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Media Perception of Interpreters

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Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title Page</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signature Page</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion/Conclusion</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

In this thesis, media perceptions of American Sign Language interpreters are examined. Focus is placed on Lydia Callis of the Hurricane Sandy NYC press conference and Thami Jantjie, the “fake” interpreter at Nelson Mandela’s memorial service. Interpreters don’t often appear on television or media, but when they do—the media goes into frenzy. Examining whether this frenzy alters people’s perceptions on ASL interpreters is the focus of this study. A snowball effect survey was conducted to collect results on if the media has changed people’s opinion on ASL interpreters. The survey’s focus audiences are Deaf, interpreters (students and professional interpreters) and hearing people. The results of the research focuses on the positivity or negativity of the media’s perception based on the groups’ perception of the scenarios and the hope for the future is that people will be able to use this study to improve the perceptions of interpreters and encourage the media to keep showing interpreters in their rotation.

Keywords: interpreters, media, perception, American Sign Language, Lydia Callis, Thami Jantjie, Hurricane Sandy, Mandela memorial.
Media Perception of Interpreters

The media is a beautiful outlet for many minority communities to get noticed. In this case, it was two interpreting situations that brought eyes on the Deaf community. One situation was with New York City’s mayor, Michael Bloomberg, and Lydia Callis interpreting the emergency announcement that followed Hurricane Sandy (Schulmanm, 2014). This announcement occurred on October 29, 2012, during the hurricane’s peak on the East coast. The next was Thami Jantjie, the “fake” interpreter, at Nelson Mandela’s memorial service alongside President Barack Obama when he “interpreted” on December 10th, 2013. Articles accusing Jantjie on making up signs and gestures during the service started to emerge the following day and the media took notice. This is when they followed up and Jantjie was ousted on a global scale. There were many questions raised in the aftermath about whether these situations created a splash of impact from the media to bring recognition to certified interpreters and how they can help the Deaf community.

What about the other countries’ requirement to certify an interpreter—what kind of impact does that have on international media? How has the Deaf community approached these dilemmas, seeing that they’ve been receiving a newfound sort of attention from the media on recent incidents? There have been varying views, both positive and negative, of how interpreters have been portrayed during their jobs from both the Deaf and hearing communities.

Interpreters being present at high level press conferences and announcements have not been out of the ordinary with the implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act but with the fast rise of technology and increased media accessibility, seeing an interpreter on television is a different and unusual sight for many. “The ADA
requires that Title II entities (state and local governments) and title III entities (businesses and nonprofit organizations that serve the public) communicate effectively with people who have communication disabilities. The goal is to ensure that communication with people with these disabilities is equally effective as communication with people without disabilities (ADA Effective Communication).” They have always been around since ADA was signed in 1990, but only when Lydia Callis interpreted Bloomberg’s press conference did the media start to take notice and claim she stole the show. The media has definitely noticed and placed the spotlight on the interpreter when he or she stands next to the speaker and use a form of sign language, a very visualizing language.

The media has been known to alter perceptions and mindsets of people upon watching or reading (Karam, Kleijn, MacLean, 2013), so the data from this specific kind of research is missing. There is no research relevant to how the media expects the interpreters to get noticed, or if their perceptions of interpreters have been altered, and/or if the perceptions of the interpreters have altered the Deaf community in any way.

Currently, there is research about generic media perceptions that is not pinpointed to any specific group, research about educational interpreting and how it impacts Deaf children, and also research about the certification aspect of interpreters’ careers. This study focuses on closing the gap between media perceptions and on how interpreters specifically are perceived in the media. This study also examines how the audience determines if the event with an interpreter was positive or negative based on the media’s influence. The media has made a significant impact and influence on people’s perceptions towards American Sign Language interpreters that was not recognized before. By examining a
wide range of people’s perception on the interpreters in the media, this study will be able to expose the lack of research in this field.

**Literature Review**

Technology is progressing at a rapid pace and our exposure to media is becoming more widespread. Media giants such as NBC, Disney, and CBS control 95% of the traditional media we receive every day as several companies have merged over time to create fewer companies and portray less diversity in opinions, influences, and beliefs (Curtis, 2012). Our stance on issues relies heavily on the stance the media takes as we are exposed to their opinions and advertising that hooks us in, as if it is a hook, and eventually making themselves trustworthy to their audience. Today’s huge merged companies have the power to shape our opinions, and beliefs, and influence our decisions (Curtis, 2012). The power of the media has progressed significantly from the very beginning and we can see it has been influential on society and their way of perceiving events. If the media notices something or shares an opinion, we are more likely to agree with that opinion once it’s pointed out. We all have had conversations with others who try to state facts, claiming they heard them on CNN or Fox News, so the facts must be true. This is one of many examples of how the media easily sways our ways of thinking and shapes our opinions. “All these media-based applications not only require media processing but they also engage one or more of the human senses (audition, vision, touch) and, therefore, human perception (Karam, Kleijn, MacLean, 2013).” So, truly anything we see in society is media when it stimulates our vision, touch and hearing. Our forms of media are not solely relying on television, but also on social media and the Internet. We are immersing ourselves in a new world full of technological media, the world that we
cannot control the opinions of (Karam, Kleijn, MacLean, 2013). Two theories that will allow us to examine the effects of media in our lives are the Cultivation Theory and the Uses and the Gratifications Theory.

