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# The unexpected talented tenth: Black d/Deaf students thriving within the margins

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**The unexpected talented tenth: Black d/Deaf students thriving within the margins**

by

Lissa Denielle Stapleton

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

Program of Study Committee:  
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Patricia Leigh  
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Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2014

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## DEDICATION

To my ancestors and all the Unexpected Talented Tenth who answered the call and persisted-

*We are the hope, aspiration, and promise.*

I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, and I have remained faithful.

*2 Timothy 4:7*

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**ABSTRACT**

This study grew out of my own lived experiences working with d/Deaf college students as well as a handful of issues uncovered within the literature, particularly around racist and audist microaggressions on campus. In hopes of gaining insight into these issues, six Black d/Deaf alumni, which I refer to as the Unexpected Talented Tenth, joined me on a strength-based journey to co-construct the answers to three questions: (a) How did they make meaning of their undergraduate experiences? (b) How did they experience racial and audist microaggressions while navigating undergrad? (c) How did they use aspects of Black d/Deaf Community Cultural Wealth to resist racial and audist microaggressions in order to persist to graduation? The literature, which supports and informs this study, is divided into four areas: (a) Historical snapshots of Black d/Deaf education, (b) Black students' college experiences with persistence and resistance as well as an overview of racial microaggressions, (c) d/Deaf students' college experiences with persistence and resistance as well as an overview of audist microaggressions, and (d) Black d/Deaf education today focusing on intersectionality, role models, and the K-12 educational system.

Elements of goodness were used to frame the research design. My assumptions were clearly stated along with the philosophical paradigmatic (constructivism) and epistemological (Deaf epistemology) underpinnings of the study. The theoretical frameworks that shaped this study were Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Deaf Theory (Deaf Crit). Both the theoretical frameworks were congruent with the analytical frameworks, the theory of microaggressions and Black d/Deaf Community Cultural Wealth (BDCCW). Hermeneutic phenomenology, the methodological framework, guided the participant selection, data collection, and data analysis processes. A purposeful sample of six participants was

successfully recruited through the National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA) as well as with the help of Deaf Studies scholars and the d/Deaf community broadly. Data were collected using three methods--participant surveys, videophone meetings, and three semi-structured interviews. Once the data were translated and summary transcriptions written, analysis consisted of four phases: (a) organizing system, (b) identifying meaning units, (c) thematic labeling, and (d) creative synthesis. Using qualitatively appropriate standards of goodness, the five areas of authenticity were used to ensure quality.

In order to protect the participants' privacy and aligned with CRT and Deaf Crit, the findings were re-presented using composite counternarratives in which I weaved the findings together, creating four inverted composite counternarratives. The analytical discussion weaved the inverted counternarratives with the participants' real lives as well as literature to answer the three research questions and address the overarching problems. Five themes were created to answer Question 1. They were based on how the participants experienced college and included (a) Campus environments, (b) Social identity development, (c) Peer and family support, (d) Classroom and faculty experiences, and (e) Vocational Rehabilitation counselors. In Question 2, I asked how the participants had experienced racial and audist microaggressions. Those experiences occurred as distorted expectations, through invisibility within the classroom and campus community at large, by trivialization of their needs, culture, and experiences, as well as the co-opting of their space and talents.

With the last question, I examined how the participants resisted racist and audist microaggressions, specifically by using Black d/Deaf Community Cultural Wealth. The findings show that high stake interactions with specific audiences accounted for difficulties resisting, such as against faculty because of a lack of confidence, or Vocational

Rehabilitation counselors for fear of losing funding. Nonetheless, the participants were able to share in greater numbers the ways in which they acquired and used BDCCW to resist racist and audist microaggressions within the classroom, among their peers, and within the larger campus.

Examples of research implications include expanding this study throughout the entire educational pipeline, including Black d/Deaf graduate students; incorporating other intersecting social identities; and examining how other aspects of student development impact Black d/Deaf students' ability to use BDCCW. Broadly, faculty and institution practitioners must develop and commit to social justice praxis regarding their work with all students. Having social justice praxis is the ability to reflect on one's actions and the world, to act on issues of inequity, and to work in collaboration with those who are most oppressed to ensure their liberation. This is what is needed to change current behaviors, curricula, and environments that perpetuate and allow audist and racist microaggressions to exist on campuses today.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION OF STUDY

“The problem is not that the (deaf) students do not hear.

The problem is that the hearing world does not listen.”

(Jackson, 1988)

On March 9, 1988, Rev. Jesse Jackson wrote a letter of solidarity supporting the students at Gallaudet University during the Deaf President Now Protest. d/Deaf<sup>1</sup> students protested for eight days until all five of their demands were met, including the resignation of a hearing president and the hiring of Gallaudet’s first Deaf president, I. King Jordan (Gallaudet University, 2014). The above epigraph is a line from Jackson’s letter, and it speaks to my motivation for working and researching with and within the d/Deaf community.

*I have many intersecting identities and most do not allow me to view the world from a privileged place in our society, but an identity in which I am privileged is my hearing. Most days I do not wake up and think about my ability to hear. I usually do not have a hard time communicating with others, and most of the world caters to and values the ways in which I communicate, which are through verbal speech. My life experience starting from my high school years is what brings me to my work with the d/Deaf community. After attending a high school retreat and interacting with d/Deaf high school students my age, I grew more and more aware that the hearing world I lived in was not experienced the same way by all. I*

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<sup>1</sup> d/Deaf is an inclusive way of acknowledging multiple identities within the Deaf world (Paul & Moores, 2012). The lower case “d” in the word deaf refers to the audiological condition or medical severity of the person’s hearing loss (Trowler & Turner, 2002; Woodcock, Rohan, & Campbell, 2007). The upper case “D” in the word Deaf refers to individuals who connect to Deaf cultural practices, the centrality of American Sign Language (ASL), and the history of the community (Johnson & McIntosh, 2009; Mitchell, 2005; Woodcock et al., 2007).

*took American Sign Language (ASL) courses as an undergraduate college student and went on to accept a student housing position at California State University Northridge (CSUN) after earning my master's degree.*

*As a residential life staff member, I had the opportunity to work more closely with d/Deaf college students, faculty, and staff, improve my ASL skills, and learn more about d/Deaf communities. During my time at CSUN, and in California more broadly, I began to observe and feel the frustration of microaggressions against d/Deaf people because of hearing people's inability to listen, acknowledge their hearing privilege, educate themselves, and embrace a different way of navigating the world. During my final years at CSUN and life journeys after, I became more conscious of the diverse subcommunities and experiences within the d/Deaf community from a domestic and international lens.*

Recently, as a Black feminist and a critical scholar-practitioner, I began to wonder about the experiences of Black d/Deaf students and the role multiple identities played as they related to the students' journeys through college. Through reading literature and my own research, I found limited scholarship related to Black d/Deaf students' college experiences (Foster & Kinuthia, 2003; Stapleton, in press). Most literature looks at the academic experiences of current and mostly White college d/Deaf students (Foster & Brown, 1988; Foster, Long, & Snell, 1999; Lang, 2002); however, I have found limited research that looks at d/Deaf students and more specifically Black d/Deaf students who have successfully graduated from college (Williamson, 2007). With these gaps in mind, I created a study that will contribute to the literature, the higher education field, and most importantly Black d/Deaf students.



### **Problems, Background, and Significance**

d/Deaf students' attendance in our colleges and universities is continuing to grow (Lang, 2002; Woodcock et al., 2007). As of 2000, there were 468,000 d/Deaf students enrolled in higher education (Schroedel, Watson, & Ashmore, 2003). The national graduation rate for all students is approximately 50%- 59% (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2013), but only 30% of d/Deaf students are persisting to graduation at four-year institutions (Destler & Buckley, National Technical Institute for the Deaf, 2011). Graduation is a goal and indicator of success for most colleges and universities (Reason, 2009), and Albertini, Kelly, and Matchett's (2011) study on d/Deaf student persistence indicated, "From 2001-2006, 75-80% of the entering deaf students at NTID [National Technical Institute for the Deaf] stated that their goal was to obtain a baccalaureate degree" (p. 86). With this in mind, in this study I focused on the college experiences and persistence of Black d/Deaf students and hoped to address several problems.

First, there is a lack of specific demographic information regarding the 30% of d/Deaf students who are graduating from colleges and university across the country. There are some exceptions, such as NTID, which because of the Education of the Deaf Act (EDA), must create an annual federal report highlighting the demographics of student enrollment, persistence, and degree obtainments (Destler & Buckley, 2013). However, in general it is unclear who these students are and what their journeys through college have been like. No other intersecting identities such as race or gender have been clearly identified within the 30% of d/Deaf student graduates. Also, studies (Albertini et al., 2011; Smith, 2004) have looked at persistence factors for currently enrolled d/Deaf college students, but there have been limited studies (Williamson, 2007) that explore persistence factors retrospectively from

the student perspective. We can learn a lot from d/Deaf students who have successfully graduated from college on how to better improve services and support. Therefore, to address this problem, in this study, I focused on the experiences of Black d/Deaf alumni who had successfully matriculated and graduated from college. This study contributes new perspectives and voices from a racialized and d/Deaf lens. The retrospective approach allows higher education professionals to benefit from the wisdom, stories, and experiences of students who have already walked the path we are trying to understand.

The second problem is that d/Deaf experiences has been essentialized to mean the experiences of White people, and the voices and perspective of the Black d/Deaf community have been left largely invisible (Foster & Kinuthia, 2003). Being d/Deaf within itself is often defined as diverse when compared to hearing people, and racial diversity within the d/Deaf community is often not acknowledged. Parasnis (2012) stated, “The experiences of white American Deaf ASL users has [sic] created a perception of Deaf culture as a monolithic overarching trait of all deaf people and has [sic] suppressed recognition of the demographic diversity of individuals within the Deaf community itself” (p. 64). Higher Education professionals and faculty are not sure if “all” d/Deaf people are having the same educational experiences nor is it clear about the challenges and support needed by Black d/Deaf students. Many issues faced by Black d/Deaf students may be the same as White d/Deaf students, such as audist treatment from hearing society, but Black d/Deaf students may also be resisting microaggressions because of other socially constructed identities such as race and gender. Students are complex beings and a part of their complexity is the intersecting of their multiple identities. Therefore, to address this problem, in this study I focused solely on the experiences of Black d/Deaf people. This is not a comparison study between White and

Black people or hearing and d/Deaf people, but rather an opportunity to allow Black d/Deaf people to speak for themselves, to speak about themselves, and to offer suggestions on how to improve Black d/Deaf student persistence in college. To avoid essentialization, in this study I highlighted the diversity among the participants and the many ways in which their lives and school experiences are similar as well as ways in which they are different.

The third problem is that Black d/Deaf college students are attending and enrolling into college in small numbers. Gallaudet University, a primarily Deaf four-year institution, has recently assessed their enrollment patterns as they relate to race and the ethnoracial representation and persistence on their campus (McCaskill, 2011). Evaluating the 2010-2011 first-year class compared to the 2009-2010 d/Deaf high school student population, from which they recruited students, they found that Black d/Deaf students were least likely to be admitted to the university (McCaskill, 2011). The challenges for Black d/Deaf students can start early in the college going process; thus, the need for research on what is specifically happening with Black d/Deaf students is critical. NTID's annual report indicated that the number of minoritized students at the institution has increased over the years (Destler & Buckley, 2013). NTID enrolled 381 d/Deaf students in the fall of 2013 and of that number 117 or 43% were minoritized students. Of 117 minoritized students, 27 or 10% were Black students, which are one of the lower racial/ethnic populations at NTID (Destler & Buckley, 2013). The annual report also highlighted that a number of Black d/Deaf students are obtaining their associate degree, but very few of those students are transitioning to Rochester Institute of Technology to complete bachelor degrees (Destler & Buckley, 2013). Therefore, to address this problem, in this study I intended to uncover what within Black d/Deaf

students' K-20 experience might have encouraged, discouraged, aided, and deterred the alumni from pursuing college and completing.

The final problem is the limited amount of literature on the college experiences, challenges, and successes of Black students with [dis]abilities, particularly Black d/Deaf students (Foster & Kinuthia, 2003). The studies that focused on the Black d/Deaf community (Aramburo, 1989; Callaway & Tucker, 1989) offered a foundation for expanding knowledge about the Black d/Deaf community; however, they focused more broadly on the Black d/Deaf community in society and not specifically on higher education and college students. The Black community is internally diverse, and Black students are navigating multiple intersecting identities, including [dis]abilities (Steward, 2008, 2009). The reality is that higher education practitioners and scholars can no longer essentialize all Black students as able bodied or hearing people. Therefore, to address this problem, with this study I intended to contribute to the limited scholarship that has been produced regarding Black d/Deaf college students. In the study I focused on the strengths, resistance efforts, and successes of students in order to learn and implement ways in which Black d/Deaf students can be better supported to persist to graduation.

### **Purposes and Research Questions**

“Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.”

(Hurston, 1942, p. 182)

Every solid study starts with a peak of curiosity, a question, or questions that must be further explored and investigated. Zora Neale Hurston, a prolific Harlem Renaissance African American female writer, in her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, spoke of research as a formalized curiosity. *My curiosity grew over time through working with d/Deaf*

*students, but peaked when I attended the inaugural Deaf People of Color Conference in 2010. For the first time, I was in d/Deaf People of Color space, hearing their stories, learning about d/Deaf People of Color advocacy associations, seeing new cultural signing styles, and taking in the issues overcome and still prevalent within various ethnic d/Deaf communities. As I continued to poke and pry, the purposes of this study were to first allow Black d/Deaf alumni to reflect back over their time in their undergraduate education and offer perspective on what their college experiences were like. The second was to allow participants the opportunity to talk about how issues of racism and audism influenced their undergraduate experiences. The third was to gain insights on how Black d/Deaf alumni were able to successfully persist to graduation. This study centered Black d/Deaf alumni voices and experiences using a non-deficit approach and critical theory lens. The overarching research questions that guided this dissertation are:*

1. How do Black d/Deaf alumni make meaning of their experiences as Black d/Deaf undergraduate students?
2. How did Black d/Deaf alumni experience racist and audist microaggressions while navigating their undergraduate education?
3. How did Black d/Deaf alumni use aspects of Black d/Deaf community cultural wealth (BDCCW) to resist racial and audist microaggressions in order to persist to graduation?

### **Research Design Layout**

Essence of goodness is the gauge or holistic criteria in which this study was built. Elements of goodness are a way to determine if a qualitative study is of high quality (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). Goodness can be seen in this

study through the intentional selection and connection among the philosophical paradigm, epistemology, theoretical and analytical frameworks, and methodology; the clearly defined data collection and analysis process; the transparency and reflexivity of the researcher, as well as the concluding practical recommendations (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Jones et al., 2006). Using goodness as a backdrop, this study's philosophical paradigm and epistemological underpinnings are constructivism and Deaf epistemology, respectively. Constructivism is a perspective whose adherents believe in the co-construction and reality of multiple truths as well as the fluidity and contradiction within truth (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Not all Black d/Deaf people have the same experiences, thoughts, or feelings; thus, constructivism allows for variation within the findings. Deaf epistemology centers d/Deaf ways of knowing yet continues to build on constructivism as knowledge is socially constructed within the d/Deaf community by d/Deaf people (Holcomb, 2010; Paul & Moores, 2012).

