs seeking job opportunities for Deaf consumers. Much of what has been learned here should assist DVRCs in understanding the ongoing needs of Deaf workers and what types of support services would enhance Deaf employment experiences, should they choose to enter the postal workforce, or enter into other Deaf collective employment opportunities developed in the future.

Further study of the Deaf postal worker experience in the various locations in which these migrations occurred is warranted to gain greater depth of understanding in how different these collective employment experiences might have been for Deaf workers, depending on the views of postal administrators in these different geographic locations and the rehabilitation professionals who served Deaf populations during the time in which these migrations occurred. According to data gleaned from Sonnestrahl's interview, the USPS Deaf worker experience varied a great deal in the temporal aspect of when specific migrations occurred in various locations, the specific numbers of Deaf workers in each location, the characteristics of Deaf workers in each location, the specific positions Deaf workers were allowed to assume, the working conditions experienced, the key players involved, and on a social level, the effect the migrations had on Deaf communities in each location.

Similarities on a national level were seen in regards to; what seems to have been the main impetus for the inclusion of Deaf workers; to work on the LSMs, the grassroots Deaf worker response to the postal opportunity, the exam accommodation process, the eventual waiving of the

exams for Deaf workers, the two primary waves of Deaf workers entering postal locations, the trial periods to prove to postal administrators the viability of Deaf workers, the workplace support received, the role VR played in the process, the tendency of postal employers in applying stereotypes to all Deaf workers, experienced barriers in the workplace, the sharp decline seen in the numbers of Deaf postal workers, and the effects of a created state of exclusion in regards to Deaf workers in the postal workforce.

While many assume Deaf workers did not have much of a presence within the USPS until these migrations took place, there is evidence to suggest that Deaf workers may very well have been present in the postal workforce, in some fashion or another, since its inception. A full historical investigation is not only warranted, but imperative in seeking social justice, and an end to the vicious cycle of control over the Deaf American working class. This study is largely based on Buchanan's (1999) line of inquiry which documented Deaf workers of industry from 1850-1950. This USPS collective employment migration of grassroots Deaf workers was the next large scale Deaf collective employment phenomenon. Further study which picks up on this line of inquiry is warranted, and as Informant 3 pointed out, this may be occurring presently with regard to Wal-Mart's active recruitment of Deaf workers. If this is found to be the case, this study should assist DVRCs in targets for intervention with both d/Deaf workers, and those who employ them to ensure continuity in the development of ongoing positive relationships between Wal-Mart executives/managers, d/Deaf workers and DVRC professionals.

While the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all d/Deaf persons, or their respective work environments, the experiences explored here, are indicative of many of the obstacles faced by Deaf Americans; living and working in a Hearing-World. Many of the issues

seen here, such as; the lack of training of employers, communication barriers, accessibility barriers, miscommunications and misunderstandings are common to the work experiences of most, if not all d/Deaf Americans.

While I sought to focus solely on the views of those within the SDC under study, it should be noted that the connections seen between all informants in this study were profoundly telling as well. All of the informants were in some way shape or form, connected. Other than the obvious connections seen in regards to the four primary informants, there were other connections that were not as readily seen and would not have been uncovered without the methods chosen.

Sonnestrahm worked closely with Anderson, who was not only my mentor during my master's studies, but was also known to my father as they both played basketball at Gallaudet University. After Sonnestrahm's interview, we had a short discussion of my aspirations and I touched on the Smithsonian ordeal discussed in this study, prior to conducting the interviews. He pointed out that his ex-wife was an art history professor at Gallaudet, and was responsible for the establishment of the Deaf American historical exhibit at the Smithsonian, that was scrapped due to a lawsuit from oralists. Of note, neither he, nor his wife were aware of the lawsuit, and Sonnestrahm pointed out that during the establishment of the Smithsonian exhibit, deaf individuals (oralists) kept bringing in artifacts in an attempt to alter the exhibit entirely to support their ideology. While plans were scrapped for the Deaf American historical exhibit, exhibits displaying oralist technologies have been established at the Smithsonian.

As stated previously, the first rough draft ASL to English interpretations were conducted by my mother, who was stunned to learn while transcribing this discussion that Sonnestrahm's ex-

wife was her art history professor at Gallaudet. Yet another strong connection was seen in that Walton was not just a DVRC, but an integral member of both the Deaf community, and the SDC under study. During our ongoing discussions I learned from my father that Walton even interpreted at my parent's wedding.

These connections are critical in developing an understanding of how closely tied Deaf Americans truly are. Though the goal of this study was to offer the perspectives and experiences of members of the SDC under study, these connections are touched on here, as a testament to how far the reach of this study's findings could extend. Further investigation of the generalizability of this study's findings is also warranted, but lies outside the scope of the present study as there are no other studies like this one from which to compare results at this time.

This study covered a wide range of topics, and as such many of the areas touched on should be further explored in greater detail, above what is seen here, as the broad approach precluded delving deeper into every aspect of the current study. Data are not kept in regards to Deaf persons across the lifespan, from their early educational experiences to their needs as senior citizens, or in regards to U. S. Census data. The complete lack of historical documentation and the created state of social exclusion only serve to perpetuate the vast number of challenges Deaf Americans face.

As stated, this study was in several ways, an extension of Buchanan's line of inquiry. The historical aspect of this phenomenon should be explored further and documented for future generations. In many ways, I lamented putting off the task of a full historical approach to studying the history of Deaf postal workers, as it was both infeasible in regards to the requirements of a doctoral dissertation, and it seemed, prior to conducting this study, most of the

data that such a grand task would demand was, for the most part, inaccessible. In returning to Buchanan's work, I also felt a pressing need to document the informants' lived experiences, as during this study, I was heavily impacted by the personal revelation of just how much Deaf American History we have lost, with each passing Deaf generation.

As stated, this study has also raised the level of awareness in our community of how much of our own Deaf History has been suppressed and blocked from historical accounts. It is hoped that this study will lead more Deaf communities to document their lived experiences in both community and work to help shed light on the Deaf American experience. While some experienced exclusion was realized by our community in the past, the sheer magnitude of what that meant on a social level was not clearly understood. In part, this is due to our unfettered access to the Deaf history that has always been passed down, generation to generation, within the community, but until this information is widespread and completely accessible to Hearing populations as well, Hearing persons will never be able to fully grasp the Deaf-World in all its complexity. Until Hearing populations better understand their Deaf populations, the vicious cycle that limits Deaf employment success will never end.

Audit trail. The primary line of inquiry this study follows was established by Buchanan (1999) who documented the history of Deaf workers of industry from 1850-1950. This study sought to take Buchanan's work a step further by documenting the next Deaf collective employment migration, to develop depth of understanding in regards to the lived experiences of the grassroots Deaf workers who take part in these migrations, and to better understand Deaf behaviors across the lifespan.

Prior to conducting this study, it was thought that the Gallaudet University study (Manning & Stansbury, 1969) was in part, responsible for the events that occurred in Houston. As stated, this turned out to be false, as Sonnestrahl explained the study occurred after the USPS/Deaf relationships had been forged, and after the USPS migrations began. Further support for the assertion of a vicious cycle of control over a Deaf presence in the USPS through control of the exam process, was found in the article entitled "*The Right Decision*," retrieved via the Gallaudet University Archives; *The Silent Worker* (November 28, 1889), and included in Chapter 4.

An ethnographic case study approach was chosen, in part, due to the inaccessible nature of these events, the created state of exclusion in regards to Deaf postal workers, and the lack of historical documentation of Deaf Americans in general. As an ethnographic case study, to increase the trustworthiness of the data collected, four informants were selected in an effort to triangulate the data using multiple sources. Data triangulation was then taken a step further by adding two additional informants. Sonnestrahl's interview added to our understanding of how the USPS/Deaf relationship began, some of the key players involved throughout the process, the first USPS/Deaf migration, and similarities seen in different geographic locations where migrations occurred. Sonnestrahl also added to our understanding of the struggles Deaf workers faced with Hearing-World barriers, offering further evidence of Deaf collective behaviors, as his efforts were driven by his concern for the struggles of all Deaf workers, and the futures of his Deaf children and Deaf grandchildren as well.