“Cultivation, also known as cultivation theory or cultivation analysis, is the area of communication research that investigates relationships between exposure to television and beliefs and attitudes about the world (Shanahan, 2009, p. 254).” By immersing in the world of media, they are providing their viewers opinions and perspectives they should be taking as their own. The theory suggests that if a person is exposed more to television, the more they will alter their attitude of the world.

Uses and Gratification Theory is “the idea that audiences of mass media texts actively use the theory to fulfill a complex set of needs--for example to gain information, to be entertained, to discuss with others as a ‘social facilitator’, or to explore the ideas and values of others (Dictionary of Media Studies, 2006).” People strive to feel connected and have a sense of belonging in a community--so they seek out information, entertainment, and others to fit in. By being social facilitators, they will be able to control what the media should be showing, and what they should keep showing weeks after the “news” breaks. By having the control of the media, people are able to keep the news in flow and constantly move it around. “According to the theory, if a medium provides a satisfactory outcome for the user, the user will return to it again and again. If it does not meet those expectations, the user will move on in search of another means to experience the satisfaction of met needs (Friedman, 2013, p. 4).”

In a perfect world, all Deaf people would have access to all the information they need through media without any various perspectives of interpreters such as the use of
closed captions, captioning, and subtitles among many other methods. But what are interpreters to the Deaf community? Interpreters are truly valuable in the Deaf community. They are the translators of information being passed from the hearing world to their eyes using a visual language native to the Deaf. Many legislative actions have been taken to ensure Deaf people would have access with an interpreter to various appointments such as doctor visits and court dates (Forestal, 2001). The process of receiving a sign language interpreter that is certified and qualified to ensure confidentiality is quite difficult (Hitch, 2005). An interpreter might seem qualified to one Deaf person, and be completely unacceptable to another Deaf person. It depends on their proficiency of sign language, understanding of basic concepts, and English writing/reading skills. People who struggle with basic concepts and English skills are usually referred as to Limited English Proficiency (LEP); these people are more difficult to work with an interpreter (Hunt and de Voogd, 2007). Having different perspectives and skill levels really does put a strain on defining a qualified interpreter. Many clients of interpreters have various expectations on how they’d like the interpreter’s role to be utilized so there is no one common or universally accepted “right” way. Add the media to the mix, and there is a huge confusion on what’s considered right, what’s good, and what’s wrong for the Deaf community and interpreters across the nation.

There are various types of sign language. Signed Exact English is a visual way to use gestured signs using the hands for every word used in chronological order. Pidgin Signed English is a blend of Signing Exact English and American Sign Language, meaning there are some ASL signs and classifiers that can be used in chronological order. American Sign Language is a visual language that relies heavily on hand shapes and
movements, along with expressions of the face to help indicate the tone established through this language. American Sign Language is not always interpreted directly from text in order, as it relies on classifiers and placements of the hand shapes to indicate a visual interpretation of what is being said. Cued Speech is a different form of sign language restricted to hand shapes where movement is limited to the mouth to reflect speech reading. There are multiple versions of sign language across the globe; American Sign Language is not universally used. Think of it as English language—there are various languages in countries. Sign Language is similar. There are many different methods of sign language but all of them rely on visual gestures and movements, which is not an everyday sight for many people not familiar with sign language.

Two of the biggest 2012-2013 spotlights on the interpreting community was when Lydia Callis interpreted for New York City’s mayor Michael Bloomberg’s safety briefing prior to Hurricane Sandy in 2012 and when Thami Jantjie, the “fake” interpreter, interpreted Nelson Mandela’s memorial services alongside President Barack Obama and several other prestigious speakers in 2013. Lydia Callis was admired by many for appearing alongside Bloomberg, as interpreters are usually placed off camera and off screen—so viewers are virtually used to not seeing an interpreter on a main news channel. Many viewers were also exposed to the concept of interpreters for Deaf people for the first time during this significant broadcast. Callis’ appearance brought on a storm of Tumblr and Reddit pages dedicated to her, and spoof videos portraying Callis (Peters, 2012). With Thami Jantjie, the storm shifted courses; it was more of a negative interpreter spotlight experience such as seeing Thami Jantjie of South Africa blasted as a “fake” interpreter who says he was hallucinating due to a disorder on stage next to...
notorious speakers at Mandela’s memorial service. What he did, flailing his arms and
gesticulating nonsense, was a mockery of sign language around the world that many haveecome enraged about. It has also raised concerns about international standards on how
these organizations hire interpreters (Bell, 2013). These two incidents occurred at least a
year apart, and one might think the storm raging over the sight of a sign language
interpreter has calmed over the last couple of months but, again, the media is easily
fascinated by sign language interpreters at conferences or services. More recently, there
was a press conference with New York City mayor Bill de Blasio and other health
officials regarding the Ebola dilemma in New York City. There was a Certified Deaf
Interpreter (CDI) that many on social media quickly took notice to. Some claimed they
were so mesmerized by his signing that they didn’t focus on the words of health officials
and the city mayor. Some others, remembering Thami Jantjie from the Mandela service,
claimed he was a fake interpreter since they also noticed someone was sitting in the
audience relaying signs back. One thing the media failed to point out until later was that
the CDI was Deaf. Jonathan Lamberton attracted quite a bit of attention for his role in the
conference and of course, the media took it by frenzy.