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Building on principles of constructivism and Deaf epistemology, there is no single theoretical lens that would offer insight into Black d/Deaf alumni undergraduate experiences; therefore, I used Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Deaf Theory (Deaf Crit) as my theoretical frameworks.

Critical Race Theory grew out of critical legal theory in the 1970s and is an interdisciplinary movement that centers race as a socially constructed phenomenon and assumes that racism is endemic. It contests color-blindness and meritocracy by honoring counternarratives to help deconstruct masternarratives, and believes in the notions of intersectionality and anti-essentialism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, Levit & Verchick, 2006).

Critical Deaf Theory (Deaf Crit; Gertz, 2003) is heavily influenced by CRT. Instead of racism, Gertz (2003) examined audism, or the mistreatment and discrimination of d/Deaf individuals (Humphries, 1977), and believes the Deaf Rights Movement has similarities to the Black Civil Rights Movement in which CRT focuses. One result of Gertz's (2003) research with Deaf adults born and raised in Deaf families was the creation of the tenants of Deaf Crit, which is a critical way to examine and talk about audistic subordination and the marginalization of d/Deaf people.

This study focused on the intersected Black and d/Deaf experience; thus, it was critical that CRT and Deaf Crit were combined to form the theoretical framework. The following are the combined Deaf Crit and CRT tenants:

- Racism and audism are endemic
- Honor the intersectionality of d/Deaf People of Color
- Challenge dominant hearing and White ideology
- Validate and center the unique voices
- Commitment to Social Justice for d/Deaf People of Color

Together these theoretical frameworks strengthen the theoretical foundation of the study providing a rich structure in which to examine Black d/Deaf alumni's college experiences and the microaggressions they may have experienced throughout their undergraduate careers. Microaggressions, which have historically only been seen as race related, are more broadly defined as unintentional behavioral and environmental slights and indignities toward any marginalized group (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, & Bucceri, 2007). Black d/Deaf students could be experiencing a variety of microaggressions because of being Black and d/Deaf along with other minoritized identities they possess. Microaggressions

often times go uninvestigated but have a real impact on the individual or group in which the aggressions are happening (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue et al., 2007).

### **Analytical Frameworks**

The theory of microaggressions and Black d/Deaf Community Cultural Wealth (BDCCW) are the analytical frameworks used in this study. Microaggressions are “brief, common-place, and daily, verbal, and environmental slights and indignities directed towards [Black d/Deaf people] often automatically and unintentionally” (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008, p. 329). This theory was used to identify the racist and audist microaggressions within the participants’ stories.

Black d/Deaf Community Cultural Wealth is a blend of Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005), Deaf Community Cultural Wealth (Garrow et al., 2014) and literature on the ways the Black community has used capital to successfully navigate oppression (Jayakumar, Vue, & Allen, 2013). BDCCW is defined as “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by [Black d/Deaf people] to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (Garrow et al., 2014, p. 5). There are six types of capital that speak to both the Black and d/Deaf identities of the participants: (a) aspirational, (b) navigational, (c) social, (d) linguistic, (e) familial, and (f) resistant capital. BDCCW was used to analyze the ways in which the participants reacted and responded to racial and audist microaggressions.

Blending CRT and Deaf Crit as the theoretical framework in which to situate the study, and using the theory of microaggressions and BDCCW to analyze the data, I was able to complicate and center the raced and Deaf experiences of Black d/Deaf students.



Furthermore, I examined how Black d/Deaf students resisted racial and audist microaggressions using social capital in order to resist oppression and persist to graduation.

### **Methodology**

Hermeneutic phenomenological methodology guided this study. Hermeneutic means to interpret and “interpretation is seen as critical to [the] process of understanding” (Lavery, 2003, p. 9) the lived experience. Because there is not a lot of research that focuses on Black d/Deaf students, this methodology is ideal as it is “concerned with the life world or human experience as it is lived. The focus is toward illuminating [or interpreting the meaning of] details and seemingly trivial aspects within experience that may be taken for granted in our lives” (Lavery, 2003, p. 7). Hermeneutic phenomenology methodology is a type of phenomenology methodology; thus, there are four critical elements for phenomenological inquiry that this study followed. First, the core of inquiry are essences that are mutually understood and commonly experienced by participants (Patton, 2002, p. 106); but, as related to hermeneutic phenomenology there is also the possibility of multiple essences. Truths that the participants collectively and individually identify were highlighted and honored in this study. Second, in this study I am most interested in knowing what people experience and what meaning they make of those experiences (Patton, 2002; Seidman, 2013). Third, it is important that the researcher experience the phenomenon intimately and directly (Patton, 2002). Hermeneutic phenomenology methodology requires that my positionality not be bracketed out, but shown and embedded in the entire research process (Lavery, 2003). Lastly, Patton (2002) stated, “Phenomenological reflection is not *introspective* but *retrospective*” (p. 104); thus, in this study I relied on the reflection of alumni participants to better understand their college experiences, the racial and audist microaggressions that they

might have experienced during their undergraduate education, and how they resisted these microaggressions to persist to graduation.

### **Participants and Recruitment**

This study focused on the experiences of six Black d/Deaf alumni. A purposeful sample or a sample that best fits the participant criteria was recruited (Patton, 2002). Participants had to identify as d/Deaf or hard of hearing as this identity was critical to the study. In order to not essentialize all Black people's experiences, participants were asked how they identify their ethnicity within the context of Blackness, including ethnic groups, such as African, Black American, African American, Black Caribbean-American, and Black Latino-American to name a few. This study specifically focused on how racism and audism are seen, felt, and experienced from a U.S. context within the U.S. higher education system; thus, all participants had to have graduated from a four-year U.S. institution. It was also important that participants were not too far removed from their undergraduate experience in order to recall stories, feelings, and thoughts about their experience, and thus the last criteria was that all participants must have graduated between 2007-2013.

All participants were recruited through snowball sampling (Patton, 2002) with the help of the National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA), Facebook postings on friends' sites, and personal contacts with d/Deaf people or hearing colleagues who conduct similar research. NBDA is a nonprofit organization founded in 1982 that promotes social equality, educational opportunities, and the safeguard of Black d/Deaf people. Using NBDA's website and membership listserv, a research announcement was posted on their website and an email was sent out to members across the country. Potential participants contacted me directly to express their interest.

## Data Collection Methods

Informed by hermeneutic phenomenology methodology, I collected data using a participant survey, rapport videophone meeting, and three semi-structured interviews. I used the participant survey to ask questions specific to three categories: identity, school, and the interview process. The participant survey was completed during the building rapport video meetings. It was used as a way to get to know participants in addition to being a screen to ensure the most diverse sample that met all participant criteria. Completing the survey during the videophone meeting also allowed me to deliver the information in American Sign Language versus emailing the participants a written survey. If the participant met the participant criteria for the study, I then emailed them a consent form that they signed, scanned, and emailed back to me. Because narratives can be highly personal (Fontana & Prokos, 2007), the 1-hour building rapport videophone meetings were critical. After completing the participant surveys, we spent a significant amount of time getting to know each other. I had an opportunity to share more about the study, my background, how I became interested in the topic, and more. We went over the consent form, and I answered any questions they had about myself and the study. We then scheduled the three-series phenomenologically-based face-to-face interviews.

All three semi-structured video recorded interviews lasted between 90 minutes and 2 hours (Seidman, 2013). The three interviews focused on life history, details of their college experiences, and reflections on the meaning they made from their experiences, respectively (Seidman, 2013). To aid the participants in reflecting back over their time in their undergraduate institutions as well as to enhance my understanding of their experience, the participants were asked to bring biographical material, including pictures, journals, clothing

items, and other personal items to help them reflect back (Creswell, 2007). Once the interviews were completed, I translated them and created summary transcriptions.

### **Data Analysis**

Once the interviews were translated and transcribed, I used hermeneutic analysis (Patterson & Williams, 2002). This process of analysis used hermeneutic circles or the practice of moving back and forth between the data and analytical frameworks, between individual participants, and from the individual to the collective continuously looking for greater connections and understanding (Patterson & Williams, 2002). This study goes through four fluid phases of analysis using the hermeneutic circle as the foundation. The four phases included (a) organizing system, (b) identifying meaning units, (c) thematic labeling, and (d) creative synthesis. With hermeneutic analysis, there is no definite end to analysis as understanding is constantly changing and is influenced by multiple facts, including my positionality. Because my positionality actively contributed to how the data were analyzed, it was not bracketed out, but weaved throughout analysis (Patterson & Williams, 2002). The findings were then used to create composite counternarratives or stories that are a blend of the participants' narratives, symbolism, and various data sources to highlight the lives and happenings of marginalized people (Patton & Catching, 2009).

### **Quality Criteria**

This study used authenticity criteria to evaluate goodness. Authenticity has five criterions: (a) fairness, (b) ontological authenticity, (c) educative authenticity, (d) catalytic authenticity, and (e) tactical authenticity (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2003). Some of the five criterion overlap, and most of the criterion was met using multiple tasks. I conducted member checks in order to fulfill fairness and tactical authenticity (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003).

Member checks allowed the participants to have agency over their stories and check for accuracy. My use of thick contextual descriptions as well as incorporating contradicting perspectives within the composites also addressed fairness (Lewis-Bec et al., 2003). On top of member checks, tactical authenticity was insured by the use of consent forms, maintaining confidentiality, and evaluating what participants learned throughout the process (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003). Ontological and educative authenticity were met by using audit trails as it aided in my reflection process as the researcher and assisted in verifying meaning making (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Guba E. , 1981). Educative authenticity also was achieved through the use of a peer debriefer (Lewis-Becket al., 2003). I worked with Dr. William Garrow, a Deaf Studies faculty expert in the field as a sounding board to talk through my analysis and findings (Patton, 2002). Lastly, concluding the study with strong practical recommendations, catalytic authenticity was met.

### **What Can You Expect?**

“Once we realize that all claims to ‘scientific truth’ are suspect, influenced by the culturally bound nature of the researcher's text, we can free ourselves to write in ways that name and claim feeling, story, and relationships equipped to communicate findings in multidimensional, penetrating, and more accessible ways.”

(Cahnmann, 2003, p. 33)

*I am anxious about this study. Unsure. Unsure, if I, a hearing person, have a right or place to even attempt to help a mostly hearing audience begin to understand the experiences of Black d/Deaf people and students more specifically. I have tried to abandon this study, but I am called. I can't stop thinking about it, presenting on it, asking questions,*

*and dreaming about it. I am called to participate, to help facilitate a connection between two worlds: hearing and d/Deaf.*

In a hermeneutic phenomenological study, the purpose is to understand the participants' experiences as closely as possible (Patton, 2002). My experience has been that as a hearing person who does research within the d/Deaf community, I am often a distraction to hearing people actually listening to and understanding d/Deaf people. Hearing people want to know how and when I learned to sign and if I am fluent (*I learned in college, and I am constantly improving my American Sign Language skills*). They want to know if I have d/Deaf people in my family (*No, no one is d/Deaf in my family*), but these questions seem less important when I think about the limited research that focuses on Black d/Deaf college students or the low college graduation rates for d/Deaf students in general. I realize there is some fascination and wonder about the d/Deaf world by some hearing people, so their questions are valid. However, I am left feeling uneasy as I come face-to-face with my own hearing privilege and grapple with what it means to be in community and partnership with the d/Deaf community. My attempt to shift some of the focus away from me and to honor both the questions asked and the questions I believe are most pressing is to be transparent and follow Cahnmann's (2003) recommendation of "free[ing] [myself] to write in ways that name and claim feeling, story,...communicat[ing] findings in multidimensional, penetrating and more accessible ways" (p. 33). I have used different writing techniques within my dissertation to help readers come as close to the participants' experiences as possible including epigraphs from various outlets as a way to connect the material to real life when appropriate. I have used poetry as a way to express emotions, add dimension and depth, and connection to the participants. My positionality, thoughts, and voice are incorporated

throughout the study within italics, so readers are not stuck wondering who I am, what my connection to my research is and how am I influencing it. I use both first and third person in an attempt to be seen and unseen as well as personal and distant throughout the study. My desire is that this study be accessible to a diverse audience including hearing and d/Deaf, White people and People of Color, and academics and higher education professionals. My hope is that readers can also juggle multiple truths seeing me and the participants as individuals as well as collective beings trying to co-construct and make meaning out of the larger phenomenon of Black d/Deaf alumni's college experiences, how racial and audist microaggression influenced their experiences, and how they resisted the microaggressions to persist to graduation.

This dissertation is organized within six chapters. Chapter 1 was the overview of the study, including the problems and significance, the purpose of the study, the research questions, and a brief methodological overview. Chapter 2 starts with a brief history of Black d/Deaf education in the U.S. and move into what has been written and researched as it relates to Black, d/Deaf, and Black d/Deaf students, their college experiences and persistence, as well as racial and audist microaggressions. I highlight where there are gaps in the literature and how this study begins to fill those gaps. Chapter 3 is the skeleton of how the research was conducted, including the philosophical and epistemological underpinnings, theoretical and analytical frameworks, methodology, methods, participant criteria and recruitment, as well as quality criteria. In Chapter 4, I present the participants' voices or findings of the study written as composite narratives. In Chapter 5, I pull apart the composite stories while weaving the participants' stories and literature together to answer the questions through an analytical discussion of the themes. Chapter 6 is the culminating chapter in which

I pull the study together, identifying the limitations, and offering implications and practical recommendations that surfaced from the study.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

“The dynamics of Deaf culture, at least in the United States, unfortunately often refers to white Deaf culture, a phenomenon that created a form of apartheid within the Deaf community itself.”

(Cohen, 1993, p. 54)

In 1993, the National Center on Education Statistics reported that there were 25,000 d/Deaf students attending colleges and universities throughout the country, mostly at public institutions. A decade later, Schroedel, Watson, and Ashmore (2003) estimated that there were 468,000 d/Deaf students attending colleges and universities around the country. The literature now states that approximately 30% and 35% of d/Deaf college students are estimated to be graduating from 4-year and 2-year institutions, respectively (Marschark, Lang, & Albertini, 2002). There are many speculations on why this number is so low; however, there are few solutions at this time. In order to better understand what is happening with d/Deaf college students, more information is needed about who they are. Scholars can make some assumptions based on Gallaudet University’s admission statistics from the 2010-2011 first-year class that most d/Deaf students graduating are White, as White d/Deaf students make up the highest percentage within the applicant pool, acceptance pool, and matriculate pool (McCaskill, 2011). Black students are the next largest group of students (McCaskill, 2011). There is limited research that has explored specifically how Black d/Deaf students persist to graduation, what challenges they have experienced (racial and audist microaggressions), and how they have resisted various challenges in order to be successful. Most of the research on d/Deaf students in higher education has failed to examine the impact

of multiple intersecting identities on d/Deaf students (Parasnis, 2012) and how these intersections contribute to student persistence. Humphries (1993) stated:

Most of the research into the lives and language of Deaf people tended to be unspecific in reference to particular communities or classes of Deaf people, leaving us to assume that most descriptions of Deaf culture and ASL in the United States are based on studies of white, middle class Americans of indeterminate local community. It is also clear that inquiry in general, including inquiry into how best to educate Deaf people, has not focused very well on issues of ethnicity among American Deaf people. (p. 10)

Because the d/Deaf experience has been socially constructed and imagined as White, a “form of apartheid within the Deaf community itself” (Cohen, 1993, p. 46) has been created. In this literature review, I attempt to paint a picture of what is known and understood about Black d/Deaf college students by reviewing scholarship from a variety of perspectives. First, I start with historical snapshots of events that have specifically impacted the Black d/Deaf community and its connection to education today. Second, the Black d/Deaf community has its own culture, but there is overlap between and within the Black community and d/Deaf community (Aramburo, 2005). Thus, in the second and third sections of this literature review, I address Black students in higher education and d/Deaf students within higher education, respectively, and examine what is known about their college experiences, what are and how do racial and audist microaggressions impact them, and what helps these students to resist and persist to graduation. Lastly, I come full circle and close with what is known about Black d/Deaf students with some focus on K-12 education.