Walton, the Houston area DVRC, who was responsible for the hiring of all Deaf postal workers during the time frame under study (including all four informants) was included to add to

our understanding of the events that unfolded, specific to the Houston area migration, to triangulate the data collected from the four primary informants, and to offer a DVRC professional perspective. Walton's interview also added to our understanding of the SDC under study, as her experiences were very similar to my own, which culminated from her lived experiences of being born into a SDC. Her father's position in the SDC he helped to create, for a previous generation of Deaf individuals, paralleled the efforts of my father, Informant 1. This added to our understanding of both SDCs and Deaf collective behaviors. Walton, who is still employed within the VR system in Texas, and who also served on the TSD Board for 21 years, was also instrumental in developing understandings of the changes seen over time, across the three broad themes.

In seeking to offer the reader a Deaf perspective, care was taken in that every point made, in regards to Deaf behaviors across the lifespan, was vetted through Informant 1, the key informant in this study, and my father. While I always knew I was "my father's son," I did not realize how much of his views were instilled in me. He pointed out this understanding several times in asking me, why I even bothered to discuss these points with him, seeing our world views as similar, yet much was learned through the constant conversations that took place between myself, and my father, throughout this study.

One of many personal revelations obtained through this process, was seen when my father pointed out to me that I had always been the gatekeeper to this SDC. While I had originally thought the informants who took part in this study stepped forward out of respect for my father, he pointed out this was not the case. My father explained to me that I had always been their bridge between the two worlds, and that this study was, in part, an extension of my

inherited responsibility to explain the Deaf-World to the Hearing-World. Though this revelation was profound on a personal level, as a researcher seeking to offer a Deaf voice, I still felt the need, given the methodology chosen, to include a rigorous focus, centered on their views, not my own. However, admittedly, I was stunned to find so many of my own personal views, accumulated over the course of my life, professional and otherwise, in the responses seen in Walton's interview.

Researcher as a Research Instrument: Discussion. In seeking to understand how this study came about, I will go back to square one and describe the process that led to this final product. This study evolved from an assignment in one of my doctoral courses. The assignment was to be interview based, and as such, I decided to interview my father about his experiences as a career Deaf postal worker. As I was researching for background information, I quickly realized the paucity of literature and the complete lack of historical documentation from the USPS in regards to the thousands of Deaf postal workers who have been employed with the post office over the years.

As a product of the community under study, the informants included in this interview study are my community elders and were my adult male role models growing up. While I have heard their stories my whole life, I never realized the inaccessibility of this information to other Deaf not in our community and those outside the community, in the general public. When I learned of how their lived experiences had been suppressed from postal history, I took a critical approach, utilizing Critical Race Theory (CRT) and admittedly, was driven by my desire for social justice. I was also heavily influenced by the work of Harlan Lane, Paddy Ladd, and many others, which at first only served to strengthen my sentiments toward a CRT approach. Upon

reading of the Smithsonian's attempts in establishing a Deaf American historical exhibit, which brought about a lawsuit from oralists, effectively blocking this endeavor in 1993 (Ladd, 2009 p. 38), I was beset with feelings of bewilderment, as to why anyone would be rewarded in a court of law, for such openly discriminatory actions against my people.

As I began my research, I decided on a critical historiography approach as it seemed to be the best fit for the task at hand. I unearthed everything I could find, but there was very little to be seen in either the Deafness literature, or in the endless number of internet searches in reference to this phenomenon. I was however, able to find my way into two internet sources which offered some promise. Deaf periodicals have always been an integral aspect of the Deaf World, and I quickly realized if there was any literature in reference to Deaf postal workers, it would be found in the GU Archives.

Sifting through the Gallaudet University Archives yielded quite a bit of relative data, but the timeframe of the periodicals found was primarily limited from the 1800's to the early 1900's. I also gained access to the U.S. National Archives and spent months going through thousands of scanned articles from periodicals across the nation. Having a solid understanding of the Deafness literature, I began to see many similarities between the periodicals I had found, and those I saw in Buchanan's *Illusions of Equality* (1999). Yet still, little was seen specifically related to my chosen topic and naught for the time frame beginning in the 1960's save the GU Study (Manning and Stansbury, 1969).

The most frustrating aspect of this part of my research was the endless number of articles of complaint against the USPS and the Civil Service, along with the recurring theme of the words "falling on deaf ears." Yet another frustration seen was in the endless number of

advertisements seeking to peddle "cures to the afflicted." As I delved deeper into the archived literature, I continued to come across historical articles that I recognized as sources from Buchanan's work. As I returned to *Illusions*, I reoriented myself with the patterns of Deaf collective employment that explained well the phenomenon under study as the next large scale Deaf collective employment migration.

The focus of this study had widened by over a century and I still felt this story needed to be told. Once I was knee deep in the formal writing process, I started to see the bigger picture and realized I had sidelined the most critical aspect of this story; the informants' lived experiences. The more I tried to make their collective story the central focal point of this dissertation; I realized I was trying to force the data to fit the research paradigm and methods I had chosen.

While a critical approach fit well the story, it was not indicative of a Deaf perspective. The Deaf men I knew (including all four informants) never complained about their work experiences, discrimination, nor did I ever hear them express anger or resentment toward the USPS for maltreatment. Also, while CRT offers a useful framework in Deafness related research, it takes on a position of bipolar construct, with an "us vs. them" approach, a "master narrative vs. the counter narrative." This does not allow for the many influences seen in the Deaf-World experience as the U.S. government is not the main source of oppression, and while the medical community continues to play a more than significant role in the oppression of Deaf populations, the ongoing efforts have a great deal to do with the medical lobby, which, as Lane (1999) points out, stands to lose an enormous amount of profit, should d/Deaf persons be largely accepted by the American public, and accept a Deaf view of there being nothing to "fix."

Another influence was seen yet again, in Buchanan's work and as thorough as his work was, I was still left with feelings of wonderment. All I could think about was all the Deaf History that was lost when these Deaf pioneers of Industry passed, without ever having the opportunity to share their collective wealth of knowledge and world of work experiences with the world. It was at this point, I was overwhelmed with feelings of my personal responsibility to the Deaf community and the realization that if I did not record the informants lived experiences; they too would one day be lost. My inner struggle was still centered on how best to make their collective story central to this study.

The original framework I had chosen was no longer a viable option, and as I delved deeper into the literature, I started to see the main issue I was grappling with was that I was not choosing the best theoretical framework for the data; I was trying to force the data into the theoretical paradigm I had selected. It was at this point that I began to see everything in a new light. I had just begun to see how much of myself I was bringing into the study and I realized if I were to do *their* story justice, I would need to select a research paradigm and research methods to best tell *their* story. It was at this point I knew I had to take a few steps back to reevaluate all the data I had to find not the research models *I thought best*, but search for a new theoretical framework that would *best fit the data*. As stated, the Deaf men in this study would never take such a critical, oppositional, tone with the USPS and as I started to apply what I had learned from the literature, to my personal lived experiences as a member to this community, through constant conversations with my father (the key informant), I realized this study should reflect a *Deaf perspective*, that is, it should reflect *their perspectives*.