“During the press conference, one Twitter user claimed everyone around him
believed the interpreter was "faking it" like the infamous Nelson Mandela memorial
interpreter. Other hearing commenters critiqued the Deaf interpreter's signing style, as if
he was putting on a show for them (Callis, 2014).” These people who are making those
accusations are not informed of the different types of interpreters there really are. “For
hearing people who do not have any experience with Deaf culture, it might be hard to
understand how Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDI) are used, and why they are necessary.
In this instance, the CDI was working as a team with a hearing interpreter who sat in the audience. The hearing interpreter was signing the message to Lamberton, who was interpreting it on camera (Callis, 2014).” CDIs are more fluent in sign language, having it serve as their primary language contrary to many ASL interpreters and considering the melting pot of New York City, it seemed appropriate to have a CDI sign this important press conference. CDIs generally have a stronger background in understanding gestures and know how to interpret phrases and words in ways many interpreters cannot. So when the media noticed someone else signing to him from the audience, they were quick to jump on the fake accusation, which is a lingering effect the “fake” interpreter has imposed on the media since his fiasco.

This incident, which happened in late October 2014, is one of the reasons why this study on how the media influences the audience’s perceptions of interpreters is being conducted. Recalling Callis’ and Jantjie’s roles as interpreters, the media has looked more closely at interpreters and their signing styles compared to before. Some make assumptions on if they’re qualified or not, which is a double edged sword since it’s great they’re recognizing the authenticity of interpreters but false accusations only set that recognition back. How the media reacted to Lamberton was different than Callis, thanks to Jantjie, but at the same time we can see how fascinated the media still is with sign language. The media always seems to focus on the interpreter’s presence more than the core reason behind a news conference or major event, and this has been increasingly happening more frequently than before.

The behaviors of sign language interpreters as of late have been noted and Schulmann, a writer for the The New Yorker has interrogated some interpreters in the
New York City area to get input on their roles. Some say that interpreters’ jobs are to be undetected to the public eye and serve as a translator. Lydnette Taylor, an interpreter for the New York City area, has pointed out that interpreters have been around interpreting several major events from Broadway shows to United Nations meetings (Schulmanm, 2014). It was only until the recent Hurricane Sandy announcement when people started to notice Lydia Callis for her facial expressions. The media has been largely responsible for the renowned fame of Callis, having fallen fascinated by her facial expressions and signing. It was only a year later when the “fake” interpreter fiasco arose, having two major media events put sign language on the map, and regardless of it being a positive or negative influence. Interpreters have said that they try not to be the star of the show, being careful not to upstage actors or take away attention the same way Callis has. At the same time, she is not at fault since “interpreters can't be poker-faced; expression is integral to sign language (Schulmanm, 2014).”

Some interpreters pointed out that Bloomberg had a very dry and stoic tone throughout his press conference while Callis appeared more animated in her interpretation, making it appear to Deaf eyes that Bloomberg was more ardent in his speech when he really wasn’t (Peters, 2012). This is something some may define as going “rogue” as they exceed the expectations of their role, but is this viewed as an issue or is the whole scenario just being ballooned by the media’s lack of expertise with interpreters at major events and conferences? We are leaving a period where the media hasn’t really put any focus on the interpreter. That is changing rapidly as now we see interpreters appear in the media more than before. They are being put on the map quite suddenly thanks to Callis and Thami Jantjie, the “fake” interpreter. To address these major events,
there appears to be mixed reactions from interpreters, clients, and the general consensus on how the media have been portraying these interpreters for their jobs.

A huge media storm has most definitely followed the two scenarios, but a particular university has noticed a change in their American Sign Language classes. There was an increase of attention and enrollment into American Sign Language classes at Southern Illinois University (University Wire, 2015). University Wire’s study linked the interest in American Sign Language classes to Thami Jantjie, the “fake” interpreter situation. This could be a long awaited spotlight to bringing attention to American Sign Language interpreters. It appears that universities like Southern Illinois have seen an increase in students interested in learning American Sign Language and the timing has it attributed to recent worldwide news like the “fake” interpreter situation. That thrust sign language onto an international scale, which is rarely seen. Being able to bring links from the media’s influence with their portrayals of the American Sign Language interpreters to how people perceive them will conclude this debate once for all. The media has jumpstarted people’s fascination with sign language and with many different sources of media that is still growing today; it has gotten easier to spread awareness on sign language and Deaf culture. In conclusion of the literature review, the research questions for this study are:

**RQ1:** Did exposure to media coverage of Lydia Callis or Thami Jantjie, the “fake” interpreter, impact perceptions?

**RQ1a:** Were the perceptions from the exposure positive or negative?
**RQ2:** Are there differences in the perceptions of interpreters by interpreters (student or professional), Deaf people, and hearing people who do not know sign language?