### **Historical Context of the Black d/Deaf Community**

Being different means being absent. WE have to elbow our way in to say, “Yes, I am here!”

(Stuart & Gilchrist, 2005, p. 64)

Carolyn McCaskill, was asked, “What is it like to be Black and Deaf?” She answered,

“Lucky.”

(Hairston & Smith, 1983, p. 33)

Black d/Deaf people make up approximately 8% (National Technical Institute for the Deaf, 2011) of the greater d/Deaf community, and they have a rich history of challenges and successes. Although they are members of the Black and d/Deaf communities, sharing many of the same discriminatory obstacles (Aramburo, 2005), they are a blend of both of these communities and do not necessarily completely fit into either. The Black d/Deaf community had to fight hard to have a presence in both these worlds as well as the dominant worlds (White and hearing), even elbowing their way into the educational system, social organizations, the job market, and more (Stuart & Gilchrist, 2005). Access to education, language, d/Deaf culture, Deaf teachers, and more has been an ongoing debate and struggle for Black and White d/Deaf people. Hairston and Smith (1983) stated,

Training of a congenitally deaf child is the supreme challenge to teaching skills.

When such a child enters school, he is usually devoid of any concept of language. He frequently does not know his own name...His only method of communication is by means of grunts, noises, cries, and simple gestures...the deaf child begins his school career at a great disadvantage. (p. 17)

This academic disadvantage looks different for a Black d/Deaf child who also in the early days of d/Deaf education started school at an underfunded and under-resourced all

Black d/Deaf school (Hairston & Smith, 1983). Most d/Deaf history speaks very little about Black d/Deaf people; however, the first Black d/Deaf history book, *The Hidden Treasure of Black ASL: Its History and Structures*, was printed in 2011. It focuses mostly on the differences in Black sign dialectic and the sociohistorical events that made it possible for variation to occur (McCaskill, Lucas, Bayley, & Hill, 2011). The Black d/Deaf community's historical past of trials and tribulations, particularly related to education, are not without resistance, perseverance, opportunity, and feelings of luck, joy, and cultural fulfillment (Hairston & Smith, 1983).

I used historical snapshots to capture moments in time that I believe have impacted Black d/Deaf education today. This historical component is important for several reasons. First, this study is rooted in Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Deaf Theory (Deaf Crit) lenses; thus, it takes into consideration and values the importance of historical context and the impact of legislation and laws. It also illuminates the ways in which racism and audism are epidemic, which are key tenants to CRT and Deaf Crit. Second, the Black Civil Rights Movement deeply impacted the Deaf Rights Movement (Rittenhouse, Johnson, Overton, Freeman, & Jaussi, 1991), and it is important to understand the ways in which they are intertwined as their meeting points are where the stories of Black d/Deaf people lie. Third, to understand the current lived experience of Black d/Deaf students, it is important to consider the historical happenings in which the present is based. I used several pictures within this section to continue the resistance against invisibility as Black d/Deaf people have always been around and are still here as indicated in the beginning epigraph, "Yes, I am here" (Stuart & Gilchrist, 2005, p. 64)! In addition, using pictures is in line with Deaf epistemology as a visual way of experiencing the world is one Deaf way of knowing; thus, the pictures included

give insight and add depth to the literature review. The historical snapshots are broken into three sections: the beginning of Black d/Deaf education, curriculum and instruction of Black d/Deaf children, and postsecondary education for Black d/Deaf people.

### **The Beginning of Black d/Deaf Education**

The first snapshots take readers back to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and introduce over a century of influential events in Black d/Deaf education.

**1817 American School for the Deaf, White d/Deaf school, opened in Hartford, CT.** Co-founded by Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, Laurent Clerc, and Mason Cogswell, the school was first called Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb persons and was only open to White d/Deaf children (Gannon, 1981). Getting access to education was a major challenge for Black d/Deaf children. Education has primarily been controlled by the state, and each state managed Black d/Deaf education differently.

McCaskill, Lucas, Bayley, and Hill (2011) stated, “The average number of years between the establishment of the white [sic] school and the establishment of the black [sic] school (or department) was 33” (p. 19). However, some states took much longer, such as Kentucky (61 years), Virginia (70 years), and Louisiana (86 years), which means several generations of Black d/Deaf people went without a formal education (McCaskill et al., 2011).

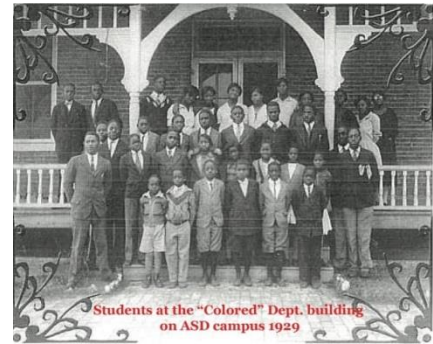
**1857 Kendall School for the Deaf in Washington, D.C. was the first d/Deaf school that unofficially accepted Black d/Deaf children.** In 1898, Kendall had 14 Black students (Gallaudet, 1983; Jowers-Barber, 2008). From the beginning, Black and White children were integrated in the classroom, but the sleeping and eating facilities were segregated (Jowers-Barber, 2008). Edward Miner Gallaudet, the principal and son of

Thomas Gallaudet, cared less about the race of the children being educated and more about providing education to all d/Deaf children. For example:

Gallaudet continued to receive letters in the late 1800s regarding orphaned Black students found abandoned in alleys, sponsored by church groups and other social agencies. He continued to respond positively to these requests for assistance for poor, Black deaf youth in need of training and accepted all who were sent. (Jowers-Barber, 2008, p. 114)

**1864 Columbia Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind was granted a charter by the U.S. Congress.** The Kendall School for the Deaf formally split, creating an early education and a postsecondary experience for d/Deaf students. The college would eventually be named Gallaudet University (Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center, n.d.). Currently, Gallaudet University, Model Secondary School for the Deaf founded in 1970 to focus on middle school children, and Kendall Demonstration School for the Deaf, now a hub for research and instruction of K-5 d/Deaf children, all reside in close proximity on the land given by Amos Kendall in the late 1800s (Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center, n.d.). Gallaudet did not successfully enroll their first Black student until 1883.

**1868 North Carolina was the first state to open a “Colored Department” to facilitate the education of Black d/Deaf children.** North Carolina was the first state to open a school for Black d/Deaf students; it started in 1869 with 26 children (Gannon, 1981). Other states, such as South



*Figure 1.* Black d/Deaf students standing in front of the Arkansas School for the Deaf Colored department building in 1929. Photograph Courtesy of The Black ASL project. Reprinted with permission.

Carolina and Georgia, followed suit in 1876 and 1882, respectively. Arkansas's school for Black d/Deaf children opened in 1929 and the picture to the right (Figure 1) is the first class standing in front of the Arkansas school for the Deaf Colored department. These were the first intentional steps in providing a formal education to Black d/Deaf children in many states.

**1887 William Holland, an ex-slave, established the Institute for Deaf, Dumb, and Blind Colored Youth in Austin, Texas.**



*Figure 2.* The Deaf, Dumb and Blind Institute for Colored Youth in Austin, Texas. The new dormitory and school building built in 1888. Photograph courtesy of the Museum of the American Printing House for the Blind, Inc. Reprinted with permission.

sign language were formed (Stuart & Gilchrist, 2005).

**1896 Plessy v. Ferguson “Separate but Equal.”** This monumental case impacted the Black community widely from education to transportation to everyday life (Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896). Separate but equal mostly meant separate as many Black schools were underfunded and under-resourced.

**Blind Colored Youth in Austin, Texas.**

Amanda Johnson and Julius Carrett were the first Black d/Deaf teachers (Gannon, 1981).

They graduated from the North Carolina Institute for Colored Deaf and Dumb (Gannon, 1981) and taught at the Institute for Deaf,

Dumb, and Blind Colored Youth in Austin (Figure 2). It was during these times, in the

segregated Deaf schools, that Black d/Deaf

history, culture, tradition, and a Black dialect of

**1905 Segregation-Maryland School for Colored Blind and Deaf-Mutes in Baltimore.** This school was founded in 1872 by Frederick Douglas Morrison originally as a school for Black children who were blind. Given the complaints by White parents at Kendall School for the Deaf, the Plessy v. Ferguson case, and the poor treatment of Black children by White children (Gallaudet, 1983; Jowers-Barber, 2008), Edward Gallaudet worked with



*Figure 3.* 1872 photo of the Baltimore, Maryland Institution for the Colored Blind and Deaf-Mutes. Photograph courtesy of the Museum for American Printing House for the Blind Reprinted with permission.

Senator Francis Cockrell to authorize the Douglas's school to also house Black d/Deaf children. The federal government increased the school's budget by \$5,000, and all Black children were transferred from Kendall School for the Deaf to the Maryland School for the Colored Blind and Deaf-Mute, (Figure 3) in 1905 (Gallaudet, 1983). This was just one of several schools that established "separate but equal" residential schools (Gannon, 1981).

**1952 Miller v. The Board of Education of the District of Columbia.** Mrs. Louise Miller, the mother of four Deaf children and a resident of D.C., attempted to get her son, Kenneth, into Kendall School for the Deaf (Miller v The Board of Education, 1952). This was one of the most significant cases in Black d/Deaf education as it pushed against the separate but equal law specifically for the education of Black d/Deaf people. Ultimately, Mrs. Miller was asking that Kenneth be allowed to attend Kendall School for the Deaf because the Maryland School for the Colored Blind and Deaf-Mute was run down and refused to admit him because of space issues (Jowers-Barber, 2008). After being denied her initial request, she asked the District of Columbia to pay to send Kenneth to Pennsylvania



School for the Deaf. This school was providing a higher quality of education, and there were other states paying to send Black d/Deaf children to nearby states to attend school (McCaskill et al., 2011). This request was also denied, and the Miller family decided to sue the District of Columbia stating that Black d/Deaf children should not have to attend schools in the district in which they reside (Jowers-Barber, 2008).

In 1952, a federal district court agreed with Miller's claim, stating "Black deaf children have the right to attend the Kendall school, although they must remain in segregated classes" (McCaskill et al., 2011, p. 18). In the same year, a cohort of 16 Black children and four Black teachers transferred to the Kendall School for the Deaf. The pictures (Figure 4)

shown to the right are children (below) standing in front of their new Black school building that was built in 1953 and three members (above) of the 1952 class at the 50-year anniversary (Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center, n.d.). There were other cases such as 1938 Missouri ex rel. Gaines v.

Canada (Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada, 1938) that pushed for Blacks to receive a fair and equal education. These cases impacted hearing and d/Deaf Black people and set precedence for the main case: Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka.

**1954 Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka – Separate but equal for Black and White students is unconstitutional.** Laws do not change hearts, minds, or culture;



*Figure 4.* (Above) Three members of the 1952 class of Black d/Deaf students at Kendall School: Irene E. Scarlett (left), Robert Milburn, and Deborah Moton Williams reunite at the 50-year tribute. (Below) The Class of 1952 in front of its new school, which opened the following year. Photograph courtesy of Gallaudet University Archives. Reprinted with permission.

thus, after the verdict of *Brown v. Board of Education*, many White schools took several years to desegregate (*Brown v. Board Education*, 1954). The average number of years among most of the Southern states from the opening of Black d/Deaf schools to the desegregation of their White d/Deaf school was 10.2 years with Louisiana taking the longest to desegregate with 24 years (McCaskill et al., 2011). It took cases such as the 1968 *Christine Archie v. Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind* (AIDB; Hanner & Myers, 2008) to force many schools to desegregate. In this case, the courts criticized AIDB (the all-White school) for adopting the freedom of choice policy in which parents could decide if they wanted their children to attend AIDB or the Black School for the Deaf and Blind saying this policy was an excuse to avoid desegregation (Hanner & Myers, 2008).



*Figure 5.* Group of young girls standing outside their new school, Madison School for the Deaf in Arkansas, after being bussed over from their all Black school. Photograph courtesy of History Through Deaf Eyes Project. Reprinted with permission.

The integration of Black and White d/Deaf people was culturally challenging for everyone. The Black d/Deaf schools had their own culture and sign language. Even though their educational facilities were often under-resourced and worn out, they were still supportive Black spaces. Lynda Carter, the young girl with pigtails in the second row of the picture (Figure 5), was a student at a segregated Black d/Deaf school. She shared, “When we were moved from the Black school on Madison Street to the Arkansas School campus, the white house mother didn't know how to take care of Black hair, [and] she made us shampoo every day” (Carter, n.d., para. 1)!

### **Curriculum and Instruction of Black d/Deaf Children**

The second snapshot explores 50 years of changes in curriculum and instruction for Black d/Deaf children.

**1860 Oralism v. Manual Education-The great educational debate and divide.** Most

d/Deaf schools, Black and White, only used the manual method (this is, sign language) to teach d/Deaf children. From the 1860s to the 1960s there was a great push to remove sign language from the classroom in order to focus on lip-reading, speech training, and making d/Deaf

people more “normal” (Gannon, 1981). This controversy brought out some of the greatest examples of audism or discrimination against all d/Deaf people. d/Deaf teachers were no longer hired at schools. d/Deaf children faced physical punishment for using sign language, including having their hands tied behind their backs or having them wrapped against a ruler. Students unable to learn through the oral method were labeled “oral failures” and sent to residential schools where they were exposed to the more flexible combined system [manual and oral]” (Gannon, 1981, p. 361). The picture to the right (Figure 6) is a Black oral classroom at Kendall School of the Deaf in 1954, where the teacher is speaking into a microphone to amplify her voice for each student with a headset. These types of classrooms became more common, particularly because sign language was outlawed in most schools except Ohio School for the Deaf and Gallaudet College (Gannon, 1981).

There were mixed feelings in the d/Deaf community regarding the debate over education methods. Some d/Deaf thought the oral method would be an addition to d/Deaf



*Figure 6.* The Black classroom in 1954 at Kendall School for the Deaf receiving oral training. Photograph courtesy of History Through Deaf Eyes Project. Reprinted with permission.

education—but never at the expense of losing sign language—while others strongly objected to this assault on their culture and language. The d/Deaf community had varied thoughts on oral education and spoke out:

“In attempting to abolish signs as used as aids in educating the deaf, the unfortunate children are not only being deprived of their birthright, but a means of education is being taken from them.” – A.R. Spear (as cited in Gannon, 1981, p. 363)

“I know the value of speech. I can speak well and read lips well. But I plead for broadness and against narrowness. I plead for the child rather than for the method itself.” – G.M. Teegarden (as cited in Gannon, 1981, p. 363)

**1876 Alexander Graham Bell, invented the telephone.** After inventing the telephone, Bell received the Volta Prize, using the funds he received to create an educational center to house information about d/Deaf people (Gannon, 1981). Bell was a fluent sign language user who was raised by his deaf mother, but he only believed in the oral education method for d/Deaf people (Gannon, 1981). He played a major role in banning sign language in schools in 1880 and was adamantly against intermarriage of d/Deaf people as well as all other socializing among d/Deaf people (i.e., social gatherings, religious worship, Deaf newspaper, and Deaf teachers).