In my quest to share the lived experiences of these men as the central focal point of this study, I felt there was only one choice, an ethnographic case study situated firmly within a constructivist paradigm. This was chosen for many reasons, but the driving force behind this shift in methodology was to take an approach I had never seen in the body of rehabilitation research and that was to show what “normal” career development looked like across the lifespan for Deaf workers who, though they were required to sign up for VR services to enter the USPS, they had never returned for further services. As such, I began to see how traditional rehabilitation research only focused on Deaf deficiencies to be mediated by intervention but rarely (if ever), did the rehabilitation research take those who have succeeded in the world of work, to better understand how would be consumers succeed without significant assistance from rehabilitation professionals post successful case closure. In all fairness to the field of rehabilitation, those who have succeeded in achieving tenure in the workplace were no longer “in the system.” One of the greatest challenges in working within Deaf populations is in regards to the complete lack of assessment measures based on Deaf norms, by which to compare new d/Deaf rehabilitation clients. This reality leaves DVRCs with inadequate assessment measures that tend to offer only Hearing norms to compare Deaf scores against to find future targets of intervention. This is extremely problematic when no theoretical model exists, to show what *normal Deaf career development* across the lifespan looks like.

I also realized I needed to find a theoretical framework that would allow for the inclusion of my personal experiences as a product of this Deaf community, as my lived experience as a member of this community, created a clear bias. By choosing a constructivist approach, and ethnographic methods, I finally found the best methodology by which to not only bring the informants’ lived experiences to the forefront, but also allows them the opportunity to take more

active roles in the research process. This change in methodology also allowed me to embrace my bias (as I have always believed a researcher's personal bias can never be completely eliminated from their work). The goal was to present the phenomenon in a manner that would hold true to a Deaf perspective (that is, the informant's perspectives).

My goal was to create a study that not only explored the essence of this collective community but reflected these constructs as well. As stated several times throughout the study, my father served as the key informant, and my mother was the Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI) who interpreted and transcribed the bulk of the first drafts of the interviews of the five Deaf informants. This had a profound effect on the research process as it led to a great deal more depth in our constant conversations throughout the study. This study also had a profound effect on all three of us, as we learned a great deal about each other and ourselves. So much of what came of this study shocked my mother and I as my father never complained, even through a considerable amount of experienced hardships; he left those troubles at work and never brought them home.

One example of this was seen in the discussion of the informants' experiences at entry when they were required to work seven days a week without holidays and the process when required to work overtime. During this time, the TTY had not yet been made available to the public (though it has been around since the early 1970's, the USPS still, has yet to install them) and Deaf workers (my father included), were rendered unable to inform their families they would be home late, when asked to work overtime. My mother, stunned by this revelation wondered why my father never explained about how these events were beyond his control and just part of what he had to endure to financially support our family.

Another example was seen when my father, who expressed he was taken aback when viewing the interviews, as he saw so much of himself in me, in how I related to the other informants, and in the manner in which I communicated with them. While it is difficult for outsiders to understand, native signers can often recognize the family a person comes from by the manner in which they sign and/or interact within Deaf populations. While we have always known this, as a naturally occurring phenomenon, neither my father nor I realized the full weight of this, on a personal level, until this study was conducted.

As stated throughout this study, my father has been in constant contact with me and every aspect that seeks to represent Deaf-World views has been filtered through him. This was one of the many reasons why I chose to pull him into the research process further by actually conducting one of the interviews himself. There were also extenuating circumstances that influenced this decision, but these challenges created a unique opportunity (or excuse) to involve him further in the research process. That said, while I've always known I was "my father's son," this study has given us both a deeper understanding of just how much of him is in me and how similar our views truly are.

One personal realization about how our relationship has influenced my life was seen through discussions about DoFD responsibilities and how my father always felt this responsibility to serve the Deaf community. While I realized full well that this responsibility was passed to him through his Deaf family, what I had not learned (or truly owned) until this study was how much of that responsibility had been passed down to me. This one major influence in my life has everything to do with the path I'm on, my educational endeavors and my desire to try my best to explain our Deaf-World to the Hearing-World. This same sentiment was reported in the study as

the opportunity to work in the USPS was seen by all of the informants as opportunities to educate Hearing people of what Deaf workers are capable of, if only given the opportunity.

Yet another realization in regards to my father was in reference to the church and Deaf leaders. While I knew my father was always seen as a leader in the Deaf community, I never fully understood what that meant until this study. While there are examples of Deaf leaders in the literature, the leaders often chosen to be represented in the literature have not made much sense to me over the years, but I did not know why. The concept of Deaf leaders within the Deaf community is far different than that which is seen in the literature. In American Society, again one of the most individualistic societies on the planet, Deaf leaders have been framed by Hearing-World standards. Wealth, station, and advanced degrees may carry some weight in the Deaf-World, but they do not a Deaf leader make.

Deaf culture, as has been discussed, is a collectivist culture and the concept of a Deaf leader as seen by the Deaf-World brings to mind the Japanese saying of “the nail that sticks up gets nailed down.” This one saying fits well the sentiments of Deaf culture in reference to how they often perceive their leaders. In the Deaf community, leaders are not the ones who rise above, they are the ones who serve as both a main source of foundational support for the community, and as the glue that holds it together. Deaf leaders are the community members who can be approached with any problem, with the knowledge that what is said in confidence will never be repeated. In a community where secrets are often frowned upon, this is a rarity, but when confidentiality is required, there are few who fit the bill. Deaf leaders are the consistent ones. They are often, as with my father, talked about as pious by certain community troublemakers, but when the same troublemakers need advice and/or assistance, they still seek

himout; because of the knowledge the individual has about my father; that he can be trusted. It is also known that my father would never turn someone away.

The format of this study has also changed quite a bit as I struggled to remain open to where the data led me. While this study was to be presented in a more narrative form, I included the text from the individual interviews in bulk, because I felt this would address two concerns that came about during the study. The first concern was the realization of the suppression and the created state of exclusion of Deaf perspectives in the literature. The second was that though I may not be able to cover every tangential aspect seen in the interview data, those who choose to follow this line of inquiry may see something worthy of further investigation, or something I was unable to cover. This decision allowed for something that has been denied grassroots Deaf Americans far too long; a “voice” in the Deafness discourse.

I felt their perspectives and experiences were far too important to sideline. I also added some of myself and my personal views on how I came to know certain characteristics of the informants, leading me to ask certain questions that would not have been known to an outside researcher. As a member of this community, I experienced an openness not often afforded outsiders as Deaf persons are keenly aware of how difficult it is to make their views known to Hearing persons and how twisted their views can become when entrusted to others to “speak” in their stead. My position in this community has also influenced this study in the selection of participants (based on my prior knowledge), the theoretical positioning of content based on an "inside looking out" position, bringing my focus to the external. In seeking to understand why I chose to focus more on the historical patterns and what I felt was one of the most significant findings (that the greatest employment barriers Deaf Americans face were primarily external,

Hearing-World barriers), in closing, I'll quickly touch on a few of the influences that led to this focus in the following sections.

Conclusions. This study asked the following research questions; What are the individual and shared experiences of five grassroots Deaf workers who took part in a collective employment opportunity with the USPS in Houston, entering postal employment during the late 1960's- early 1970's; How did the informants' early experiences lead them to choose to pursue the collective employment opportunity for Deaf workers with the USPS in Houston; How did this collective employment opportunity lead to the development of a new Strong Deaf Community in Houston? The purpose of the research questions listed was to develop understandings of how grassroots Deaf workers successfully navigate the world of work (RQ4) and to add to our understanding of how the collective aspect of Deaf culture influences the process (RQ5). Given the nature of the findings, the research questions and the data collected from the two additional informants (Sonnestrahl and Walton), Chapter 4 was devoted to the first research question.

RQ1: What are the individual and shared experiences of five grassroots Deaf workers who took part in a collective employment opportunity with the USPS in Houston, entering postal employment during the late 1960's- early 1970's? The first research question sought to develop understandings of the four primary informants' individual and shared experiences in early learning, employment and in the establishment/development of a new SDC in Houston. Two additional informants were added to add to our historical understanding by adding contextual data and in seeking to offer the perspectives of two professionals who played key roles in the development of the Deaf/VR/USPS relationship to offer further triangulation of the data collected.