**Methods**

In order to obtain information that assesses how individuals perceive the media’s increased attention towards sign language interpreters on a national scale, a survey was conducted to obtain statistics for further analyzing and research. The plan for this survey was to reach out and see if people saw this recent burst of attention as a positive or negative influence on the Deaf community and sign language interpreters alike.

The independent variable was the overall media that presents interpreters in a form of spotlight. The sample size consisted of 201 participants, surpassing the original goal of 150 participants. The total was 79 Deaf participants, 39 interpreters, regardless of if they were professional or student interpreters, and 83 hearing participants that knew or didn’t know ASL.

The dependent variables was how people perceived the two interpreters who have been put under the spotlight by the media, viewing those events as a negative or positive impact on the Deaf community. The independent variable was the viewing of two interpreters, reflecting their exposure by the media. A third group with hearing participants was included because there should be a sample size that has possibly little to no knowledge of the Deaf community nor the sign language culture to get a better idea of how the outside group identifies the whole issue.

The method used to collect data was a survey conducted on the sample groups. Participants were reached out to via social media, primarily through Facebook, using the
snowball method. The survey was originally posted on Facebook. Participants were also encouraged to share the survey with their friends and family. Additionally, a copy post was shared with a specific National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) group and a Cross Registered group in order to reach out to more varied sample sizes. This method is the most effective because it reached all kinds of people from all over the United States for an unbiased result.

This survey was conducted online via Google Forms, as that program was able to classify statistics and written answers. A description of why the survey was being conducted was included and what the survey hoped to prove from it so participants knew what this research would be seeking. Participants were not required to enter their names as to keep anonymity of this survey. In the survey, all three sample groups were asked general demographic questions asking their age, gender, and a short self-assessment on their sign language skills (in their opinions). For example, they were asked, “How long have you been an American Sign Language user?” If they did not know any ASL, they were allowed to put down N/A. To examine if the sample group were aware of ASL classes, the participants were asked a closed ended question, “Do you know a friend or a classmate who is currently taking or took ASL classes?” Then in order to find an estimated number, participants were asked how many friends/classmates were currently taking or took ASL classes, with answer options of 0, 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, and more than 20.

There were specific questions (see Appendix 1) designated for all groups. One of the questions inquired if the participants knew what interpreters were being used for, so they were asked that with a closed ended question giving three options to choose their
answer from: Yes, No or Somewhat. There were specific questions that were separated in three groups during the data crunching: Deaf people, both professional and student interpreters, and hearing people that do not fit in the previous two groups. Because Google Forms did not allow a specific question to load to another specific question, this method was done manually via SPSS, the Statistical software program. Questions were categorized, focusing on the most basic and generic questions first. The first grouping was with all the questions regarding Lydia Callis, and then grouping the Thami Jantjie questions together. Finally, the last few generic questions, including the demographics, were at the end of the survey.

Before proceeding with specific questions regarding the Deaf community’s perception or the hearing community’s perceptions, the participants were asked if they were aware of the two interpreting scenarios with separate questions for each interpreter. For example, the participants were asked a closed ended question, “Have you heard of Lydia Callis?”, that led to “Do you think the scenario with Lydia Callis has made an effect on the media’s perception of interpreters?” with the answer choices of No Effect, Slight effect, Significant Effect, or I do not know who Lydia Callis is. Following a similar method regarding Thami Jantjie with a closed ended question, participants were asked, “Have you heard about the “fake” interpreter, Thami Jantjie, in South Africa?” and then that led to “Do you think the scenario with Thami Jantjie, the “fake” interpreter, has made an effect on the media’s perception of interpreters?” with four answer selections which were No Effect, Slight effect, Significant Effect, or I do not know who Thami Jantjie is.
The survey narrowed to more specific questions for each community. With the Deaf community, the statistical information that comes from if the media has benefited the Deaf community was looked at closer. For example, the question, “Do you think the scenario with Lydia Callis has made an effect on the Deaf community’s perception of interpreters?” could be answered in four ways—No Effect, Slight effect, Significant Effect, or I do not know who Lydia Callis is. The survey also asked “Do you think the scenario with Thami Jantjie, the “fake” interpreter, has made an effect on the Deaf community’s perception of interpreters?” with similar answer selections—No Effect, Slight effect, Significant Effect, or I do not know who Thami Jantjie is.