He wrote,

Those who believe as I do, that the production of a defective race of human beings would be a great calamity to the world, will examine carefully the causes that lead to the intermarriages of the deaf



*Figure 7. 1947 May Dance hosted by the Black d/Deaf Washington D.C. and Philadelphia Silent Club. Photograph courtesy of Gallaudet University Archives. Reprinted with permission.*

[sic] with the object of applying a remedy. (Gannon, 1981, p. 75)

Figure 7 is a picture of the May Dance held jointly by the Black d/Deaf Washington D.C. and Philadelphia Silent Club in 1947. These events and organizations served as major social hubs and places of cultural exchange and were exactly what Bell and many others were against.

Regardless, oral education was not widely extended to most Black d/Deaf children. It was considered a superior method of education; thus, many Black-only schools did not have access. In Baynton's (1996) book *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Sign Language*, he noted:

Because of the continued use of sign language in the classroom [an] ironic result [was that because of] discrimination southern deaf black Americans, in spite of the chronic underfunding of their schools, received a better education than most white students.

(p.180)

**1902 Virginia amends constitution to mandate school segregation.** Similar to



*Figure 8.* Black d/Deaf children's classroom at Kentucky School for the Deaf. Photograph courtesy of History Through Deaf Eyes Project. Reprinted with permission.

Virginia, several states, including Oklahoma, Texas, Kentucky (Figure 8), and Missouri required that Black and White students be educated in separate spaces (Doctor, 1948; Shmoop University, Inc., 2013), meaning Black teachers were heavily recruited from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) to teach d/Deaf children.

Many Black d/Deaf schools were located near HBCUs. For example, West Virginia School for the Colored Deaf was near West Virginia State College, Mississippi School for the Negro

Deaf was near Jackson State University, and Alabama School for the Negro Deaf and Blind was near Talladega College (Hairston & Smith, 1983; McCaskill et al., 2011).

Unfortunately, many Black teachers had little training or access to training on how to educate d/Deaf children. In 1938, at West Virginia State Collegiate Institute, a teacher training program for Black teachers was established to focus on d/Deaf education. Later, in 1942, the program was moved to Hampton Institute, a Black vocational school (Doctor, 1948). Although training courses started and Black teachers were desired, many Black d/Deaf schools often hired White teachers (Doctor, 1948). It is unclear if White teachers, such as individuals in Figure 9, were hired because Black teachers were not available or if it reflected the continuous racial discrimination within hiring practices of the time (Redding, 1997).



*Figure 9.* White Faculty from the Institute for Deaf, Dumb and Blind Colored Youth in Texas. Photograph courtesy of the Black ASL Project. Reprinted with permission.

### **Postsecondary Education for Black d/Deaf People**

The previous snapshots highlighted critical events that impacted the development of Black d/Deaf education and debates regarding curriculum and instructional methods. The third snapshot captures moments that impacted postsecondary education for Black d/Deaf people.

**Vocational education.** d/Deaf education in general had its challenges, and the Black d/Deaf schools were not all deficient or effective. Some Black d/Deaf children were able to get access to sign language, unlike many of their White peers, while some Black schools never graduated students as that was a privilege held for White students who were attending

dual school systems or one in which oral and manual methods were used (Hairston & Smith, 1983; McCaskill et al., 2011). This practice is evident by this statement,

Many Blacks have attended schools for the deaf [sic] for 13 years or more, only to graduate with a second to fourth grade achievement level or less. This was especially true of the previously segregated schools in the South; however, the Northern schools have not done much better. (Hairston & Smith, 1983, p. 11)



*Figure 10.* A Black d/Deaf student in her vocational beauty school class. Photograph courtesy of The Black ASL Project. Reprinted with permission.

Vocational education or “training programs geared toward preparing students for future trades in manual labor” were common for the Black and d/Deaf community (Figure 10) (Leakey, 1993, p.

75). Since the 1800s, d/Deaf residential schools stressed trade skills such as pressing, tailoring,

typing, and home economics. Many schools

required students to learn two trades (Hairston &

Smith, 1983; Leakey, 1993). In many ways, these

training programs gave Black d/Deaf people the opportunity to become self-sufficient,

developing pride in themselves and establishing strong work ethics. However, they also

were rooted in social stigma as these positions “did not train deaf [sic] Americans and

African Americans to participate in the country’s larger political, social, and economic

spheres. Instead, [they] drew well-defined occupational parameters for deaf persons and

African Americans that framed their place in society” (Leakey, 1993, p. 76). This practice

also decreased the number of Black d/Deaf people who attempted to enter college (McCaskill et al., 2011).

**Higher education.** In 1983, Hairston and Smith wrote *Black and Deaf in America: Are We that Different*, in which they shared a variety of insights as scholars and members of the Black d/Deaf community on why they believed college-ready Black d/Deaf people had not attended college:

Gallaudet College did not admit Blacks; they were unaware of the advantages of college education beyond becoming a teacher of the deaf; they would rather work in a factory, and “make more money”; or they were told that they were not capable of doing college work. (p. 80)

Between the opening of Gallaudet in 1864 and 1950, only two Black students were admitted (Ennals Adams Jr. was one of the first in 1883) but neither of them finished because of racial harassment (Stuart & Gilchrist, 2005). Although several Black students wanted to further their education, their only option was to attend a Black majority hearing college, and this was not a possibility for most. Take, for example, the experiences of Mary Herring Wright and William King:

“Mary Herring Wright, a former student of the North Carolina school for the colored deaf [sic] and blind recounts she heard about a college for the deaf [sic] in Washington but it turned out to only be for whites [sic]” (McCaskill et al., 2011, p. 21).

“William ‘Bill’ King, a graduate of Indiana school for the deaf in Indianapolis, faced a similar predicament. When he was informed that he [could not] attend [Gallaudet University] because of the color of his skin, he was devastated” (McCaskill et al., 2011, p. 21).



**1954 Andrew Foster first Black Deaf man to graduate from Gallaudet University** (Camp, 2011). In 17 different countries within Africa, Foster (Figure 11) founded 31 Deaf schools before his untimely death in 1987 (Anderson & Miller, 2004/2005). Foster was not the only successful Black person at Gallaudet. Ida Wynette Gray Hampton was the first Black woman to graduate in 1957, and Dr. N. Judge King was the first Black faculty hired in 1966 (Camp, 2011).



*Figure 11. Andrew Foster. Photograph courtesy of Gallaudet University Archives. Reprinted with permission.*

### **1960s Movements, Change, and Revolution**

The 1960s were a time of great resistance within the Black and d/Deaf community. The Civil Rights Movement led the way to social changes and equality for many marginalized groups, including d/Deaf Americans (Rittenhouse et al., 1991). It is unclear how much of a role Black d/Deaf Americans played in demonstrations, but they benefited greatly from the strides made by the Black community (Hairston & Smith, 1983). During this time, the federal government founded the National Technical Institute for the Deaf in Rochester, New York and many d/Deaf resource centers and programs started at colleges around the country (Gannon, 1981). These developments provided more educational opportunities for d/Deaf people outside of Gallaudet. This was also a time of technology, innovation, and new opportunities including the invention of the teletypewriter, which allowed d/Deaf people to use the phone, thus, reduced the likelihood of d/Deaf persons being turned down for jobs because they could not use a phone. Also, the National Registry of Professional Interpreters and Translators for the Deaf (NRPITD) was formed (Gannon, 1981). This was the turning point for interpreters. Interpreter services transitioned from

volunteer assistance to a full profession, ultimately leading to more access and better trained interpreters for d/Deaf people.

### **1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act**

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was important for d/Deaf education as it required that every d/Deaf child had Individual Educational Plans; it pushed for mainstreaming, or hearing and d/Deaf mixed classes; it required parents be involved and consent to educational interventions; and it made stronger pushes for equal employment opportunities (Hairston & Smith, 1983). Following EAHCA, a variety of legislation including the 1990 American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the 1997 Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has continued to enhance individuals with [dis]abilities' lives, including d/Deaf people's rights, as it relates to education, appropriate accommodations, job placement, and fair and equitable treatment within the society. In addition, vocational rehabilitation (VR) services and centers opened up across the country, aiding d/Deaf people in finding work and accessing higher education. In some cases, because of the funding provided by VR, Black d/Deaf students were the first and the only people in their families to be able to attend college (Hairston & Smith, 1983).

### **1980s Deaf Employment**

The implementations of laws and legislation were not the only ways in which d/Deaf people were fighting for their rights. Specialty organizations were beginning to form, such as the National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA) founded in 1982. This organization was founded to cultivate Black d/Deaf leaders, focus on issues pertinent to Black d/Deaf people, and allow Black d/Deaf people to have a collective voice: "The Mission of the National Black Deaf Advocates is to promote the leadership development, economic and educational

opportunities, social equality, and to safeguard the general health and welfare of Black deaf and hard of hearing people” (National Black Deaf Advocates, 2013, para. 2).

With over thirty chapters across the country, NBDA holds a Miss Black Deaf America pageant each year. Chena Laldee, crowned in 2013, is their most recent recipient and pictured to the right (Figure 12). This pageant focuses on young women, encouraging academic excellence and leadership skills. Each winner receives scholarship funds toward her education (National Black Deaf Advocates, 2013).



*Figure 12.* Chenae Laldee, NBDA Miss Black Deaf America 2013. Photograph courtesy of Andrew Robertson and National Black Deaf Advocates. Reprinted with permission.

### **So What?**

So, the larger questions of “So What?” and “What does this mean?” still need to be answered. History is known to repeat itself and greatly impacts our current reality and future possibilities. Although American Sign Language is no longer outlawed, there is still a debate over oral and manual d/Deaf education. American Sign Language is being taught in high schools and colleges across the county, but many hearing parents, doctors, and educators still look to the medical model or the need to fix d/Deaf children first, thus, do not encourage sign language or the exploration of d/Deaf culture.

In some ways, hearing children have more access to sign language than d/Deaf children. The challenge of Black d/Deaf students having mostly White teachers in their classrooms is still true today. In a survey conducted by Andrews and Jordan (1993) of 6,043 professionals in 349 Deaf education programs, 10.4% of the professionals were People of

Color and about 90% were White. Similar to the larger Black and d/Deaf community, Black d/Deaf children have struggled to find role models and mentors who look like them in the classroom and in the educational system more broadly (Ila & Fischer, 2005). However, higher education is starting to improve with more d/Deaf administrators and faculty as well as People of Color rising in the ranks of leadership (Simms, Rusher, Andrews, & Coryell, 2008).

My study is a continuation of the Black d/Deaf community's stories. There is a past of racism and audism, particularly within the Black d/Deaf educational system, so my study begins to answer the questions: *What is happening now with Black d/Deaf students in higher education?* and *How might issues of racism and audism impact their success in college today?* Black d/Deaf people have had both similar and very different educational experiences compared to the Black and Deaf communities. They have been affected by racial and audist discrimination at the hands of their own communities (Black and d/Deaf) as well as outside of their communities (White and hearing). However, in some ways, their current reality within higher education can be better understood as we start to pull apart what is happening for Black students and d/Deaf students in higher education (McCaskill et al., 2011). The next section focuses on Black students and persistence as well as the impact of racial microaggressions on this student population.

### **Black Students in Higher Education**

**12<sup>th</sup> grade:** *Whatever you do, "Don't join too many Black student organizations; it will make you less marketable when you're done, but make sure you join the "right sorority!" [Words from my Black high school mentor] I joined the right one and doors started to open.*

**1<sup>st</sup> year in college:** *The June before school started, I got my roommate's information. We talked regularly, but it wasn't until August that we realized we're both Black. So excited! Two of the four Black women in the Honors residential hall. My dorm room was always a safe place.*

**2<sup>nd</sup> year in college:** *Took Portuguese 105 spring quarter. I didn't understand it like everyone else. I got an F on a test. I got a tutor. We took another test. I watched two White girls share notes and cheat during the exam. I got a B. They got an A. My grades improved. I was accused of cheating.*

**3<sup>rd</sup> year in college:** *Went to Brazil to complete my honors thesis on Brazilian women and HIV/AIDS. The most amazing experience until I was called the N word by the host History professor in the museum during class. It didn't feel so amazing after that.*

**4<sup>th</sup> year in college:** *I took my first Black Women's Studies class. This was the hardest, most life changing, and important class of my college career. The first time I saw myself in front of the class, in books I read, in the chairs next to me, and the first time I really saw me!*

**Last semester in college:** *I just left my honors thesis review and defense. More edits, I'm not quite there yet, but I'm devastated because graduation is in a week. In tears, I am met in the hallway by my faculty advisor, Dr. Brun, who said, "You are almost there. You'll get this." Angry and overwhelmed, I couldn't fully take his words in. Before I walked away he said, "One day you're going to get a PhD. I don't care what discipline, you just need to get one!" These were the first of many seeds planted to help me get to where I am today.*

**Graduate day:** *My whole family came out. I was the first in my immediate family to graduate and the second grandkid to finish college. My grandfather couldn't afford to attend*

*the Black colleges in his day. I was walking for me, for him, for my family, for my ancestors, for each Black person who desired a college education, but didn't make it.*

Within my academic journey, these are a few moments when I came face-to-face with my racial identity within an educational setting, felt the positive impact of a faculty member, withstood racial microaggressions of faculty and staff, found safe Black counterspaces, and felt uplifted by family support. Black students have a variety of diverse experiences in college today. Some of those experiences are similar to mine, while others are vastly different as there is no one Black student experience. For example, some Black students are the only one in their classes, while others are sitting in classes with all Black students. They are coming from rural and urban communities. They feel invisible (Solórzano et al., 2000) and hypervisible, and many are navigating White spaces because they are bicultural or able to “understand the rules of communication and interaction... [thus can] switch communication patterns and styles to apply rules and ways of communicating that are accepted” (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007, p. 515) by Blacks and Whites proficiently. Black students are being labeled everything from *the token* to *at risk* to *high achieving* to *first generation* to *underrepresented*. The one element that remains the same regardless of the institution is that race and race relations have been and continues to be—from admissions to graduation—a significant, debatable, challenging, and relevant topic for discussion.

As some ideology and behaviors have changed, much has stayed the same, particularly related to Black students. Racial stereotypes are alive and well, and they are influencing the type of experiences even the most academically prepared students are having in and out of the classroom (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). This study looks at two forms of oppression experienced by Black d/Deaf alumni—racism and audism—and how Black

d/Deaf alumni were able to resist oppression and persist to graduation. Because there is no literature or research that specifically investigates this topic with Black d/Deaf students, in this section, I focus on what is known about hearing Black students. I address Black hearing students' persistence in college, as well as what racial microaggressions are, how hearing Black students experience them, and how they resist.