In search for the answer to the first research question, we explored the four primary informants' lived experiences across the three broad preset themes of; early learning experiences, employment and in the establishment of a new Strong Deaf Community in Houston. To help frame this discussion, tenets were pulled from Social Cognitive Career Theory, which as stated in Chapter 3, is less concerned with specific ages and stages of "normal" career development, instead seeking to understand theoretical elements that either promote or stymie developmental tasks across the lifespan (Lent, 2005, p.103). Again, as stated in Chapter 3, the process of successful career development was an underlying assumption in exploring the four primary informants' lived experiences in early learning and employment, as were able to achieve tenure with the USPS. Given this understanding, we sought elements within the three preset themes (early learning experiences, vocational experiences, experiences within the SDC) that promoted successful career development.

What we found was that the career development process of the informants followed, exhibited similar patterns of "normal development" seen in the general population. Within a SCCT framework, this included the development of interests based on exposure to early learning experiences, the development of a primary vocational goal and the revision of vocational goals based on the environmental feedback loop where the individual receives encouragement or discouragement to pursue certain options (Lent, 2005, p. 106).

As was seen in Chapter four, the informants were exposed to a myriad of early learning experiences at Texas School for the Deaf that led to expressions of primary vocational goals, which were pursued after high school. All four informants experienced truncated opportunity structures in either pursuing further education (limited options in available postsecondary

programs that also offered Deaf support), and in the world of work (the most common employment based limitation reported was the refusal of insurers to cover Deaf workers). The less than ideal employment experiences led all four informants to seek out other employment options.

Considering the numerous trade skills learned while students at TSD, the informants were likely to have been exposed to far more transferrable skills particularly with regard to "hands on" industrial work, than would have been seen in the general population (which later contributed to their being "a good match" for postal employment). However, no amount of training or education could have prepared the informants for a world of work that largely required applicants to have the ability to hear and speak to even be considered for employment. This gave rise to a need to explore further the historical contextual influences in which the informants' lived experiences occurred to better understand the events under study.

Historical context. The inability to hear was an automatic disqualification for many government positions until collective social action was initiated by Deaf men like Sonnestrahl, the Deaf leadership of the NAD and key political allies made during the 1950's with the influence necessary to alter legislation to allow for the inclusion of Deaf workers in consideration for employment in various government agencies. As Sonnestrahl pointed out, many government positions, including his chosen field of engineering, required the ability to hear to even be considered for employment, prior to this legislative change. Evidence for this assertion was reported by Sonnestrahl, and also seen in the numerous times in which Sonnestrahl was determined both "*eligible*" due to his education and "*ineligible due to medical condition.*"

Once this requirement to hear was overturned through collective social action, the USPS no longer excluded Deaf applicants based on their inability to hear but the USPS/Civil Service exam process remained a formidable barrier for Deaf Americans as two sections (one based on English reading comprehension and the other based on poetry), limited the ability of Deaf workers to enter the postal workforce, though neither section was critical to the positions being applied for. As Sonnestrahl pointed out, when he asked postal administrators about the relevance of the poetry section they explained to him that the USPS clerk position was very boring and that applicants who were able to enjoy the music played in the workplace were thought to be happier (or less bored) workers.

While these significant legislative and policy changes (as reported by Sonnestrahl) opened the doors to Deaf workers to enter the postal workforce, the cyclical patterns of control over the number of Deaf workers eventually led to changes in postal policies that reinstated the entrance exam barrier. Informant 2, who still serves as the union steward for Deaf postal workers, expressed the USPS reinstated those sections and expressed a new policy change of no longer hiring "*handicapped workers*." While these two aspects of the interview findings are telling, when placed into the historical pattern uncovered, along with the article from the late 1800's which points to the same two sections being eliminated for Deaf workers, the USPS method of controlling the number of Deaf postal workers stands on solid ground. The created state of exclusion in postal discourse and the complete lack of awareness in the general population of Deaf Americans merely serve to perpetuate the Hearing-World barriers with which all Deaf Americans must contend. It is this understanding that lends credence to the assertion that as public awareness of the Deaf increases, so too do employment opportunities and the quality of life for all Deaf Americans.

As stated throughout this study, one of the most significant findings in this study (from a rehabilitation service delivery standpoint) was seen in that most of the barriers the informants faced were external. The greatest of these challenges was seen to be the historical exclusion of Deaf Americans. This exclusion robs the d/Deaf of their own history, their historical employment successes and by extension, d/Deaf children of d/Deaf working role models in discourse. This historical exclusion also robs the general public and potential employers of a working knowledge of Deaf capabilities.

While the exclusionary practices of those in power are still seen today, awareness is the key to unlocking the chains that bind Deaf Americans to the cyclical patterns of control over the employment opportunities afforded d/Deaf workers uncovered in this study. As the old adage goes; "*those who cannot learn from the past are condemned to repeat it.*" In the case of Deaf Americans, they learned this lesson long ago, but no one listened. Deaf leaders repeatedly worked diligently to establish a national labor bureau for the Deaf, where the Deaf collective employment experiences in Akron were held up as the prime example of initiatives they sought to establish across the nation for grassroots Deaf workers. Returning yet again to *Illusions*, to better understand this endeavor;

In this formative period between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, deaf leaders centered their efforts on a strategy rooted deep in the experiences of an earlier generation of deaf leaders. Akron's Ben Schowe best articulated this approach. The example of excellence established by working men and women in Akron and around the country, Schowe maintained, was the most effective method to combat discrimination and secure opportunities for deaf workers in the second half of the twentieth century. "Each deaf work-man of this sort," Schowe explained, "is like a man with a lantern on a moonless night. He dispels the gloom of prejudice all around him and others can see the gleam of his light from

afar." These working men and women, he concluded, "are the unsung heroes we must depend on. (Buchanan, 1999, p. 126)

As can be seen from this passage, the historical context and patterns discussed in this study, offered a depth of understanding that would not have been possible without framing the informants' lived experiences with historical data from the line of inquiry this study followed (Buchanan, 1999). Given this understanding, this study required a broadened focus, expanded to include the historical, which ultimately led to the decision to devote Chapter 4 to the answering of the first research question. Yet another finding that influenced the organizational layout of this study was seen in that; not only are Deaf postal workers excluded from historical accounts, but that the population of grassroots Deaf workers has also been ignored in the rehabilitation discourse. These influences led to the decision to not only devote Chapter 4 to the first research question, but also to allow space for the informants to express, in their own words, the events and experiences under study.

Chapter 5 layout and contributions. The data collected and presented in Chapter 4 were inclusive in nature, seeking to offer the reader a holistic representation of the phenomena under study. In this chapter, we pulled only the most salient themes from Chapter 4 toward the development of the understandings we sought, in answer to the remaining research questions (2-5), which were; (RQ2) How did the informants' early experiences lead them to choose to pursue the collective employment opportunity for Deaf workers with the USPS in Houston; (RQ3) How did this collective employment opportunity lead to the development of a new Strong Deaf Community in Houston? The purpose of the research questions listed was to develop understandings of how grassroots Deaf workers successfully navigate the world of work (RQ4)

and to add to our understanding of how the collective aspect of Deaf culture influences the process (RQ5).

The findings from Chapter 4 utilized in this chapter toward the development of the understandings we sought included the historical context in which these events occurred (historical narrative), the historical patterns that emerged by tying the findings from this study to the primary line of inquiry (Buchanan, 1999), the Deaf/USPS relationship, the created state of historical exclusion, media exclusion (as it enables historical exclusion), social isolation across the three broad preset themes, then awareness (as the sociopolitical inverse to exclusion), the informants' experienced mode of communication struggles (inherent to the Deaf experience), socialization in the SDC, and finally we explored Deaf collective behaviors (again across the three broad preset themes).