With the interpreter participants, both professional and student interpreters were included because this survey was more interested in how they felt towards other interpreters being put in a spotlight and if that was positive or negative. Whether they were professional interpreters or students still in training did not matter much, as long as they had an understanding of what the interpreter’s role is and knew what they had to do to excel as an interpreter. With the hearing participants, the survey explored whether the media has influenced their opinions on sign language and whether it has encouraged them to learn or discourage them instead. Both groups were given similar questions. For instance, “Do you think the scenario with Lydia Callis has made an effect on the hearing community’s perception of interpreters?” was asked with the four answer selections of No Effect, Slight effect, Significant Effect, or I do not know who Lydia Callis is. The question for Thami Jantjie was, “Do you think the scenario with Thami Jantjie, the “fake” interpreter, has made an effect on the hearing people’s perception of interpreters?” with the available selections of No Effect, Slight effect, Significant Effect, or I do not know
who Thami Jantjie is. The next specific question to ask was geared towards the hearing audience that had little to no knowledge of the Deaf community or ASL. The question, “Has the media’s focus on sign language made you want to learn sign language at all?” had the available selections of Yes, No, I already know sign language, or I don’t want to learn sign language. Also, the question, “Did you learn about the Deaf community for the first time as a result of either of these interpreting scenarios?” had the available answer selections of Yes, No, I already knew about the Deaf community, or I knew about the interpreting scenarios.

Finally, for all of the groups, the survey looked at whether the scenarios had been positive or negative with inquiries such as: “Has the media’s attention on Lydia Callis been positive?” with the available answer selection of Yes, Somewhat, No, or I do not know who Lydia Callis is. For Thami Jantjie, the question asked was, “Has the media’s attention on Thami Jantjie, the “fake” interpreter, been positive?” with the available answer selection of Yes, Somewhat, No, or I do not know who Thami Jantjie is. Then the participants were asked for their actual opinion with a somewhat controversial question, “In your opinion, has the media correctly portrayed interpreters and their roles?” with answer selections of only Yes, No, or Somewhat. With the next question, still picking the participants’ minds, the survey asked if their perception changed based on either of the interpreter scenarios with the answers of Yes, No, or I was not aware of these scenarios. The last question related to the research before moving on to gathering their demographics was, “I feel the media is over-hyping (putting unnecessary attention over interpreters under the spotlight) the position of the interpreter?” This question was unique from the rest of the survey because the answers were based on a five-point Likert Scale.
with the 1, as Strongly Disagree, to 5, being the Strongly Agree option providing a range to the participants’ answers.

For the primary investigator, the information that came from their reactions to the media’s portrayal was vital to the research. It goes a long way towards answering the question on how the media’s impact has affected the Deaf community and brought a new found attention to interpreters. Findings were gathered, analyzed, and grouped in a way that is visually appealing to the target audience. A program was used to show results through different graphs and collect various responses from the communities surveyed, highlighting common phrases that could be found throughout the surveys. After comparing the findings with the research questions, the researcher explains how these research questions arose, expanding on why this result would happen and what actually did happen with the results of the survey.

**Results**

As a result of this survey being conducted, the primary investigator hoped to gain a better understanding of where people stand with the media’s recent portrayal on sign language interpreters and whether or not they view this as a positive impact for the Deaf community.

The original expectations was to receive a maximum of 150 participants; however, there were 51 more participants than anticipated to examine after closing the survey, thus bringing the final participants count to 201. The Deaf participants were 39.3%, interpreter participants were 19.4%, and hearing participants were 41.3% of the results. Looking at these statistical percentages, it became apparent that the survey was
lacking interpreter participants. Needless to say, the primary investigator did not let this stop the study, and took what could be worked with.

The responses to the first research question were analyzed, “Did exposure to media coverage of Lydia Callis or Thami Jantjie, the “fake” interpreter, impact perceptions?”

Starting with Lydia Callis, participants were, again, asked:

- “Have you heard of Lydia Callis?”
- “Do you think the scenario with Lydia Callis has made an effect on the media’s perception of interpreters?”
- “Do you think the scenario with Lydia Callis has made an effect on the Deaf community’s perception of interpreters?”
- “Do you think the scenario with Lydia Callis has made an effect on the hearing community’s perception of interpreters?”

The biggest factor was that the two scenarios needed to be separated so it could be compared with each other. 55.2% of the participants had heard of Lydia Callis, and 42.8% had not heard of her. People who claimed that they did not know who Lydia Callis was were omitted in order to focus on the participants that could answer the questions.

Moving onto the actual perception questions, starting with the most generic one, “Do you think the scenario with Lydia Callis has made an effect on the media’s perception of interpreters?”, 3.6% of the participants said no effect, 40.2% of the participants said slight effect, and 56.3% said significant effect. Regarding the question, “Do you think the scenario with Lydia Callis has made an effect on the Deaf community’s perception of interpreters?”, 22.3% of the participants claimed no effect, 44.6% of the participants said slight effect, and 33.0% of the participants said it was a significant effect on the Deaf
community’s perception of interpreters. Finally, regarding the question, “Do you think the scenario with Lydia Callis had made an effect on the hearing community’s perception of interpreters?” 3.6% the participants chose the answer no effect, 33.3% chose slight effect, and 63.1% chose significant effect, the scenario did make an effect on the hearing community’s perception.