### **Black Student Persistence**

As of 2011, approximately 39,031,000 or 19% of the U.S. population was Black (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). According to the American Community Survey, as of 2004, one in every six Black Americans have earned a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2007), and as of 2012, 8% of all bachelor's degrees held by those 25 and older were held by Black people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). The masternarrative is Black college students do not graduate from college. Although the numbers are not high, the counternarrative is that Blacks have made considerable strides in educational attainment, and from a strength-based perspective, some Black students are successful and do persist to graduation (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). The question is: *How do we continue to increase the number of Black student graduates?*

There is no one formula for Black student success. Bonner (2010) put forth five major themes informed by current research on what impacts Black students' academic success and persistence in higher education. These themes include (a) institutional climate and environment, (b) academic and social integration, (c) identity development, self-esteem, and self-concept, (d) mentoring and role modeling, and (e) family relationships and support (Bonner, 2010). Other scholars have investigated the impact of social capital on Black students' success specifically with men (Harper, 2008), the role of Black student

organizations (Guiffrida, 2004a), and the harmful effects of excessive consumerism and materialism on Black student success (Wood & Essien-Wood, 2012). The overarching notion is that Black college students must navigate more than academic challenges to succeed in college (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Based on the literature, I have created five overlapping categories that highlight some of the factors influencing Black students' ability to persist to graduation: (a) home support systems, (b) campus factors, (c) faculty-student relationships, (d) social and academic integration, and (e) multiple intersecting identities. Although I will talk about each area as a separate entity, they are more like finger prints as each Black student has experiences, but they do not all look or feel the same. Some Black students have all the right tools and encounters to persist and graduate, and others do not.

**Home support systems.** Black students enter college with and without the full support of their families and larger community; however, this support is vital to Black student persistence because it meets needs such as safety, emotional security, and guidance (White & Cones, 1999). There is a debate on how involved families should be. Some scholars believe students must break away from family and friends in order to become completely integrated into their academic lives (Tinto, 1993) while others have challenged this assumption saying it has not taken into consideration the different needs of racially/ethnically minoritized students (Tierney, 1992). Barnett's (2004) study supported the importance of family involvement in Black college students' lives. She explored whether family involvement among Black college students promoted social and intellectual competence, helped with adjustment, and aided in lowering student stress. Interviewing 50 Black undergraduate students who attended an academically selective, urban and Predominantly White Institution (PWI), Barnett (2004) found that:



Many parents prepared their children for college along the way by giving advice ranging from developing study skills and habits, choosing selective schools and programs for their children, teaching them to set priorities and be responsible, managing race relations, and generally preparing them for the future. (p. 62)

Family support and encouragement happened over time and while students were growing up through setting high expectations and valuing education. In this same spirit, Bonner (2010) affirmed that family involvement in college should be encouraged and nurtured. Family involvement should not just occur in the beginning during orientation or the end at graduation but throughout Black students' college experience and on into their transition into graduate school or future career.

The majority or 76% of the students in Barnett's (2004) study said their parents helped them to persist to graduation, and 40% said their friends were major contributors to their success. Also, Guiffrida and Douthit's (2010) qualitative study on Black college students' experiences at PWIs stated:

Family of high achievers often encourage students to view their academic success at college as their most important obligation to their family and to the Black community...[and] for Black students to succeed at PWIs, it is important for them to strengthen relationships with family members. (p. 313)

However, Guiffrida and Douthit (2010) went on to say they believed families should help students "make healthy separation when transitioning to college" (p. 313), and family and friends from home have the potential to be both assets and liabilities depending on their educational values. Guiffrida (2004b) conducted another study that focused on the impact of friends on Black college students' success. With a mixed group of high achieving (average

GPA of 3.6) and underachieving (average GPA of 2.1) Black students, the influence of home friendships were significant. If those closest to the students expressed fear or disapproval of their adaptations to college, then these relationships negatively impacted students' ability to focus at school, achieve academically, and connect to their university (Guiffrida, 2004b). If students' friends attended college, particularly at other PWIs, then the friends' support, encouragement, and relatability were assets to the Black college students' success (Guiffrida, 2004b; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010).

Leaving the familiarity of home and transitioning to college life can be complicated, particularly as students attempt to navigate home relationships. Factors such as socioeconomic status and whether their parents or other family members went to college can influence the ways in which some Black students must negotiate their college experiences (Barnett, 2004). However, the most important factors in helping Black students persist are that Black families and home support systems offer Black college students emotional support and encouragement (Kuh & Love, 2004). Additionally, it is important that Black families and friends maintain an open relationship, allow the student to grow through college experiences, listen, and be understanding (Barnett, 2004), and—in the best way they know how—stand as their students' biggest cheerleaders.

**Campus factors.** Move-in day, the first day of classes, homecoming, first sporting events, a meal in campus dining, attending the first week of community programs, and meeting faculty for the first time are all experiences most students have on campuses across the country at the beginning of a school year. These rituals or common annual events are embedded within an institution's culture. Museus (2008) stated that a “culture is both something that an educational institution *has*, such as core values and rich history, and

something that an institution *does* that affects both institutional and individual outcomes” (p. 569). A campus’s ability to provide a supportive campus culture and environment plays a pivotal role in the achievement, persistence, and overall health of Black college students (Cureton, 2003; Palmer & Young, 2011). Bonner (2010) stated, “While every institution strives to put its best foot forward via marketing and recruitment efforts, what invariably happens is that they falsely represent the actual climate for diversity at their respective schools” (p. 74). Such misrepresentation is particularly true at PWIs, and creating a culturally supportive and responsive campus environment is what has made Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) successful in graduating a higher number of Black students—particularly Black men (Palmer & Young, 2011). Cureton’s (2003) comparative study between Black and White students at a PWI examined if Black students had “unique, racially exclusive social situational circumstances that could potentially affect academic performance” (p. 295). After surveying 126 Black students and 115 White students, Cureton (2003) discovered that when Black students held positive feelings about their institution, the likelihood that they would academically perform better increased; and that negative encounters, such as with campus police, were strong indicators of a campus’ climate. More specifically, Cureton (2003) stated, “Any time race enters as a possible variable for unfair treatment, if quick resolution does not occur, then the academic progress of the student involved may become stagnant” (p. 307). Overall, a supportive campus culture, climate, and environment are important contributors to Black students’ persistence and achievement (Palmer & Young, 2011).

**Faculty-student relationships.** Faculty mentorship is critical to Black college students’ ability to persist (Bonner, 2010; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Palmer and Young’s

(2011) research on underprepared Black male students attending HBCUs revealed that, “Professors and administrators were accessible and displayed a willingness to form supportive relationships with students. These relationships encouraged persistence because students realized that professors and administrators cared about them and their success” (p. 153). Bonner (2010) noted that “[Black] students need to see themselves reflected in physical, organizational, and perceptual spaces on campus” (p. 75), and HBCUs have been able to achieve this goal in many ways through their faculty, staff, alumni, and overall mission.

It is through educational and purposeful activities such as research with faculty mentors that students learn how to navigate higher education. In Barnett’s (2004) study, 16% of the participants said their mentors played a significant role in helping them graduate. There is a continuous struggle with recruiting and retaining Black faculty on campuses across the country, and although the racial and cultural identity of the faculty mentor is not the most important factor, Black students’ ability to connect with White faculty can be challenging, particularly if the faculty is viewed as culturally insensitive (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Black faculty mentors have been reported as “enforcing higher academic standards...[holding Black students] accountable...[and pushing] them to reach new limits in their academic work” (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010, p. 313). Although all Black students’ needs are not the same, most have agreed that faculty who are student-centered or “dedicate sufficient time to attending to each student’s unique academic, career, and personal issues” (Guiffrida, 2005, pp. 718-719) are the most helpful.

**Social and academic integration.** Faculty mentorship and the campus climate influence Black students becoming socially and academically integrated into the fabric of the

university, which can be complicated and multilayered (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003).

Tinto's (1993) integration model on the ways in which students acclimate to an institution focuses on the importance of academic and social integration. A student who is academically integrated is doing well in classes, believes classes are relevant to his or her future, and is mostly satisfied with his or her major. A student is socially integrated when he or she feels comfortable in the campus's social environment (socially and psychologically) and he or she feels a sense of belonging and connection to an affinity group(s), which provides the student with security and support (Tinto, 1993). Tinto's (1993) theory suggested that students who came from cultures that were incongruent with their campus culture needed to abandon their previous cultural understanding and assimilate by taking on the values, assumptions, and norms of their campus. This idea of complete immersion did not take into consideration the consequences it may have for marginalized and minoritized populations such as Black students (Tierney, 1999).

Scholars (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tierney, 1992) have challenged Tinto's (1993) theory, and Kuh and Love (2004), in particular, believed that "survey items developed to measure these constructs did not capture the complexities and subtleties of the interactions between students and institutions that affect persistence" (p. 197). They believed it was imperative to understand a student's culture of origin and the culture of the institution the student was attending before it was possible to determine if a student would be successful because students' college experiences are filtered through their cultural meaning-making system (Kuh & Love, 2004). Kuh and Love (2004) proposed cultural propositions about premature student departure stating that persistence was directly connected to the cultural distance between a student's culture(s) of origin (culture before attending college) and the

cultures of immersion (current campus culture). Importantly, minoritized students were more likely to persist if they connected with cultural enclaves or “a group or subgroup that has values, attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions that are congenial with one’s culture(s) of origin” (Kuh & Love, 2004, p. 205). Black cultural centers as well as Black student organizations have been identified as cultural enclaves providing Black students with a sense of mattering, a sense of belonging, a safe place, a home away from home as well as academic, social, and emotional support (Strayhorn, Terrell, Redmond, & Walton, 2010; Guiffrida, 2004a).

The idea that students need to feel a sense of belonging is essential (Tinto, 2012), and Kuh and Love (2004) would argue that for Students of Color a sense of belonging is connected to their culture. As related to this hypothesis, there have been a few studies that have looked at Black student involvement (Guiffrida, 2004a; Harper & Quayle, 2007; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001) and its impact on Black identity development, Black student leadership, and the pros and cons of helping Blacks succeed. Museus’s (2008) qualitative study conducted with 12 Black and 12 Asian students focused on the role of ethnic student organizations in fostering students’ adjustment to and membership in the cultures of their PWI. Students shared that they felt these organizations allowed them to connect with other ethnic peers who had common backgrounds (Museus, 2008). They felt empowered particularly as these groups were an outlet for pushing for cultural change on campus. Having these types of organizations was an indication that the campus accepted and supported them, further aiding in a positive campus environment (Museus, 2008). Results highlighted that ethnic student groups do aid Black students in feeling a sense of belonging and concluded that “ethnic organizations facilitated the cultural adjustment and membership of minority student participants by serving as sources of cultural familiarity, vehicles for

cultural expression and advocacy, and venues for cultural validation” (Museus, 2008, p. 576). There is research that suggests that high achieving students are more drawn to academic organizations and that over-involvement can negatively impact low achieving Black students (Guiffrida, 2004a). However, in general, “student involvement with campus groups that reflect personal, cultural, or service interests have a strong impact on helping students feel that they belong on the campus, are contributing to the campus culture, and have their interests reflected in the institutional structure” (Smith, 1997, p. 29), which leads to social and academic integration and persistence.

**Multiple intersecting identities.** Black students are not a homogenous group simply because they share the same racialized identity as this one identity does not take away from the fact that there are diverse subcommunities within the group (Steward, 2009; Williamson, 2007). Examining Black student persistence from a sociocultural perspective allows intersecting identities such as gender, class, sexual orientation, and ability to be taken into consideration as factors that impact Black college students’ persistence. Research has shown that Black women and men have different experiences in college related to student involvement (Harper & Quaye, 2007), dealing with sexual assault (Lindquist, et al., 2013), and graduation rates (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005), to just name a few. The intersections of race and class have a historical legacy, which manifests itself as a current burden for many Black Americans, particularly related to education (Berg, 2010). Guiffrida and Douthit (2010) found that “economic deprivation can cause stress and frustration or force [Black and White] students to get unskilled labor jobs, which detracts from time that should be devoted toward academic obligations” (p. 306).

Many college students engage in self-reflection regarding aspects of who they are throughout their entire college experience (Steward, 2008). This ripe season in their life can be an opportunity to explore identities they did not feel comfortable exploring before college. The intersection of race, gender, and sexual orientation can be seen in Strayhorn, Blakewood, and DeVita's (2010) study on Black gay and bisexual male students and Patton and Simmons's (2008) study on Black lesbian students. Most of the men said they desired to come out in college because it was viewed as a safe place to start over, but their decision to come out was not without challenges. Issues of not fitting in with the Black community, negotiating their spiritual life, navigating issues with depression, and the burden to teach heterosexual people about Black and gay life were just a few examples of the hurdles they had to overcome. The women went through a *coming in* process or exploring "their internal sense of self either in response to or in spite of how others felt about their lesbian identity" (p. 205). Patton and Simmons (2008) also found, similar to the men in Strayhorn, Blakewood, et al.'s (2010) study, that the women felt a sense of triple consciousness or an awareness of their race, gender, and sexual orientation, all sites of oppression in which they had to continuously negotiate. As related to persistence, Strayhorn, Blakewood, et al. (2010) stated, "Facing triple threats [race, gender and sexual orientation] places [students] at risk for failure in educational and social settings, especially in environments that are largely incongruent with or unaccepting of one or all three of their social identities" (p. 95).

Black students with [dis]abilities have a high school drop rate of 44.5% and a graduation rate of 36.5% (Boone & King-Berry, 2007). There is an ongoing debate on the labeling of Black students with [dis]abilities as some scholars would suggest that Blacks are underrepresented and others would suggest Blacks are overrepresented, particularly related to



learning [dis]abilities (McLeskey, Waldron, & Wornhoff, 1990). Boone and King-Berry (2007) spoke candidly regarding the challenges of Black students with [dis]abilities after the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1974 was signed stating:

[There is a] disproportionate identification of African American students in disability classifications, their overrepresentation in more restrictive educational environments and under-representation in less restrictive ones, and the adverse educational impacts and outcomes for African American students with disability that are the inevitable result of these disparities...[include] fewer opportunities to access post-secondary education. (pp. 342-343)

The awareness of the multiple identities of Black students helps to create a fuller picture of who Black students are and all lenses in which persistence could be examined and impacted. Because being d/Deaf has been socially constructed as a [dis]ability, the intersection of race and ability is where my study contributes to the literature as scholars continue to look at factors that impact Black student persistence and the subcommunities within the Black population. Harper (2008) said it best, “Most researchers have justifiably opted to call attention to the conditions that continually yield inequitable access...the pervasiveness and popularity of the deficit approach to studying African American students-focusing on why they fail” (p. 1032). I hope that my study challenges these notions by exploring the experiences of Black d/Deaf alumni and not only focusing on issues of inequity, but also how they overcame challenges in order to persist to graduation.

Home support systems, campus factors, faculty mentorship, academic and social integration, and multiple intersecting identities are several of the factors that contribute to Black student persistence. The ways in which these factors impact Black students must be

examined from a strength-based and cultural lens as the issue of persistence is not an individual, isolated, and psychological experience, but primarily a sociocultural phenomenon in which culture and the lived experiences of Black college students must be taken into consideration (Tierney 1992).

### **Racial Microaggressions**

Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) stated, “Understanding and analyzing the collegiate racial climate is an important part of examining college access, persistence, graduation, and transfer to and through graduate and professional school for African American students” (p. 62). Issues and experiences with racism, or the belief in racial inferiority and superiority, have become more covert over the years. Black students are experiencing more subtle verbal, nonverbal, and/ or visual insults that seem unconscious, pervasive, and hard to prove called microaggressions (Solórzano et al., 2000). Racial microaggressions are defined as “brief, common-place, and daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental slights and indignities directed towards Black Americans, often automatically and unintentionally” (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008, p. 329), and can be experienced on a micro, meso or macro level. Racial microaggressions affect all People of Color, occurring in the classrooms with faculty and peers, with campus police at social events, one-on-one in study groups, written into campus policies, displayed in art around campus, and felt in casual conversations. Many times racial microaggressions are based on a history of racial stereotypes taught by one’s family, friends, or the media (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007).