By exploring the development of the Deaf/USPS relationship we learned how the efforts of both Deaf leaders and the professionals who worked in Deaf populations led to legislative changes of policies that excluded all d/Deaf workers, simply by requiring the ability to hear for most government positions. We learned that Deaf Americans, including the four primary informants, matched well the demands of the postal labor force. We also uncovered evidence of the first Deaf collective employment cohort to enter the USPS in Washington D.C., the development of further Deaf/VR/USPS relationships (including the events that led up to the Houston migration) and how these relationships, upon termination, led to a sharp decline in the number of Deaf postal workers.

Exploring the historical patterns of Deaf collective employment migrations and the developed Deaf/USPS relationship allowed us to develop a contextual framework to frame the

findings from this study and connect the findings to the broader historical context of the cyclical patterns of employment opportunities afforded grassroots Deaf workers (illustrated in Figure 4.5). While the exam process was seen to be one of the primary tools employed in control of the postal workforce, the greatest influence found that allows for complete control over the number of Deaf postal workers was seen to be the created state of historical exclusion. By removing Deaf workers entirely from postal discussions, postal administrators have been enabled to continue the control over the number of Deaf workers allowed in the postal workforce.

Social isolation was included as a salient theme in this chapter, as without an understanding of the social isolation the informants experienced across the lifespan; by living and working in a predominately Hearing-World; developing understandings of Deaf social behaviors would be impossible. As stated, the establishment, maintenance and utility of the SDC for the informants was heavily influenced by that which was inaccessible to the informants in the Hearing-World. Understanding the social isolation Deaf individuals experience in Hearing-World contexts allows for the development of a greater depth of understanding of the sociological contrast the SDC experience holds for the Deaf. In light of this understanding, the SDC was where quality of life was measured for the informants in this study.

The two broad themes of Exclusion, and Awareness, that we used to organize the salient themes in this chapter, represent the stark differences seen in the Informants' experiences between Hearing (Exclusion) and Deaf (Awareness) contexts in which the experiences occurred, to better understand the motivating factors (exclusion/isolation) underlying the Deaf social behaviors (cultural collectivism/the establishment of the various organizations that constituted SDC establishment). This gives rise to the understanding that the shared experiences in one

context (Hearing-World) served as a catalyst for the behaviors that followed in the other (Deaf-World).

Awareness, framed in this study as the sociological/sociopolitical inverse of exclusion, was seen to be the primary means of combating the challenges Deaf Americans face in school, work and community. While this understanding is critical in seeking to mediate the challenges faced by the Deaf, the informants were all well aware of critical nature of raising the level of Deaf awareness in Hearing populations and all six informants (including the two additional informants) touched on this in one way or another. The primary informants were keenly aware of the critical nature of seeking to raise Hearing awareness of the Deaf-World and have all worked diligently (in various settings) to connect with Hearing persons toward this end. Again, as has been stated throughout this study, Deaf individuals (including all four primary informants) typically see the issues that arise in their interactions with Hearing individuals not as outright discrimination, but as a lack of Deaf awareness.

[One example of how this plays out in the Deaf community is seen with regard to Hearing interpreters who, when not interpreting at a Deaf event, converse without signing (a slight to all Deaf attendees). While it may be easier, or more natural for them to converse orally, when in a Deaf-World context, this behavior is unethical.]

Under the broad theme of Awareness, the next salient theme included in this chapter was based on the mode of communication struggles the informants faced (this time from their shared Deaf perspective). Communication concerns are paramount to the rehabilitation of Deaf persons (as was seen in the data), but often the burden of effective communication falls solely on the Deaf consumer. This can be problematic in Deafness and rehabilitation services, as there are many professionals (in all levels of d/Deaf services) who do not possess the necessary skills or the multicultural expertise required to effectively evaluate either the level of linguistic ability or

the level of intellect a Deaf consumer may possess. While a DVRC who does not have strong ASL skills will certainly seek out deficiencies in the Deaf consumer (as they have been trained to do), when two individuals must communicate with linguistic approximations it is often forgotten by the h/Hearing, that both individuals are adjusting to "meet" the other party somewhere in the middle of *two* languages. Given this understanding, the DVRC must always take into account their own limitations when evaluating the abilities or the aptitude of the Deaf consumer.

Socialization in the SDC was a critical piece of the puzzle, in that the discussion under this theme was presented to offer the reader a social contrast to the exclusion, social isolation and communication struggle that the informants experienced from living in a world full of communication barriers. These barriers are not of their making, yet must be dealt with on a daily basis in a world that excludes them without caring to know them. The SDC offers an entirely different social context of their own creation, and through maintenance of their collective community they find collective growth. How they achieve this creation and growth leads into the next theme.

The last salient theme included in this chapter can be seen in response to the final research question, which sought to understand the collective aspect of Deaf culture across the lifespan and of particular interest to the field of rehabilitation; how Deaf collective behaviors influence the career development process. This theme is included in detail, as it relates back to the assertions made in Chapter 1 that conflicts exist between the manner in which rehabilitation services are rendered (based on the individualistic nature of rehabilitation services) and the collective aspect of Deaf culture. This conflict will be discussed further in the following chapter.

Research Question 2: How did the informants' early learning experiences lead them to choose to enter collective employment with the USPS?In Chapter 4 we explored the informants' early learning experiences (including their initial experiences with the world of work after leaving high school) to better understand how the informants came to make their respective decisions to enter into collective employment with the USPS. We learned that there were Hearing-World barriers that denied the informants equitable treatment, creating experienced truncated opportunity structures (the most common of these were seen to be limitations in post-secondary educational opportunities and the refusal of insurers to allow for health coverage of the informants in the various work settings they found themselves in), but we also learned entrance exams were a commonly experienced barrier for Deaf Americans. We learned that the informants were all aware of the significance the USPS opportunity held and all saw the opportunity as the best option for grassroots Deaf workers during this time. All four informants also indicated the health insurance coverage to be the strongest deciding factor in their respective decisions to enter the USPS. This coverage also influenced job maintenance, as the informants started families of their own, seeking to retain health insurance coverage for their wives and children.

Research Question 3: How did this collective employment opportunity lead to the development of a new Strong Deaf Community in Houston?The short answer offered for this research question was; naturally. As was historically seen to be the case in Buchanan's *Illusions* (1999); wherever and whenever a Deaf population developed; a Deaf community was established. While earlier Deaf communities were referred to as Silent Colonies by those who established them (as was seen in Buchanan), we utilized the term Strong Deaf Communities (or SDCs) to represent an insular signing community where critical development (throughout the

lifespan) of its members takes place. The many challenges the informants experienced with Hearing-World barriers presented a need for the informants to rely on lessons learned early in life, in that (as Informant 2 explained) they were all the same; Deaf and that they could only rely on themselves in mediating the shortcomings they all experienced in the Hearing-World. This understanding points back to the theme of social isolation discussed in this chapter, as the barriers the informants faced were primarily social in nature.

The various SDC organizations discussed in Chapter 4, offered the informants the only venues where they could communicate to their highest levels of linguistic (in ASL) and intellectual abilities. As such, these venues offered the informants the greatest access to new funds of knowledge, helping to create the spaces necessary to make critical information exchanges possible. While the information accessible to the informants within the SDC was by no means finite, of particular interest to the field of rehabilitation is that these organizations offered the new Deaf postal recruits a space to exchange knowledge that was seen to be critical to their development of understandings related to workplace demands, mastery of skills necessary to maintain their positions, conflict resolution, problem solving, information about postal union support and ultimately, how to achieve tenure in the postal workforce. The establishment, development and continued maintenance of the SDC under study also enabled the informants to bypass the telecommunication barriers they experienced upon arrival to the Houston area.