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between participants’ knowledge of Lydia Callis and their opinion on if she had an effect on media’s perception. A strong positive correlation was found ($r(168) = .792, p < .001$), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. The more aware the participant was of Lydia Callis, the more they thought she had an effect on the media’s perception of interpreters.

Regarding Thami Jantjie, the participants were asked:

- “Have you heard about the “fake” interpreter, Thami Jantjie, in South Africa?”
- “Do you think the scenario with Thami Jantjie, the “fake” interpreter, has made an effect on the media’s perception of interpreters?”
- “Do you think the scenario with Thami Jantjie, the “fake” interpreter, has made an effect on the Deaf community’s perception of interpreters?”
- “Do you think the scenario with Thami Jantjie, the “fake” interpreter, has made an effect on the hearing people’s perception of interpreters?”

With Thami Jantjie, 84.6% of the participants had heard about his scenario at Nelson Mandela’s memorial services as opposed to 13.9% of the participants who did not know about him. Again, people who claimed that they did not know who Thami Jantjie were omitted in order to focus on the participants who could answer the questions.
Moving onto “Do you think the scenario with Thami Jantjie, the “fake” interpreter, has made an effect on the media’s perception of interpreters?”, 5.3% of the participants said no effect, 32.2% of the participants said slight effect, and 62.6% of the participants said significant effect; it did have an effect on the media’s perception of interpreters. With the question, “Do you think the scenario with Thami Jantjie, the “fake” interpreter, has made an effect on the Deaf community’s perception of interpreters?”, 16.5% of the participants claimed no effect, 28.2% claimed slight effect, and 55.3% claimed significant effect, suggesting the scenario did have an effect on the Deaf community’s perception of interpreters. For the question, “Do you think the scenario with Thami Jantjie, the “fake” interpreter, has made an effect on the hearing people’s perception of interpreters?”, 7.0% of the participants entered no effect, 39.2% entered slight effect, and 53.8% of the participants entered significant effect, confirming it did have an effect on the hearing community’s perception of interpreters.

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between participants’ knowledge of Thami Jantjie and their opinion on if he had an effect on media’s perception. A weak negative correlation that was not significant was found (r(169) = -.074, p > .05). The more aware the participant was of Thami Jantjie was not related to if they thought he had an effect on the media’s perception of interpreters.

With the second part of the first research question, this was easier to approach due to having to determine whether it was positive or negative: “Were the perceptions from the exposure positive or negative?” The results of this variable depended on the questions, “Has the media’s attention on Lydia Callis been positive?” and “Has the media’s attention on Thami Jantjie, the “fake” interpreter, been positive?” For this result
to be more focused on if the participants did know about the two interpreting scenarios, the decision was made to temporarily omit the “I do not know who Lydia Callis is” and “I do not know who Thami Jantjie is” from the SPSS percentage results. Thus, there were 111 qualifying participants who were aware of Lydia Callis’ scenario and 170 qualifying participants who were aware of Thami Jantjie’s scenario after the elimination of participants and the percentages provided are based on the numbers of participants that were aware of each interpreter. 24.3% of the participants felt the media’s attention on Lydia Callis was positive, 65.8% said it was somewhat positive and 9.9% said it was negative. 1.8% of the participants felt the media’s attention on Thami Jantjie was positive, 13.5% said it was somewhat positive, and the majority of the participants, 84.7%, said it was negative.

For the second research question, “Are there differences in the perceptions of interpreters by interpreters (student or professional), Deaf people, and hearing people who do not know sign language?” More extensive analysis had to be done with SPSS, using those variables mentioned in the first research question but also cross referencing them to the new variable column that separated the participants in three groups; Deaf, interpreters, and hearing. With this method, it was possible to differentiate between groups and effectively get the results clearly.

For the following six questions, One-Way ANOVA was run through SPSS to differentiate whether each or at least one group had a significant difference in how they think each interpreter has an effect on the perception of interpreters in a general sense, on the Deaf community and the hearing community.
MEDIA PERCEPTION OF INTERPRETERS

With the question, “Do you think the scenario with Lydia Callis has made an effect on the media’s perception of interpreters?”, the pretest means of media perception from three groups of participants, Deaf, interpreters and hearing were compared. No significant difference was found (F(2,109) = 1.193, P > .05). The perception from all three groups of participants did not differ significantly. The Deaf participants had a mean score of 2.60 (sd = .591). The interpreter participants had a mean score of 2.47 (sd = .561). The hearing participants had a mean score of 2.40 (sd = .503).