There are three forms of microaggressions: (a) microassaults, (b) microinsults, and (c) microinvalidations and nine subcategories (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, & Bucceri, 2007).

**Microassaults.** Microassaults are “explicit racial derogation characterized by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). In Strayhorn, Blakewood, et al.’s (2010) study on gay and bisexual black men, one participant talked about microassaults on campus, stating:

If one decides to [go to college], I’d just tell [a prospective Black gay male] to be ready to face racism and homophobia...like White people here don’t really respect Black students... it’s not everyone but a lot of them, especially White faculty, and there’s all this stuff going on with racist remarks on campus. (p. 95)

Microassaults are direct and intentional and have one subcategory entitled environmental microaggression as defined previously or macroaggression meaning racial insults that occur on a institutional level and impact a whole environment (Sue et al., 2007). This participant painted a picture of the general feel of campus, warning new students that racism is within the environment or fabric of the institution.

**Microinsults.** Microinsults are “communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person’s racial heritage or identity” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). They are typically unconscious and fall within four subcategories, including ascription of intelligence (assigning intelligence to a Person of Color based on his or her race), second class citizenship (assumption that People of Color are servants to White people), pathologizing cultural values/communication styles (White cultural values are ideal and better than People of Color’s values), and assumption of criminal status (People of Color are presumed to be dangerous or deviant; Sue et al., 2007). In Fries-Britt and Griffin’s (2007) study on high achieving Black students, one participant reflected back on experiences she

had with her peers regarding her acceptance into the honors program. People made comments such as, “Oh, you’re going to get in there because you’re Black...or thinking that everything I was getting was because I was Black- that was the only reason” (p. 518). In this case, White students assumed the participant would get into the honors program because of her race and not because she was academically stellar. Black people are not naturally assumed or stereotyped to be smart or high achieving.

**Microinvalidations.** Microinvalidations are “communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). These aggressions are often unconscious and occur within the four subcategories including being an alien in one’s own land, color blindness, myth of meritocracy, and denial of individual racism (Sue et al., 2007). I had personal experiences with microinvalidations during my college years. I have two examples of times when I experienced color blindness and denial of racism. *First, I got an internship in the International office my second year in my master’s program. I set everything up over the phone and my new supervisor seemed excited to have me working there. I walked in the first day and introduced myself. She looked at me and asked if I was sure I was Lissa Stapleton. I said yes and thought to myself, “She was expecting a White woman.” By the end of the semester, my supervisor finally acknowledged that I was a Person of Color, but only after I had conducted all of the People of Color study abroad information sessions. Second, I attended a women’s leadership retreat, and during a presentation on successful women, I asked why no Black women had been included in the presentation. The White female presenter said there was not enough room on the PowerPoint slide. As a female leader at the*

*retreat, she never acknowledged that her behavior was dismissive and racist. These experiences just sit in your soul and make you wonder and second guess yourself.*

**Processing microaggressions.** Sue et al. (2008) identified five domains in which Black people tend to process through racial microaggression, including the ways in which they internalized the experiences in their qualitative study with a purposive sample of 13 Black people. The domains are (a) incidents, (b) perception, (c) reaction, (d) interpretation, and (e) consequences (Sue et al., 2008). The domains are not necessarily sequential, but their participants typically started with the incident, explaining what verbal, nonverbal, or environmental situation happened. Participants then went through a process of perception, questioning if the incident that happened was racial motivated (Sue et al., 2008). Then participants emotionally, cognitively, and psychologically reacted to the situation, which resulted in feeling a healthy sense of paranoia or suspicion, confiding in other Blacks to confirm that the incident was racist, rescuing the person who did the microaggression by considering his or her feelings, or repelling the microaggression by blaming the aggressor for the incident and not internalizing the situation (Sue et al., 2008). In the mist of the response, participants tried to make meaning of the situation. Some believed the message was that Black people did not belong, were abnormal, were intellectually inferior, or were not trustworthy. Consequence was the last domain and refers to the impact the microaggression had on the Black person's behavior, coping strategies, and psychological well-being (Sue et al., 2008). The consequences are feelings of powerlessness and/or invisibility, forced compliance, and loss of integrity as well as pressure to represent the Black race.

Over time, microaggressions can cause psychological and emotional harm to Black college students and impact their ability to successfully persist through college (Sue et al.,

2007). In Solórzano et al.'s (2000) study on the linkages among racial stereotypes, cumulative racial microaggressions, campus racial climate, and academic performance, they found that, "Several students commented that racial microaggressions had affected their academic performance in overt ways such as pushing them to drop a class, changing their major and even leaving the university to attend school elsewhere" (p. 69). Students in various studies commented on feeling exhausted and isolated as well as experiencing issues of self-doubt and frustration because of racial microaggressions (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2008; Sue et al., 2007). Racial microaggressions put pressure on Black students, particularly high achieving students, to continuously prove themselves to their White peers because of negative Black stereotypes. Some Black students are thinking about and trying to avoid stereotype threat or "the risk of confirming to a negative stereotype about one's group" (Steele & Aronson, 1995, p. 797). Fries-Britt and Griffin (2007) stated that "proving academic ability was by far the greatest test faced by [high achieving Black] students...the time spent dispelling myths and stereotypes about the Black community, has the potential to divert energy away from studying" (p. 520).

**Resistance.** Black students, however, have found ways to resist aggressions and oppression and persist through college. Their involvement in predominantly Black and minority student organizations has allowed them to acquire access to academic opportunities, information, and administrators and faculty's time and energy (Guiffrida, 2003; Harper, 2008). Black students have leaned on each other, and through role modeling of older students, Black students have been able to pull each other up and create supportive networks (Harper, 2008). Through these connections with peers, faculty, and staff, Black students are developing proacademic identities, which lead to greater likelihood of persistence (Harper,

2008). Black families and friends have offered their support through verbal, emotional, and financial means to help Black students stay in college and persist to graduation. In the classroom, students have “invested in learning from both [Anglo-centric and Afro-centric] perspectives [that] allowed Black students to relate to the dominant context while protecting their own psychological development and learning about ideas and information germane to the Black culture” (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007, p. 515). Lastly, Black students are resisting and disrupting negative Black stereotypes by openly living counternarrative lives. In Fries-Britt and Griffin’s (2007) study one student gave an example of this type of life,

She often sang Mozart in Latin while she was taking a shower in the residence hall community bathroom, she knew that as she was singing the song it would attract attention, and she commented that she enjoyed seeing the shock on people’s face when they learned that it was a Black woman singing Mozart in Latin. (p. 516)

Black students have been and continue to be creative and resilient.

The pressures of stereotype threat and effects of racial microaggression can “affect the high stakes game of college academic achievement” (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 62) and, ultimately, persistence in college for many subgroups within the Black community including Black d/Deaf students. Similar to other scholars’ work on Black male students (Harper, 2008); Black gay, bisexual, and lesbian students (Patton & Simmons, 2008; Strayhorn, Blakewood, et al., 2010); and high achieving Black students (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007), my study will continue to highlight the diversity within the Black college student community as race and ability have not been addressed. In addition, exploring ways in which Black d/Deaf students are experiencing college, navigating racial microaggressions, and finding ways to resist is missing in the literature now. Researchers are not sure if the intersection of race and

ability changes the ways in which students approach college, or how they are impacted by racism, or if they have other resistance mechanisms that aid them in being successful.

### **d/Deaf Students in Higher Education**

After teaching an honors course entitled a *Glimpse into Deaf Culture* and facilitating several educational presentations on Deaf culture and d/Deaf students to mostly hearing audiences, I have gathered that the masternarratives told by hearing people about d/Deaf people center around the idea that there is little diversity within the community. People typically do not think about d/Deaf people having other identities such as race or gender: There is no real Deaf culture that people know. The d/Deaf community is ahistorical. Most Deaf people use American Sign Language. Most hearing people do not think about d/Deaf people in college. The counternarrative to those assumptions is that the d/Deaf community is very complex and diverse with a strong history within the U.S. The d/Deaf community has a rich culture encompassing language, tradition, and folklore, which has historically been nurtured in Deaf residential schools and Deaf clubs and is now nurtured through the use of technology. There are wide ranges of people, some who are born d/Deaf or throughout their lifetime become a part of the d/Deaf community. Some individuals use American Sign Language while others use exact signed English. Some individuals only read lips and others use both sign language and lip-reading. The d/Deaf community cannot be boxed in, and in order to critically look at Black d/Deaf students' experiences within college the complexities of who these students can be and are must be taken into consideration.

### **The d/Deaf Community**

So, who makes up the larger d/Deaf community? As of 2006, there were 37 million adults in the U.S. with some range of hearing loss (Schoenborn & Heyman, 2008). Men



were 4.3% more likely to have hearing loss than women at 2.4% (Schoenborn & Heyman, 2008). The d/Deaf community is racially/ethnically diverse. In fact, between 2000-2006, racial/ethnic groups with the highest percentage of hearing loss were American Indian/Alaska Native and White people followed by Asian Americans, Latinos, and Blacks, respectively (Schoenborn & Heyman, 2008). Using the U.S. Census and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention statistics, it was estimated that in 2000 there were 468,000 d/Deaf students spread among our 5,000 colleges and universities within the U.S. Of these students, 345,000 were hard of hearing, 115,000 became deaf after the age of 19, and 8,000 were deafened before the age of 19 (Schroedel, Watson, & Ashmore, 2003).

Medical technology has influenced what it means to be d/Deaf. As of 2010, 42,600 adults and 28,400 children in the U.S. had received a cochlear implant, which is “a small, complex electronic device that can help provide a sense of sound to a person who is profoundly deaf or severely hard-of-hearing” (National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, 2010, para. 1). Some children are getting cochlear implants as young as 12 months (National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, 2010), and there are about 6.5 million individuals using hearing aids or small devices that amplify sound for individuals with milder hearing loss (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, n.d.). It is highly likely that college students who appear hearing may identify as culturally Deaf, as some students are learning American Sign Language in high school or college and starting to connect with the d/Deaf community later in life. *My first year working at California State University, I met a Black hard of hearing student who had grown up in mainstream schooling where she had an interpreter in her class, but most of her peers were hearing. She wore hearing aids and was used to reading lips. She did not realize until*

*she got to college how much she was missing. She started learning and using sign language with her new d/Deaf peers. By the time she graduated, she was comfortable and fluent in sign language and identified auditorily as hard of hearing, but culturally Deaf.*

Also, educational options have changed for d/Deaf students. In 1994-1995, 70% of d/Deaf children were attending a local school or mainstream program, and 21% were attending a Deaf residential school (Schildroth & Hotto, 1996). There has been a continuous decline in the Deaf residential schools since the 1970s because of the “inclusion philosophy which encourages placing all disabled children in the local regular school environments” (Schildroth & Hotto, 1996, p. 71). This trend means that d/Deaf college students have had a range of contact with the d/Deaf community from complete immersion to none at all.

In a study I conducted with d/Deaf Women of Color exploring their college experiences related to their families, the classroom, extra-curricular activities, and racial and d/Deaf identity, many of the women talked about their diverse K-12 educational experiences. Mel, a Black Deaf woman, attended Deaf specific programs growing up and was taught using American Sign Language. She shared, “As for my deaf identity, I learned about deaf culture and interacted with deaf people while growing up; it's ingrained in me” (Stapleton, in press). She was very comfortable in all d/Deaf spaces and knew how to navigate the larger hearing world. However, other d/Deaf students who attended mainstream schooling had little to no exposure to the d/Deaf community or that aspect of their identity before coming to college. Institutions that have a noticeable d/Deaf student population, residential housing, and Deaf culture courses are replacing the K-12 Deaf residential experience. Deidra, an Asian American woman from the study, attended a mainstream program in which she was the only hard of hearing person in her school and had no contact with other d/Deaf people or sign

language. She had a very eye-opening experience while attending a college with a large number of d/Deaf students. She shared,

The most important thing I have learned from the [Deaf] community here at [college] is my similarity with others. The classes I took such as a Deaf Culture class. I just learned a lot, so I feel connected. In high school, I would just stumble through conversation after conversation and just got by and I did not know anything about the deaf culture.

The diversity within d/Deaf students' lived experiences is why it is important to better understand who the students are who have successfully graduated from college. There are so many variables that could impact their persistence, and simply labeling students as d/Deaf and perhaps including their age and gender within research studies is not enough to get a full picture of what is happening. Stinson, Scherer, and Walter (1987) stated,

Students come to a particular institution with a range of background traits. These background traits influence, not only how the students will perform in college, but also how they will interact with, and subsequently become integrated into, an institution's social and academic systems. (p. 245)

Most researchers over the years have either not had access to a diverse d/Deaf population or have chosen not to include demographic descriptions of their participants in their write-ups. The studies have mostly focused on what is happening while d/Deaf students are still in college. There have been studies conducted on learning in the classroom, particularly focused on learning styles (Lang, Stinson, Kavanagh, Liu, & Basile, 1999), English teaching methods (Berent et al., 2007), inclusive classrooms (Foster, Long, & Snell, 1999), and the challenges of learning using different types of support services (interpreters,

notetaker, etc.) (Lang, 2002; Weglarz, Brown-Kurz, & Moehring, 1998). Other studies have identified best academic success predictors (Convertino, Marschark, Sapere, Sarchet, & Zupan, 2009), examined the impact of mainstream education (Foster & Brown, 1988), and explored d/Deaf students' attitudes toward racial/ethnic diversity, campus climate, and role models (Parasnis, Samar, & Fischer, 2005).

There have also been scholars who have investigated d/Deaf student persistence (Albertini, Kelly, & Matchett, 2011; Eilers-Crandall, 2009; Smith, 2004). However, there have been no studies that look at d/Deaf college graduates' reflection on how they persisted to graduation. The U.S. States Census Bureau American Community Survey (2011) has indicated that 23.80% of the d/Deaf population holds a college degree. Although this percent is 15.4% less than the hearing population, and there are no racial demographics of d/Deaf graduates, there is still a significant population of d/Deaf people who have successfully navigated higher education. These students' experiences could offer higher education professionals insight into the roadblocks and support needed for future d/Deaf students in order to persist to graduation.

In this study, I will add a diverse perspective and fill gaps within the literature. Similar to the ways in which Black hearing students can offer insight into the racialized experiences of Black d/Deaf students, it is important also to look at what is known about d/Deaf college students as a way to better understand the lived d/Deaf experience. These experiences can offer insight into how Black d/Deaf students experience college, persist, and navigate racism and audism. The next section focuses on what is known generally about d/Deaf students' persistence in college. I also define and examine audist microaggressions.

## **d/Deaf Student Persistence**

“Deaf people can do anything, except hear.”

I. King Jordan, the former President of Gallaudet University (Mclane, 2012, para. 2)

According to the National Council on Disabilities (2011), the percentage of d/Deaf students pursuing higher education has continued to increase since 2003. As of 2009, d/Deaf students made up the largest percentage (72.9%) of students with [dis]abilities within education followed by students with visual [dis]abilities (66.7%), students with speech [dis]abilities (65.2%), and students with learning [dis]abilities (63.3%; National Council on Disability, 2011). Although most d/Deaf people do not identify as a person with a [dis]ability, being d/Deaf has been constructed as a [dis]ability (Lane, 2002). On many campuses, the accommodations required for d/Deaf students to be successful, socially and academically, are housed in [dis]ability services, as few campuses have d/Deaf specific programs and offices. In addition, there is some literature on the persistence of students with [dis]abilities that incorporates d/Deaf students as participants (Getzel, 2008; Lombardi, Murray, & Gerdes, 2012); thus, this literature and students with [dis]abilities’ statistics add to our understanding of d/Deaf college students’ experiences and is intertwined throughout the literature review.