Research Question 4: How do grassroots Deaf workers successfully navigate the world of work; and (RQ5) how does the collective aspect of Deaf culture influence the process? As stated, the final two research questions were combined as the fifth research question

is a sub question of the fourth. These last two questions seek to tie all the previously discussed salient themes and research questions together, including the Deaf collective behaviors we explored across the lifespan under salient themes. In Chapter 2, we learned that Deaf Americans have historically utilized Deaf initiated periodicals, (also referred to in this study as little papers), to inform those in the community of Deaf successes, various employment opportunities and challenges faced in the workplace. These periodicals also served to establish moral codes of conduct for Deaf Americans in school, work and community. Deaf established organizations have also been historically utilized by the Deaf in mediating the experienced shortcomings (or complete lack) of formal services for the Deaf, again by creating spaces where critical information exchanges are made possible and in the developmental growth of community members throughout the lifespan (including career development). The informants were also seen to have followed the same historical Deaf behavioral patterns touched on here related to Deaf periodicals, as all four continue to subscribe to the largest still in print today; SIGNews.

As members of a collectivist culture, the four primary informants exhibited collective behaviors in a myriad of ways but as laborers (which often meant being the only Deaf person in the workplace), the informants were all keenly aware of how one Deaf individual in the workplace is seen to be a representative of all Deaf Americans (as this is often how they are assessed by their Hearing employers and coworkers). These stereotypes were seen to be the result of a lack of Deaf awareness in Hearing populations and ignorance of the vast number of variations within the inclusive population of all persons with hearing loss. These understandings point back to the discussion of Deaf periodicals as they served as Deaf Americans' primary sources of employment based information for over a century. Seeking to represent this collective sense of a shared Deaf employment identity, I have termed the "Deaf collective work ethic," as it

encapsulates well the history of Deaf collective employment behaviors. This concept is critical to the development of Deaf world of work understandings and how they can be integrated into the rehabilitation process. The concept of a collective Deaf work ethic was also seen in the interview responses from Sonnestrahl and Walton, who both explained particular considerations given to their respective aspirations to include Deaf leaders in the first cohorts to prove the worth of hiring Deaf, seeking to convince postal administrators to hire more.

As was seen in the events under study and in the historical patterns of Deaf collective employment seen in Buchanan's *Illusions*, the Deaf/VR/USPS phenomenon presented in this study may represent the first time in history where rehabilitation services as rendered, ran parallel to the collective aspect of Deaf culture for grassroots Deaf workers. As such, this study may offer the first known example of how successful these methods of rehabilitation service delivery can be if broadly employed for this population of Deaf rehabilitation consumers.

While this study in part, presents this model to rehabilitation professionals seeking to offer culturally appropriate services for Deaf Americans (as was seen in Buchanan) this same model for grassroots Deaf workers was previously held up by Deaf leaders as the model to represent how to best serve grassroots Deaf populations during the post-WWII era. The Deaf collective employment migration to the factories in Akron was seen to be the prime example for the rest of the nation, as Deaf leaders of the day sought to establish a national labor bureau for the Deaf. However, no one was listening and the plan for this model's application in every state was never actualized. Unfortunately, not much has changed and Deaf Americans today are still left without a say in how they should best be served. In this respect, one has to wonder who is truly deaf when it comes to the needs of Deaf Americans.

What matters deafness of the ear, when the mind hears. The one true deafness, the incurable deafness, is that of the mind.

Victor Hugo to Ferdinand Berthier, November 25, 1845 (as cited in Lane, 1984).

The knowledge that this model was repeated yet again, primarily by the efforts of Deaf leaders, stands as evidence for both the viability of this model and the model's strong cultural connection to the historical employment behaviors of Deaf American laborers. If our goal in the field of rehabilitation is to offer our consumers culturally appropriate services (as stated in the CRC Code of Ethics), there is one thing we as a field must learn to do-- listen to those who possess the experience and knowledge we lack in the discipline of rehabilitation research.

Chapter 6: Implications for the Discipline of Rehabilitation Research

Introduction

The primary line of inquiry this study followed was established by Buchanan (1999) who documented Deaf workers of industry 1850-1950. Buchanan aptly outlined the struggles of the Deaf American working class in the historical contexts in which they occurred, across a century (1850-1950) of the ongoing control and oppression of the employment opportunities afforded Deaf workers. While Deaf workers of industry repeatedly proved the value and worth of hiring Deaf, the gains seen over time were invariably lost, as with each passing migration, Deaf successes were all but erased from the memories of those who depended on Deaf laborers in times of experienced labor shortages. The refusal of industrial leaders to document or acknowledge these experiences merely added insult to injury for all Deaf Americans. The created state of exclusion in dominant discourse and in historical accounts has created a vicious cycle with which all Deaf Americans must contend when seeking employment.

This study also picked up on Buchanan's line of inquiry because this Deaf collective employment migration (beginning in the late 1960's) seems to be the next large collective employment migration of Deaf American workers of industry. This study was not however, meant to be purely historical as it sought to offer the reader an ethnographic case study approach, rooted in historical context. Historical patterns also emerged from this study that mirrored those seen in *Illusions*, which helped to frame this discussion by offering the reader patterns of migratory behaviors of Deaf workers and the patterns of collective employment opportunities afforded Deaf workers. As was seen in this study, the greatest challenges to gainful employment the informants faced were seen to be primarily external and systemic in nature. This presents

conflict with rehabilitation services as the field of rehabilitation has yet to shed the influences of the Medical Model orientation to deafness, which still sees every d/Deaf person as deficient and in need of intervention to make the Deaf consumer more employable. While the field of rehabilitation trains their D/VRCs to assume deficiency by design, rarely (if ever) does the rehabilitation professional pause to evaluate their own skills to ascertain whether or not they possess the necessary training or experience to accurately gauge the abilities (linguistically and intellectually) of each individual Deaf consumer.

As stated in Chapter 1, the field of rehabilitation has been established on American, Eurocentric, individualistic values which can create cultural conflicts with collectivist cultures including rehabilitation consumers who are members of Deaf culture. Individualized services with the short term end goal of fostering consumer independence may not be the most effective means by which to serve this population. As was stated by the informants throughout this study across all three broad preset themes; Deaf individuals depend on each other to understand, to learn, to grow, to develop and to prosper. In light of the findings from this interview study, the Deaf career development process reportedly hinges on the collective interdependence of Deaf individuals. Independence in the SDC under study was seen to be achieved through years of collective, interdependent behaviors.

This understanding gives rise to a potential need in rehabilitation to offer collective, community based services that utilize the strength of the collective Deaf community which in turn, should increase the likelihood of positive employment outcomes for the individual members. This is not by any means to say that Deaf individuals cannot learn to be independent or that this rehabilitation goal should be eliminated altogether but the data suggests they arrive at

the end goal of independence through years of sustained interdependence. Support for this assertion was seen in the establishment of peer-based Deaf organizations by fellow Deaf workers during young adulthood and the decreased (but not eliminated entirely) need for them later in life. Further support was seen in the manner in which the organizations the informants established evolved over time, which was also seen to be tied to the evolving needs of the informants and the enduring Deaf peer based focus at the center of these various organizations.

Membership and participation in these organizations offered the informants a means by which to maintain correspondence, to grow as a peer-based collective community, to mediate the problems of daily living, to deal with major negative life events, to share information about the workplace (offering peer support for collective career development), to establish a moral code of conduct for the informants, to connect with other Deaf individuals and to engage in critical information exchanges. While socialization is critical for the development of all people, for Deaf Americans, who must contend with world of work experiences that are often extremely isolating, and where effective communication in the workplace is often absent, the SDC becomes the center of their lived experiences. Again, this knowledge brings forth an understanding that the quality of life for Deaf Americans is measured not in the world of work experience, or in the Hearing-World, but in the SDC.