With the question, “Do you think the scenario with Lydia Callis has made an effect on the Deaf community’s perception of interpreters?”, the pretest means of media perception from three groups of participants, Deaf, interpreters and hearing were compared. No significant difference was found (F(2,109) = 2.947, P > .05). The perception from all three groups of participants did not differ significantly. The Deaf participants had a mean score of 2.26 (sd = .762). The interpreter participants had a mean score of 1.88 (sd = .640). The hearing participants had a mean score of 2.05 (sd = .759).

With the question, “Do you think the scenario with Lydia Callis has made an effect on the hearing community’s perception of interpreters?”, the pretest means of media perception from three groups of participants, Deaf, interpreters and hearing were compared. No significant difference was found (F(2,108) = .518, P > .05). The perception from all three groups of participants did not differ significantly. The Deaf participants had a mean score of 2.56 (sd = .627). The interpreter participants had a mean score of 2.68 (sd = .475). The hearing participants had a mean score of 2.55 (sd = .510).

With the question, “Do you think the scenario with Thami Jantjie has made an effect on the media’s perception of interpreters?”, the pretest means of media perception
from three groups of participants, Deaf, interpreters and hearing were compared. No significant difference was found (F(2,168) = 10.935, P > .05). The perception from all three groups of participants did not differ significantly. The Deaf participants had a mean score of 2.72 (sd = .532). The interpreter participants had a mean score of 2.70 (sd = .520). The hearing participants had a mean score of 2.29 (sd = .622).

With the question, “Do you think the scenario with Thami Jantjie has made an effect on the Deaf community’s perception of interpreters?”, the pretest means of media perception from three groups of participants, Deaf, interpreters and hearing were compared. No significant difference was found (F(2,167) = 13.442, P > .05). The perception from all three groups of participants did not differ significantly. The Deaf participants had a mean score of 2.67 (sd = .641). The interpreter participants had a mean score of 2.36 (sd = .762). The hearing participants had a mean score of 2.3 (sd = .748).

Finally, with the question, “Do you think the scenario with Thami Jantjie has made an effect on the hearing community’s perception of interpreters?”, the pretest means of media perception from three groups of participants, Deaf, interpreters and hearing were compared. No significant difference was found (F(2,168) = 9.146, P > .05). The perception from all three groups of participants did not differ significantly. The Deaf participants had a mean score of 2.55 (sd = .598). The interpreter participants had a mean score of 2.70 (sd = .520). The hearing participants had a mean score of 2.21 (sd = .642).

**Discussion/Conclusion**

With this study, a lot of new and interesting information was discovered. Original beliefs were that, naturally, media coverage would impact perceptions, and perceptions of interpreters would change. The results indicated that the hypothesis was partially correct.
Upon asking whether (in their opinion) the media has correctly portrayed interpreters and their roles, 9.5% of the participants in the study felt it had—the media did a correct portrayal, 29.9% said no they did not do a correct portrayal, and 59.2% felt like the media did somewhat a correct portrayal. It was assumed that most media platforms would try to appropriately portray a figure, but the audience did not think the same.

With the statement, “I feel the media is over-hyping (putting unnecessary attention over interpreters under the spotlight) the position of the interpreter”, the participants were asked to pick a number between 1, being the strongly disagree option, and 5, the strongly agree option. 8% of the participants picked 1, 21.4% of the participants picked 2, 40.3% of the participants picked 3, 15.4% of the participants picked 4, and 12.4% of the participants picked 5. Most participants were neutral about the over-hyping of interpreters and how widespread the scenarios became. Participants were not sick of the interpreters being in the media so often.

Answering RQ1: “Did exposure to media coverage of Lydia Callis or Thami Jantjie, the “fake” interpreter, impact perceptions?” 56.3% of the participants felt like yes, it had a general significant effect with Lydia Callis, with only 52.5% of the participants knowing who Lydia Callis compared to 84.6% of the participants knowing who Thami Jantjie was. This created a higher percentage of perception impact with 62.6% of the participants saying yes, it had a general effect on the media’s perception of interpreters. As for the significant data, Thami Jantjie was not significant compared to Lydia Callis’ impact. With this, Lydia Callis’ exposure in the media has shifted perceptions more than Thami Jantjie, and positively.
RQ1a, “Were the perceptions from the exposure positive or negative?”, was the most surprising and biggest transformation in data during this study. 65.8% of the participants felt as if Lydia Callis’ scenario was somewhat positive, for reasons unknown and left unsaid, and 84.7% of the participants felt like Thami Jantjie’s scenario was negative. The most shocking data came from Lydia Callis’ scenario, as the Literature Review offers, it was a very positive and enlightening experience by being able to inform people of what interpreters are used for--but from the participants, they felt like it was somewhat positive. With the negative media circulating around Thami Jantjie, it was not as surprising that the participants felt the same.

The last research question, RQ2, “Are there differences in the perceptions of interpreters by interpreters (student or professional), Deaf people, and hearing people who do not know sign language?”, was the most critically important in the study, because in order to find this result, exhaustive statistics had to be performed. This research question was the first question the primary investigator thought of when looking at various interpreting scenarios, and this is the question that has been the primary reason of this study. There were six statistically not significant results in order to answer this question with a resounding no, there were no differences in perceptions between interpreters, Deaf people, or hearing people.