There are few studies that focus on the persistence of d/Deaf college students (Boutin, 2008; Stinson, Scherer, & Walter, 1987). Similar to Black students, involvement in the academic and social systems of an institution, a connection with peers, specifically d/Deaf peers, confidence in their academic abilities, and access to information all play a role in d/Deaf students persisting and matriculating to graduation (Boutin, 2008; Stinson et al., 1987). Stinson et al. (1987) conducted a quantitative study at the National Technology

Institute for the Deaf focusing on attrition after the first year of college with 412 d/Deaf students. They found that persistence is a complex “and multidimensional phenomenon composed of academic, psychosocial, and demographic factors” (p. 253). Situations that caused d/Deaf students not to persist were dissatisfaction with their social lives, over-involvement in campus activities, and moving too far from home to regularly access family support. The question is not if d/Deaf students can succeed, as the former President of Gallaudet pronounced at the Deaf President Now protest in 1988, “Deaf people can do anything, but hear!” (McLane, 2012, para. 2), but the larger question is what sets d/Deaf students up for success? In one study, factors that enhanced persistence were (a) being a part of a large d/Deaf student population and (b) extensive support services including remedial courses, counseling, and tutoring (Stinson et al., 1987). After reading the literature, I have identified four areas that seem to capture and greatly impact d/Deaf student persistence: (a) campus environment, (b) academics resources, (c) college skill-building, and (d) participating in career-related opportunities. Although the persistence factors are identified as separate areas, there is overlap among these factors, and in some ways, they build on and influence each other.

**Campus environment.** Some of the persistence challenges faced by students with [dis]abilities more broadly are connected to the campus environment. Some campus environments are not welcoming to students with [dis]abilities, and students are made to feel they are not capable of succeeding in higher education (Getzel, 2008). An environment does not evolve or exist prior to or separate from the people who create and use it (Razack, 2002). Historically, the academy was designed for elite White hearing men (Altbach, 2005). Therefore, White hearing men entered the academy and began “creating, reproducing, and

reinforcing one set of values and practices and excluding others. This type of power shapes what is important” (Trowler & Turner, 2002, p. 250); thus, it created hearing spaces and privileges that are unspoken and seem natural (Maher & Tetreault, 2007). There is a myth that space is empty of culture or value; consequently, creating an illusion of innocence (Razack, 2002); however, Porter, Camerlengo, DePuy, and Sommer (1998) stated, “Deaf and hard of hearing students often face navigating the hidden rocks and sudden whirlpools of college life without the necessary tools and /or responsive and supportive campus environment” (p. 5).

The campus environment plays a huge role in all students’ transition and successful persistence through college. In many circumstances, what it means for a campus to be inclusive takes on an additive approach versus a transformative approach. Consequently, special initiatives using soft money are formed, once a year celebration events are planned, student groups are started, or campus brochures highlight marginalized student populations, but no real inclusive value changes, strategic plans, or campus-wide education occurs. In this regard, campuses do what is legally required—the letter of the law, but not necessarily the spirit of the law (Ballenger, 2013), which is “whatever is possible in ensuring that deaf and hard of hearing students have full opportunity for engaging the array of educational resources and campus services” (Porter et al., 1998, p. 5).

**Academics.** Campus environment and academics are closely intertwined, and Boutin (2008) used Tinto’s longitudinal model on persistence to investigate the persistence factors of d/Deaf students. Boutin (2008) believed communication abilities, academic achievement levels, experience in mainstreamed educational settings, the ability to adjust to new social freedom, the distance of their home to campus, as well as their age upon starting college were

all key factors in d/Deaf students' persistence. There was some similarity to hearing students such as the need for students to become academically and socially integrated into their institution. In many ways, this finding can be challenged, similar to the experiences of Black students, as d/Deaf students are a marginalized population and on many campuses are overpowered by hearing culture and privilege. This situation may mean students must give up aspects of their d/Deaf culture or at least put it to the side while at school. The idea of d/Deaf students fully integrating into majority hearing campus life depends largely on the student as well as his or her educational background, communication abilities, and desire to navigate hearing spaces (Boutin, 2008); however, I would not say it solely depends on students.

Faculty and staff must be educated on their students' academic needs as well as accommodations and technology available to assist in making the classroom and campus experiences accessible. Many times, there is a lack of awareness and discriminatory practices happen out of ignorance. Faculty may not be familiar with [dis]ability services on their campus or how to apply the principles of universal design (Getzel & McManus, 2005). Broadly speaking, "Universal design is a process that enables and empowers a diverse population by improving human performance, health and wellness, and social participation...it makes life easier, healthier and friendlier" (Steinfeld & Jordana, 2012, p. 29). Coined by Ron Mace in the 1990s, universal design within an educational setting helps create an instructionally accessible classroom and campus environment for all students by using technology and developing diverse teaching and programming methods (Steinfeld & Jordana, 2012). There are specific examples of how faculty and staff can use universal design to positively impact d/Deaf students. Examples include captioning movies, making



sure the lights are bright in the classrooms, holding classes and events in spaces that are open and everyone can see each other, as well as lecturing or speaking toward the people versus facing the board or talking with one's head down. Using universal design can reduce stigma, support all students, encourage all students to be self-reliant and socially engaged, and reduce the need for special accommodations (Steinfeld & Jordana, 2012). Ultimately, "students benefit when faculty have an increased awareness and knowledge of the characteristics and needs of students with disabilities and when faculty incorporate concepts of universal design into their instruction and curriculum" (Getzel, 2008, p. 207).

Encouraging campuses to use universal design has not eliminated the need for accessibility accommodations. Coming to college is a huge transition for most students, but unique to d/Deaf students and students with [dis]abilities more broadly, is the requirement that they learn what accommodations they need to be successful in their new college environment. Getzel (2008) stated that sometimes the challenge is that "students with disabilities enter college unprepared to disclose their [dis]ability or lack the understanding of how to access services on campus" (p. 208). d/Deaf students have and require a variety of resources in order to be successful and feel included in the classroom and on campus including interpreters, real time captionists, notetakers, assistive listening systems, captioning of video material, hearing evaluations, individual listening theory, and more (Kavin & Botto, 2009).

Foster and Brown's (1988) study focused on the mainstream college education experience from a d/Deaf student's perspective. Students expressed both frustration and satisfaction with notetakers, tutors, and interpreters in their college classes. They also talked about feelings of separation from other students and faculty in the class because of

communication difficulties and a perceived lack of interest on hearing peoples' part to work with them. Students gave examples of their frustrations, which ranged from the hassle of finding an interpreter for informal interactions to the heightened awareness of not embarrassing themselves in class because of communication delay (Foster & Brown, 1988). However, feelings of inclusivity did not necessarily occur because support services were provided in the classroom. Authors of this literature have argued that physical proximity and support services are not enough to make a classroom inclusive, but other factors such as student interactions, informal conversations, and faculty teaching styles are critical to creating an inclusive space (Foster & Brown, 1988; Foster et al., 1999). The subtle and informal moments in a class, as well as the course material itself, need to be open to d/Deaf students.

Interestingly enough, what d/Deaf students need to feel connected in a classroom is very similar to hearing students in general. In Foster et al.'s (1999) study on inclusive classrooms, 30% of hearing students said they felt connected to a class when they comprehended the material being taught, and 33% of d/Deaf students agreed with this statement. Surprisingly, the authors did not find a significant difference when students were asked questions about communication with the teacher. Both groups stated they understood the teacher best when "the teacher [was] clear, easy to understand, and organized; the pace was not too fast; and the teacher involved students" (Foster et al., 1999, p. 229). In the literature, faculty were asked who is responsible for d/Deaf students feeling connected and learning in the classroom (Foster et al., 1999). Most felt that it was a team effort to help d/Deaf students learn in the class, including the faculty member, the student, the interpreter, the notetaker, and the tutor (Foster et al., 1999). However, faculty's' opinions varied as

some thought it was the students and the resource providers' responsibility to help the student learn and in no way did their teaching approach or style need to change (Foster et al., 1999).

There is a variety of technology that d/Deaf students can use in the classroom. However, technology is constantly improving and some students are unaware of existing technology or their options (Getzel, 2008). Faculty in another study believed d/Deaf students needed an alternative to the traditional face-to-face classrooms as a method to creating inclusive learning spaces (Slike, Berman, Kline, & Rebilas, 2008). As technology continues to advance, online learning has become an option for d/Deaf students to take courses or complete their entire degree. Bloomsbury University of Pennsylvania transformed three courses from face-to-face to more accessible and d/Deaf friendly online courses (Slike et al., 2008). These courses took into consideration that d/Deaf students are visual learners. Students were able to see the online interpreter, communicate with the professors directly through live chat, and engage with their peers through online group work. Though this classroom approach was not perfect, creating an accessible and inclusive classroom includes being intentional about students' learning needs and trying new methods.

**Building college management skills.** Up to this point in their education, many d/Deaf students have relied on their parents, school counselors, Vocational Rehabilitation counselors, Individual Educational Plans (IEPs), and interpreters to inform them about their needs and what accommodations and strategies would work best for them. This process changes once d/Deaf students arrive at college. For example, d/Deaf students at California State University Northridge, must submit paperwork each semester for each class to schedule an interpreter. They must also request and sign up for tutors, and in many cases request their

own interpreter for social and after hour events. Some students have a hard time adjusting to managing their accommodation needs on top of their academic program (Getzel, 2008) as well as their new independence from their families and prenegotiated resources. Getzel's (2008) work highlighted two key factors within higher education that aid students with [dis]abilities in remaining in college—self-determination skills and self-management skills. Self-determination skills are internal and are connected to self-efficacy and being comfortable with one's different ability (Getzel, 2008). Being self-determined requires that a student understand what resources he or she needs to be successful and have the ability to persevere through challenges in order to fully transition, adjust, and remain in college. Self-management skills are more external as they include the ability to manage time, identify and learn study skills, and ask for help when needed to name a few (Getzel, 2008). I broadly refer to these skills as college management skills.

Eilers-Crandall's (2009) research is closely connected with Getzel's (2008). Eilers-Crandall (2009) focused on the learning behaviors and study habits of d/Deaf students and persistence. For 3-5 years, 134 d/Deaf students' learning and studying behaviors were tracked starting with their first semester at the National Technological Institute for the Deaf (NTID; Eilers-Crandall, 2009). Examining three out-of-class learning behaviors—completion of assignments, use of tutoring services, and doing optional work—as well as three in-class learning behaviors—attendance, attentiveness, and participation, Eilers-Crandall (2009) found that all the behaviors positively impacted d/Deaf students' ability to persist through college. For example, “Seventy-five percent of the students who used tutors weekly were successful in college while only 8% of those who did not use tutoring services were successful” (Eilers-Crandall, 2009, p. 37). Getzel (2008) further highlighted, “Not only

must students understand how to obtain accommodations, but they must also understand the importance of utilizing these accommodations while in college” (p. 210). Eilers-Crandall’s (2009) study found that students who persisted had these skills before they came to college; however, this may not be the case for all d/Deaf students. Finding ways to meet them where they are, teaching college management skills, and identifying other helpful skills needed after a student arrives at college are all critical to the student’s success and ability to persist.

Several factors can influence why students do not improve their college management skills. These factors could include not understanding how the university system works to obtain support services, feeling embarrassed about asking for services, attempting to go without services as an assertion of their independence, or newly diagnosed students who have recently acquired a [dis]ability or whose abilities have changed over time (Getzel, 2008). For example, there are some hereditary hearing conditions in which over time people lose their hearing until they become profoundly deaf, and the resources and support they need may change. Institutions must be able to provide a variety of educational services to students in a variety of methods. Some institutions are currently providing hearing evaluations, speech and language services, peer support groups, and educational sessions on specific college management skills to further educate and encourage students to become self-reliant, learn what resources they may need, and advocate on their own behalf.

**Participating in career-related opportunities.** The hope of getting a job and settling into a desired career are important motivators in aiding students to persist through college. Having a college degree not only increases personal self-esteem, but also the economic independence of d/Deaf students (Boutin, 2008). There are positive and significant

negative economic consequences for d/Deaf individuals who complete or do not complete college:

Those who graduate experience significant earning benefits and reductions in the duration of time spent on federal disability programs...individuals who attend college, but withdraw before graduation, fair no better economically than individuals who never attended college. (Schley, et al., 2011, p. 1)

Student persistence is not the only critical component to obtaining a good job. What students do with their time while they are a student is essential in helping them become more marketable once they graduate. Learning to network with professionals in their field is a skill that must be taught, and hands-on experiences such as internships, practicums, and co-op provide that opportunity (Getzel, 2008). d/Deaf students need the opportunity to figure out how to transfer their accommodations needs from an academic space into a work space as well as advocate for their rights (Getzel, 2008). Making real connection between their academic experience and the real world encourages d/Deaf students to persist to graduate and reach their career goals (Getzel, 2008).

Similar to Black hearing students, persistence is complex and is being shaped by students' educational backgrounds, the inclusiveness of campus environments, faculty and staff levels of awareness and sensitivity to their needs, and academic and social integration. It is important to take into consideration the ways in which transitioning to college is different as d/Deaf students have laws and regulations that require that institutions provide resources to help them succeed, but those laws do not mandate that a campus environment is d/Deaf friendly. The diversity and variability of students within the d/Deaf community is even greater than the hearing community, making it hard to narrow down the best inclusive

classroom approach to aid d/Deaf students in being academically successful (Convertino et al., 2009) or the specific steps necessary to keep all d/Deaf students in college. However, the need for this type of research is critical in order to shed light on what a d/Deaf friendly campus could look and feel like and what support is needed to increase the persistence rate of d/Deaf students within our colleges and universities.

### **Audist Microaggressions**

“What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”

(Shakespeare, n.d, para.1)

“What’s in a name?,” Romeo asked Juliet (Shakespeare, n.d., para. 1) presuming that the name of something was not as important because a name did not change the meaning of an item, the reality of its existence, or the feelings it evoked. I would have to disagree with this argument somewhat as there is power in naming feelings, actions, and oppression. Not being able to name oppression does not make it less real, but through naming it, we begin to legitimize a lived experience, and it goes from invisible to visible. People can begin to more clearly identify the oppression and relate to it. Moreover, collective voices can move into formal resistance efforts (policy changes, education, etc.). Racism was first named in 1933 (Racism [Known Use], n.d.), sexism in 1968 (Sexism [Known Use], n.d.), and ableism in 1981 (Ableism [Known Use], n.d.). Tom Humphries (1977), a Deaf scholar, coined the word audism and defined it as “the notion that one is superior based on one’s ability to hear or behave in a manner of one who hears” (p. 12). Over the years more comprehensive definitions have been created including that of Garrow, Fleischer, Eugster, and Love (2014) who stated, “Audism manifests itself in a complex weave of micro, meso, and macro-aggressions that leads to a system of overprivilege for those that [sic] can hear and speak and

underprivilege for those who are deaf” (p. 4). Since the formal naming of the discrimination against d/Deaf people, there have been articles written (Bauman, 2004; Eckert & Rowley, 2013; Myers & Fernandes, 2009), films created (Bahan, Bauman, & Montenegro, 2008), and movements started around raising awareness about audism throughout the country. The National Association for the Deaf (NAD) has submitted formal requests for the word to be included in several dictionaries stating:

We believe that adding the word “audism” to dictionaries is one step towards a new paradigm shift in the perception of deaf and hard of hearing people...[and that it] also raises the bar in discourse, awareness of, and respect for the civil, human, and linguistic rights of the deaf and hard of hearing community. (Biography In Context, 2010, para. 2)

Audism Free America (AFA), a grassroots Deaf activist organization, was formed in the U.S. around 2009 (Audism Free America, 2009). They adamantly fight for the “human and linguistic rights of Deaf people, unmasking audism and media representation, and advocating for future generations” (Audism Free America, 2009, para. 1). They have become a visible group actively protesting, blogging, video logging, and writing letters protesting against companies and practices that are audistic in nature.