The connections made in the SDC under study were not limited to Deaf-Deaf interactions, as there were multiple examples of d/Deaf-h/Hearing interactions considered by the informants to be integral to their personal growth and development. While this study may seem to be exclusionary in its design and presentation, the SDC as an insular signing community was discussed as such because it was established as such. The enduring heart of the SDC was (as it

continues to be) primarily Deaf focused but people from a multitude of differing backgrounds came and went over the years.

Many of the d/Deaf-h/Hearing interactions took place both in the workplace and the community but the main venue for these interactions was seen to be the church. The informants expressed the d/Deaf-h/Hearing interactions were critical as they exposed the informants to new funds of knowledge. This same church based organization was also the main venue where Deaf members would teach Hearing persons about the Deaf (in both linguistic and social domains). These same behaviors and the influences of church organizations are still seen in this community today. Again, as was seen in Walton's interview, her father and the previous Deaf generation in the Houston area followed similar behavioral patterns in the community where child rearing led to further church involvement.

The "spreading out" of this particular community however, seems to have been significantly influenced by the rise in telecommunication accessibility technology which allowed the informants to maintain correspondence with other members, thereby eliminating the telecommunication barriers the members experienced upon arrival to the Houston area related to both distance and time. While the informants were seen to have gained greater independence over time, this does not mean the strong collective bonds they formed early in life have been eliminated.

Interdependent reliance between community members (including the informants) is still seen today. However, the need for sustained interdependence decreased as the informants aged. This seems to be largely due to learned problem solving skills where the need of each individual community member to rely on the SDC decreased, as their ability to solve problems of daily

living on their own, increased. While this seems to be the case in regards to problems of daily living, when confronted by major negative life events, the SDC's influence in mediating the effects of significant issues for community members continues to be unparalleled by formal services. Considering the understandings developed through this interview study, in that the benefits of membership in the SDC offered the informants a system of social support while it simultaneously offered the informants multiple venues for social interaction (which also served as the main conduit of information exchange across the lifespan), the importance of understanding the various functions of SDCs for the Deaf, becomes critical in the development of rehabilitation policies that seek to maximize the potential of d/Deaf rehabilitation consumers.

Further support for the significant influence employment had on these interactions was seen in the decreased need for interdependence toward the end of the informants' careers. However, both informants who had retired from the post office prior to conducting this study had, as a result, become more active in current Deaf organizations in the Houston area. The organizations the informants are currently affiliated with include both Deaf-specific organizations and a few of those established intentionally to include both d/Deaf and h/Hearing populations. Again, all the informants stressed the importance of d/Deaf and h/Hearing interactions. The knowledge that the two retired informants became more active in the community after retirement, offers support for the assertion that the informants as senior citizens still harbor strong feelings of responsibility within the Deaf community and in seeking to raise the level of awareness in Hearing populations toward understanding the Deaf-World experience. Deaf leaders and community elders hold a vast amount of knowledge, representing what seems to be a largely untapped resource for rehabilitation professionals.

While the collective Deaf core of the insular SDC functions like an extended kinship network (with a strong familial focus) Deaf individuals (in my experience) have always been extremely welcoming of community "outsiders" who approach with a personal desire to learn about the Deaf-World. Those who find the SDC to be insular and unwelcoming, tend to approach the Deaf in charitable, pitiable manners, seeking to "help" them (in essence to be more like Hearing people). Unfortunately many individuals over the years were simply too entrenched in their Hearing-World views to effectively "connect" with the Deaf.

This study also provides support for the assertion that current rehabilitation methods of sending individual grassroots Deaf consumers for individualized training or education in isolating educational environments, only to be sent upon completion into a Hearing work environment as a Deaf solitaire, might be far less efficient than seeking to develop collective employment opportunities that run parallel to a Deaf cultural orientation to the world of work. Taking into account the strong social peer-based focus and the information exchanges made possible by the natural tendencies of grassroots Deaf workers to establish their own SDCs in locations where Deaf collective employment opportunities are made available, should lead to both a greater number of employment opportunities and a better quality of life for the Deaf populations we serve. While the utility of collective employment options is presented here as a viable means of increasing employment opportunities, it should not be assumed this means those who are placed in collective employment opportunities should remain there for the duration of their careers, or that this is the only type of service delivery that should be considered. In this study, and in previous Deaf collective employment migrations, there were numerous examples of Deaf individuals leaving their jobs to return to school, graduate and later assumed professional positions, often within Deaf services. As seen in this study, stereotypes are common with regard

to d/Deaf populations and for the sake of clarity, this model is not recommended for all d/Deaf consumers, nor should all d/Deaf consumers be confined to this type of model for service delivery.

However, when collective employment migrations develop, the result has historically been the establishment of new SDCs, which in turn, increase further employment opportunities, an increased quality of life for community members, and an informal system of networking unparalleled by formal services. Methods of maintenance toward tenure should be integral to the development of plans for collective employment, migratory behaviors should be considered when opportunities lie elsewhere, but ideally, there should also be a system of support in place for those who benefit from the collective employment experience but later desire alternative options.

Future Implications for the Discipline of Rehabilitation Research

This study is, in several ways, the result of a convergence of the discipline of Vocation Rehabilitation research with the discipline of Deaf Studies, in that this study sought to offer a Deaf perspective (standing by its very nature in opposition to the Hearing-centered dominant discourse) of what *normal Deaf career development* looks like, the historical context in which career behaviors take place, the historical patterns of Deaf collective employment migrations, sociopolitical influences and the lived experiences of grassroots Deaf workers who took part in one such migration to better understand the Deaf world of work experience. By building on the work of others from the field of Deaf Studies, we not only seek to understand Deaf career development throughout the lifespan but also the historical, sociological and sociopolitical contexts in which the career development process unfolds.

The implications for future research across the various disciplines touched on in this study are vast when one considers how many research disciplines this study encompasses (e.g., Deaf Education, Deaf Studies, USPS History, Deaf American History and American History in general) in addition to the discipline of Vocation Rehabilitation research. However, as a doctoral dissertation for the study of Vocation Rehabilitation, this chapter will focus on the most salient implications specific to the discipline of rehabilitation research. As such, the sections that follow, will discuss the population parameters, geographic locations, a model for service delivery, a model for conducting Deaf employment research, and additional considerations for the discipline of rehabilitation research.

Population parameters. As stated in Chapter 3, this study required a purposive selection of Deaf men who were members of Deaf culture, utilized ASL as their primary mode of communication, were hired by the USPS during the late 1960's-early 1970's, were consumers of rehabilitation services prior to entry, were successful in achieving tenure, were instrumental in the establishment of a new Strong Deaf Community in Houston and were members of the Deaf congregation at Westbury Church of Christ. As stated, this study sought to offer a Deaf cultural representation of the events under study, and to add to our understanding of Deaf cultural behaviors across the lifespan. This was not to exclude all other postal workers who have experienced hearing loss from this discussion, but rather to offer as pure a Deaf cultural perspective as possible in seeking to develop understandings of how Deaf culture relates to both the career development and rehabilitation processes.

Further investigation is warranted in regard to other (d/Deaf/Hard of Hearing/Late Deafened/persons of color/women) and other minority populations not included in this study.

While each of these subcategories of persons with hearing loss are worthy of exploration and documentation, the Deaf cultural aspect of this study does not apply to all. This was yet another reason in dividing this exceedingly large and complex population so that the pieces of the whole of the population could be better understood. It is suggested that the populations not seen in this study be investigated thoroughly, but in either individual case studies or in clusters of those with similar characteristics, to avoid confusion, but also to be combined later toward full historical recognition, and the depth of understanding needed to develop future courses of action based on the experiences of those who have lived what we seek to understand.