The varied responses from the participants were appreciated, and the variables that were originally assumed to be positive or correct were surprising. Along the way, the primary investigator discovered some factors that could be pivotal to the varied responses and the non-significance of data. The factors that probably played into the varied responses would be: lack of interpreter opinion/participants, hearing participants who
were originally aware of the Deaf community (need to find more isolated hearing participants), and the regionality of participants. Most of the participants hailed from Facebook, which meant the survey reached out to mutual friends and their friends, it was not as widespread as originally anticipated. This might have led to the reason why the percentage of interpreter participants was lower than what was expected, mixed with the fact that not many people this survey came in contact with were interpreters. The interpreting field was very small compared to many other occupations so finding a sufficient number of interpreters to take the survey was enough of a challenge alone.

For any future studies, it would be valuable to find more interpreters in order to get their perspective on this topic, conduct more extensive research towards how interpreters are being perceived by social media rather than just the media generally, and discover why participants were not enlightened by the wide spreading by the media of the scenario whether it was positive or negative. Also, further research on why Lydia Callis’ scenario was somewhat positive would enlighten the true results of the participants’ opinions.

In conclusion, the study provided a look into the participants’ minds and their opinions of how interpreters are being perceived in the media. The two scenarios with Lydia Callis and Thami Jantjie provided a new light to the media’s perception, although it was not always positive, it did have an effect. The more interpreters enter the spotlight, regardless of situation or positivity will continue to improve the awareness and perception of interpreters in the media, and in turn--the audience the media reaches to.
References


Appendix 1

Questions

- Are you Deaf?
  - Yes/No

- Are you a professional interpreter?
  - Yes/No/No but I’m an interpreting student

- Do you know American Sign Language?
  - Yes/No

- How long have you been an American Sign Language user? (Answer in years, if you do not know ASL enter N/A.)
  - _______ years

- Why did you want to start interpreting? (If you do not interpret, put N/A)
  - __________

- How long have you been interpreting? (If you do not interpret, put N/A)
  - _________ years.

- Has the media’s focus on sign language made you want to learn sign language at all?
  - Yes/No/I already know sign language/I don’t want to learn sign language

- Do you know a friend or a classmate who is currently taking or took ASL classes?
  - Yes/No

- How many friends/classmates?
  - 0
  - 1-5
o 6-10
o 11-15
o 16-20
o More than 20

• Do you know what interpreters are used for?
  o Yes/No/Somewhat

• Have you heard of Lydia Callis?
  o Yes/No

• Do you think the scenario with Lydia Callis has made an effect on the media’s perception of interpreters?
  o No Effect/Slight effect/Significant Effect/I do not know who Lydia Callis is

• Do you think the scenario with Lydia Callis has made an effect on the Deaf community’s perception of interpreters?
  o No Effect/Slight effect/Significant Effect/I do not know who Lydia Callis is

• Do you think the scenario with Lydia Callis has made an effect on the hearing community’s perception of interpreters?
  o No Effect/Slight effect/Significant Effect/I do not know who Lydia Callis is

• Has the media’s attention on Lydia Callis been positive?
  o Yes/Somewhat/No/I do not know who Lydia Callis is

• Have you heard about the “fake” interpreter, Thami Jantjie, in South Africa?
Do you think the scenario with Thami Jantjie, the “fake” interpreter, has made an effect on the media’s perception of interpreters?
  - No Effect/Slight effect/Significant Effect/I do not know who Thami Jantjie is

Do you think the scenario with Thami Jantjie, the “fake” interpreter, has made an effect on the Deaf community’s perception of interpreters?
  - No Effect/Slight effect/Significant Effect/I do not know who Thami Jantjie is

Do you think the scenario with Thami Jantjie, the “fake” interpreter, has made an effect on the hearing people’s perception of interpreters?
  - No Effect/Slight effect/Significant Effect/I do not know who Thami Jantjie is

Has the media’s attention on Thami Jantjie, the “fake” interpreter, been positive?
  - Yes/Somewhat/No/I do not know who Thami Jantjie is

In your opinion, has the media **correctly** portrayed interpreters and their roles?
  - Yes/No/Somewhat

Did you change your perception of interpreters based on either of these interpreting scenarios?
  - Yes/No/I was not aware of these scenarios.

Did you learn about the Deaf community for the first time as a result of either of these interpreting scenarios?
MEDIA PERCEPTION OF INTERPRETERS

- Yes/No/I already knew about the Deaf community/I knew about the interpreting scenarios

- I feel the media is over-hyping (putting unnecessary attention over interpreters under the spotlight) the position of the interpreter?
  - Strongly Disagree -1- -2- -3- -4- -5- Strongly Agree

- Gender
  - Female/Male/I would prefer not to answer

- Age: ____