Geographic locations. The focus of this study centered on the experiences of members of one SDC in the Houston area. While this study touched on other locations where similar migrations occurred, leading up to the migration under study (specific to the Houston area), further investigation into other geographic locations is warranted toward similarities and differences between the events that occurred in Houston and in other locations, to better understand the whole of this historical phenomenon. While many similarities are sure to be seen, there was also evidence in this study to suggest that the relationships and events also varied a great deal. For example, in Houston, all the informants remained clerks for the duration of their careers, while in other cities we learned through Sonnestrahl's interview that Deaf workers became mail carriers, drivers, and some even entered into supervisory positions. It seems this had a great deal to do with Sonnestrahl's involvement and by his own report, his close proximity to the Civil Service Administration in Washington D.C., where he stated he was able to rectify complications as they arose. It is assumed that the Houston area Deaf postal workers did not see similar successes in upward mobility due to a lack of similar representation in the D.C. area. This points back to Buchanan (1999) and the repeated efforts of Deaf leaders in seeking to

establish a National Labor Bureau for the Deaf, as had this goal been realized, the representation might have increased the employment outcomes of all Deaf postal workers, including those specific to the Houston area. Once individual ethnographic case studies have been conducted in these various locations, the data collected should then be compared both within the timeframe under study and with previous migrations to better understand Deaf collective employment behaviors, which in turn, should assist DVRCs in planning future plans of action.

While previous migrations have been documented, the Deaf/USPS relationships led to Deaf migrations in a greater number of geographic locations than was seen in previous Deaf collective employment migrations. This would suggest further documentation in these various locations (as suggested previously) is not only warranted but imperative toward developing understandings of the various elements that "worked," as well as those that did not. Should another future migration occur, this information could prove invaluable in not only securing employment for Deaf workers en masse, but also in the development of methods that will assist Deaf consumers in both job maintenance and in achieving tenure in competitive work environments.

A model for service delivery. As was mentioned at the end of Chapter 5, this model was held up by Deaf leaders in the post WWII era, where the collective employment in the factories in Akron were seen as a prime example that should be used toward the establishment of both a National Deaf Labor Bureau, and a model that was historically proven to work. In seeking to implement this proposed model of service delivery, care must be given when planning and implementing to maximize Deaf consumer outcomes not just in the short term focus on job placement but in the long term goals of maintenance and tenure. While Deaf

leaders played central roles in the development of further opportunities for d/Deaf workers, we must also consider whether we do greater harm or good to our Deaf leaders if we do not also support their ambitions to continue to explore and achieve their employment goals outside of the collective employment experience. Consideration must be given to each individual Deaf consumer, though we also learned that Deaf leaders from the first cohort, continued to support those who came after, offering the new recruits leadership and representation in the workplace. These understanding points to the central role Deaf leaders played in the development of further d/Deaf opportunities, and the central role they played in helping others to maintain their positions and achieve tenure.

This proposed model of service delivery, which seeks VR support in the development of d/Deaf migratory employment opportunities, with a focus on community development, should not be considered the only means of serving this population. The limitations the informants experienced in furthering their education are not as prevalent today, as the postsecondary educational opportunities afforded Deaf youth today have expanded exponentially. However, Deaf youth today do not experience the same level of training, education and socialization the informants experienced. In consideration of a systematic program that worked, the informant's education at TSD enabled the successes seen and their early educational experiences were certain to have played a large role in their continued successes in the world of work.

Additional consideration must also be given to the changes in employment opportunities seen for d/Deaf workers today. While this study has followed closely the industrial workforce (as was seen in Buchanan), consideration to updating the potential targets for the development of collective employment opportunities should be given as well. While Deaf have been seen to be

successful in the industrial workplace, the world of work has changed significantly. Particular attention should be given in the fields related to math, science, technology and health care when seeking to develop further collective employment opportunities for Deaf consumers.

One last consideration that should be given is in regards to technology. As was seen in this study, advancements in technology afforded the informants greater access to each other and the Hearing community as well. Technology has completely altered the Deaf-World, creating vast improvements in the "Deaf quality of life," yet technology has been devastating in the world of work. As technology in the USPS changed, Deaf workers in particular were negatively affected (a phenomenon also seen in previous migrations). While technology has certainly been a positive in the community, it still has yet to translate into gains in employment, leading to the understanding that advocacy of Deaf capabilities and how assumed limitations (not being able to use the telephone) can be mediated through the use of available technologies. In short, technology should be increasing Deaf employment outcomes, not perpetuating the same historical excuses offered by employers for Deaf underemployment.

A model for conducting Deaf employment research (D/VR/USPS & replication studies). In a day where data collection is seen as an integral aspect of the rehabilitation process toward developing new plans of action, to continue to ignore our shared history of successful services rendered, we continue to condemn ourselves as rehabilitation professionals to the same cyclical patterns of control that have plagued Deaf Americans for well over a century. When Deaf employment gains are allowed to be erased, we also allow for the loss of past rehabilitation successes.

Quantitative research methods have failed to capture the human experience, and if nothing else is gained by conducting this study, the vast potential ethnographic case studies hold for the field of rehabilitation should have been made readily apparent. The methodology chosen to conduct this study allowed for something that is sorely lacking in the body of rehabilitation research; that of a grassroots Deaf "voice." Mixed methods should also be considered, but care should be given to how we define this population, and the manner in which we present the research findings.

This study also offers clues as to why these distinctions are critical to the discipline of rehabilitation research, in that; to simply say one is "Deaf," and "educated in the residential school setting" is partial and incomplete without further exploration as to the specific early learning experiences (including experiences with the world of work) the Deaf individual was exposed to. To use TSD as an example; depending on when the Deaf individual attended, and which ideology (oral vs. Deaf) was prevalent at the time in which the individual attended school, the resultant consumer characteristics could be vastly different. Care must be given when conducting d/Deaf studies to accurately assess the individual's experiences across the three broad preset themes used in this study of early learning, world of work and community, to better understand the resources the individual has access to, before plans of action are considered.

Additional considerations: Other federal agencies and VR data preservation. As evidenced by Sonnestrahl's interview about how this phenomenon came about and the legislative changes that were made to allow him to enter into employment with the Navy Department as an engineer, we learned that the doors that were opened as a result were not limited to his ability to secure a position, as the events led to the USPS opportunities as well. Further changes were seen

in that Sonnestrahl reported NASA also altered their policy as a result (as NASA was just being established at the time). This points to the potential for similar collective employment opportunities within other federal agencies as well. Further investigation is warranted in exploring these d/Deaf employment experiences as well. While scant historical documentation is likely (as was seen with the USPS/Deaf relationship), VR should have retained documentations that would assist in these endeavors, and conducting further ethnographic case studies of Deaf workers who lived these world of work experiences, could yield a vast amount of usable data in the development of future plans of action. Interestingly, Informant 2 had a Deaf brother who had a long career with NASA here in Houston, though I never made the connection between the USPS opportunities and those with NASA (until Sonnestrahl's interview).

In closing, the discipline of rehabilitation research has a duty to both explore Deaf career successes of those who made use of VR services, but were successful in achieving tenure, displacing them from rehabilitation discussions. To move away from *deafness* discourse based on models of deficiency and to refuse to perpetuate the negative stereotypes of Deaf consumers is our duty. By exploring the lived experiences and employment successes of Deaf consumers long after VR services have been rendered (displacing Deaf consumers from VR discussions), we will be creating a new body of *Deafness* discourse that can only assist us in developing further understandings of what normal Deaf career development and success looks like across the lifespan. Yet another reason to steer the rehabilitation discourse in this new direction, is seen in that we will also be enabling discussions of our own professional successes of past services rendered to Deaf consumers, to explore further our own accomplishments as well as those for whom we serve.

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