Audistic microaggressions are the manifestation of audism similar to racial microaggressions being a manifestation of racism. I have defined audist microaggression using an adapted definition of racial microaggressions, “brief, common-place, and daily, verbal, and environmental slights and indignities directed toward [d/Deaf people] often automatically and unintentionally” (Sue et al., 2008, p. 329), which can be experienced on a micro, meso or macro level. Audistic microaggressions have deep roots within the U.S.,



particularly within the educational system, through the promotion of oral education. During the mid-1800s, Deaf teachers were no longer hired and common classroom practices were to ban the use of sign language, which included making children sit on their hands, tying their hands behind their backs, or making them wear paper bags over their hands (Gannon, 1981). Hearing people have not trusted d/Deaf people with the ability to control their own lives; thus, hearing people have dominated and discriminated against d/Deaf individuals (Eckert & Rowley, 2013) through erasing d/Deaf history and culture, establishing antiDeaf laws, and controlling the Deaf educational system through the dictation of educational practices and methods (Gertz, 2008). Even though attitudes about teaching sign language within educational settings have shifted some and derogatory language, such as deaf and dumb, is no longer acceptable or used, many d/Deaf people and allies to the community would say there is still a lot of work to do related to addressing hearing privilege and subtle practices of covert and over audism.

Since the original coining of the word, scholars have expanded and more deeply explored the roots, theory, and historical context of audism (Bauman, 2004; Eckert & Rowley, 2013; Myers & Fernandes, 2009). French philosopher, Jacques Derrida's notion of phonocentrism, "the historical assumption that speech is the most fully human form of language," (Bauman, 2004, p. 243) provides the theoretical underpinnings of Bauman's understanding of audism. Bauman (2004) defined audism as "a system of advantages based on hearing ability" (p. 241) and goes on further to coin metaphysical audism, which is "the orientation that links human identity and being with language defined as speech" (p. 242). If speech is directly tied to what it means to be human, then treating d/Deaf individuals as if they are only half human and "working to make the deaf [sic] creature more normal, fully

speaking human being” (Bauman, 2004, p. 243) becomes the masternarrative and supports discriminatory practices on individual and systemic levels. Investigating metaphysical audism from a micro and macro level, Bauman (2004) argued that the Western tradition of what it means to be human is flawed and limited stating, “There is nothing intrinsically more human about nonphonetic forms of communication such as signing or writing” (p. 243)... it gives us a more complete picture of the human potential for language and being” (p. 245).

The discipline of Deaf Studies grew out of the Deaf Rights Movement and heavily rests on Bauman’s theory of metaphysical audism. In many ways, Deaf Studies has represented a counternarrative to metaphysical audism in its attempt to promote the use of ASL, preserve Deaf culture, and teach Deaf history. Myers and Fernandes (2009) used Deaf Studies departments as the context in which to critique Bauman’s (2004) outdated examples of oppression stating, “We need only remember that these examples--denial of rights to own property, have children, or drive a car--typically belong to the past” (p. 34). They challenged his uncritical acceptance of Derrida’s phonocentrism stating “the theory involves an idiosyncratic idea about writing that does not oppose speech as Bauman thinks it does and, thus, is not interchangeable with signing” (p. 34). Lastly, they contested his binary thinking between hearing and d/Deaf people suggesting that his views leave d/Deaf and hearing people fixed within an oppressor and oppressed relationship. Myers and Fernandes (2009) believed there is a lot of diversity within the d/Deaf and hearing community that is unable to exist within that binary. This diversity includes Deaf People of Color, d/Deaf people born to d/Deaf and hearing families, residential and mainstreamed education people, etc. They stated, “Validating everyone’s experiences can teach us how to respect, value, and include each other” (Myers & Fernandes, 2009, p. 42). Myers and Fernandes (2009) ultimately

urged Deaf Studies departments to adopt more inclusive foundational theories and practices in order to not become implicit in perpetuating “an impoverished definition of [who] Deaf people [could] be” (p. 42).

Eckert and Rowley (2013) stated, “Audism is a schema of audiocentric assumptions and attitudes that are used to rationalize differential stratification, supremacy, and hegemonic privilege” (p. 105). They have identified four types of audism: (a) individual, (b) institutional, (c) metaphysical, and (d) laissez-faire, and each can be practiced overtly, covertly, and aversively. Overt audism are practices that directly and openly dehumanize d/Deaf people such as policies and behaviors that isolate and exclude d/Deaf people from society without consequences (Eckert & Rowley, 2013). Covert audism are practices that are disguised and more difficult to identify such as hiring practices and providing reasonable accommodations. Aversive audism are practices that “concern a principle of equality accompanied by contradictions and high levels of anxiety when around Deaf people” (Eckert & Rowley, 2013, p. 109) including avoiding interaction and forcing d/Deaf people to assimilate into the hearing world.

Individual audism happens at a micro level or to an individual person. An example of individual aversive audism is when an interpreter, who is supposed to interpret to the d/Deaf person, decides to filter key information during interpreting, which is counter to their role as an interpreter. Institutional audism is “a structural system of exploitative advantages that focuses on and perpetuates the subordination of Deaf communities of origin, language, and culture” (Eckert & Rowley, 2013, p. 106). An example of institutional covert audism is when classmates, managers, and family members attempt to communicate, but select what incidental capital or general information gets shared and or refuse to repeat information

stating, “it’s not important or never mind.” d/Deaf individuals may lose out on family connections, job responsibility details, and random information from study groups and class. Metaphysical audism is “a stratifying schema that promotes differential treatment by linking identity and autonomous being with audiocentric assumptions and attitudes that rationalize subordination” (Eckert & Rowley, 2013, pp. 106-107). An example of metaphysical covert audism is when a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor, a person responsible for supporting and advocating for a d/Deaf person to receive training in order to obtain a job, discourages a d/Deaf student from attending college or selecting a certain major because the student’s success with finding a job will take too long; thus, requiring the student to stay on the counselor’s caseload longer and costing the state more money. Laissez-fair audism is “a postmodern apology which claims recognition of Deaf humanity, but through the denial of Deaf autonomy coupled with a social evolutionary goal to end Deaf-centric structures, schemas, and praxis ends up perpetuating a dehumanization of Deaf American communities” (Eckert & Rowley, 2013, p. 107). An example of laissez-fair overt audism is when hearing people intentionally ignore d/Deaf people by talking toward the interpreter and not the d/Deaf individual. This type of audism was clearly displayed during the 2012 Superbowl XLVI game when Ms. Deaf America was asked to sign America the Beautiful, but was not shown on any television channel (Sotonoff, 2012). She was also not asked to stay for the game nor was she positioned near Kelly Clarkson who was singing and televised (Sotonoff, 2012).

**The practice and impact of audism.** The ways in which audism surfaces are numerous, and although audism is alive and well, there has been little research conducted on

audism within the educational system and the impact it has on d/Deaf students. Bauman (2004) stated:

Educational practices such as oralism, Total Communication, and mainstreaming are the institutionalization of our phonocentric and audist metaphysical orientation; the practices of these institutions then beget individual audist attitudes through daily practices, rituals, and disciplining Deaf bodies into becoming closer to normal hearing bodies. (p. 245)

Ballenger (2013) identified common audist pitfalls made within adult educational settings. The first pitfall is when campus communities only comply with the basic American with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements and not the spirit of the law, which is inclusiveness. Higher education professionals provide reasonable accommodations, when they could adopt universal design values and teaching practices, which benefit all students. Some faculty refuse to be flexible and try different visual teaching methods such as charts, skits, pictures, and demonstrations. Second, higher education professionals make assumptions that all d/Deaf students have the same resource needs and lived experiences. Ballenger (2013) stated, “Learning about your learners and allowing them to learn about themselves can produce accessible activities and ways to learn” (p. 125). d/Deaf students figuring out how they learn and what resources they need is critical to persisting through college, and multiple professionals on campus influence students’ ability to achieve these goals. Lastly, higher education professionals do not prepare in advance, but wait for d/Deaf students to join their class or co-curricular activity, before thinking through audist practices which is problematic and often too late. Ballenger (2013) stated, “We must all become

aware of possible audist attitudes and focus on various communication modes in every situation, particularly in adult education if educating adults is our goal” (p. 126).

Although microaggressions have historically been and originally were identified as racialized discriminative acts, using the broadest definition, microaggressions are unintentional behavioral and environmental slights and indignities toward any marginalized group (Sue et al., 2007); thus, it is possible to expand our awareness beyond just racism and include audistic behavior, the effects of which are similar to the ways in which racial microaggressions build and do psychological harm to People of Color (Sue et al., 2008). Gertz’s (2003) study with Deaf adults born and raised in Deaf families found that audism deeply impacts d/Deaf individuals as well. She looked at how dysconscious audism, “a form of audism by means of an implicit acceptance of the dominant hearing norms and privileges,” (p. xii) impacted their understanding of themselves as Deaf people as well as their awareness of unequal status in society. Many of her participants “did not realize that they had internalized audist values and that these values had altered their perception” (Gertz , 2008, p. 230). Gertz (2008) identified six critical features of how dyconscious audism impacts d/Deaf individuals:

- Disempowers Deaf people from becoming liberated;
- Disables Deaf people from expressing Deaf cultural pride;
- Intimidates Deaf people and limits their promotion of the Deaf perspective;
- Hinders Deaf people from attaining quality education;
- Denies Deaf people full acceptance of ASL;
- Weakens Deaf people in the development of their Deaf identity.

In Gertz's (2003) study, the ways that participants experienced dyconscious audism were in their lack of support for ASL, acceptance that there is a cure for deafness, unwillingness to participate in the Deaf community for fear that it would limit them and fear of offending and challenging hearing people's authority to name a few. Audism has an internalized impact similar to racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression; however, this is not how the story ends for all d/Deaf people. Some individuals within the d/Deaf community are resisting and Black d/Deaf students are finding ways to fight back.

**Resistance.** *Pests to Exterminate* By Guie C. Cooke (as cited in Gannon, 1981, p. 213)

-1-

With mouthing that would frighten one

She tries to make us read her lips.

She swears that only harm is done

With graceful signs and finger-tips!

-2-

He says that everyone who hears

Finds the all-talking shows are best.

Well, let the fools wear out their ears!

Like ours, someday, they may have rest.

-3-

There is a pest we can't endure:  
 He is the one who has a cure,  
 And comes around with this or that.  
 Politely, we pass him his hat.  
 (If there's a cure we'd like to try  
 It's socking him upon the eye!)

-4-

This one of us exterminate!  
 The pest who mourns his own sad fate,  
 And, doing naught, tells all he'd do  
 If he could hear. Thank God, there's  
 few!

*The Washington Deaf Record 1938*

What does resistance look like? Guie Cooke wrote this poem in 1938 sharing the complexities and multiple layers of audism. He highlighted resisting oralism to navigating the dominant hearing culture to loving himself in spite of the pathologization of being d/Deaf as well as managing the internalized or dysconscious audism within the d/Deaf community when he stated, "This one of us exterminate! The pest who mourns his own sad fate" (as cited in Gannon, 1981, p.213). Ballenger (2013) claimed, "The perception of audism is a motivating and unifying force in the deaf community...The community of deaf and hard of



hearing individuals has claimed audism as a social justice issue” (p. 124); this trend can be clearly seen over the past 30 years.

The resistance to audism within higher education can be seen on micro and macro levels. One of the most visible resistance efforts against audism was the Deaf President Now (DPN) protest at Gallaudet University in 1988 (Gallaudet University, 2013; Jordan, 2008). Students, faculty, staff, and alumni protested, held sit-ins, gathered for rallies, and shut down the campus until the Board of Trustees listened to their demands (Gallaudet University, 2013). Elisabeth Zinser, the seventh president, stepped down after only holding the position for six days (Jordan, 2008). I. King Jordan was appointed as Gallaudet’s first Deaf president and stated:

DPN’s success in achieving the appointment of Gallaudet’s first deaf president and first deaf board chair, along with the board’s decision that going forward 51 percent of the board must be deaf, was strong testimony to the abilities of deaf people.

(Jordan, 2008, p. 179)

The DPN movement was the beginning of an important transition for Gallaudet. The climate changed, academic achievement improved, the diversity of the student population increased, faculty and staff received better training and benefits, and the institution became an active member of the higher education system (Jordan, 2008).

Other forms of resistance were the establishments of Deaf Studies programs and the recognition of American Sign Language (ASL) as a real language. In 2010, ASL was ranked the fourth most studied language on college and university campuses (Myers & Fernandes, 2009). Online and community activist organizations have been formed and students have formed ASL clubs in high schools and colleges throughout the country. The Registry of

Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc. has increased the education required for all interpreters (Trusty, 2008). As of 2016, every certified interpreter will have at least a bachelor's degree (Trusty, 2008). This requirement increases the interpreters' familiarity with higher education and their overall knowledge; thus, it improves the services for all d/Deaf people—particularly d/Deaf college students. Most importantly, resistance has happened on a micro level as d/Deaf students have succeeded in spite of audism. Relying on their families and friends for support and encouragement, taking advantage of support services such as tutoring as well as fully engaging in all the opportunities college has to offer, d/Deaf students are thriving. Claudia Gordon, the first Black d/Deaf lawyer who works in the White House; C. J. Jones, Black d/Deaf actor and comedian; Juliette Low, Black d/Deaf and the founder of the Girl Scouts; and Lindsay Dunn, Black d/Deaf scholar, are all counternarratives and examples of d/Deaf people who have navigated and resisted audism and now serve as role models for the greater d/Deaf and hearing world.

Using what is known about Black and d/Deaf students' experiences, persistence factors, racism, and audism, in the last section, I discuss what literature and research has been produced regarding Black d/Deaf students' experiences in college and how they are persisting to graduation.

### **Black d/Deaf Students in Higher Education**

No, “We are all deaf,” but “We’re White deaf and you are Black deaf, and there is a difference.” A lot of these African American deaf students are not prepared for that, not so much the academics. You are not able to be Black at Gallaudet.

You can be deaf, but you can't be Black.”

(Borum, 2012, p. 12)

Hairston and Smith (1983), in their book, *Black and Deaf in America: Are We That Different?* stated that there are approximately two million Black people with some form of hearing loss, and of those 22,000 are profoundly deaf. This number has changed since the 1980s, and Black d/Deaf people make up approximately 8% or 3 million of the total Black population (U.S. United States Census Bureau, 2011). The question of how different are White and Black d/Deaf students or Black hearing and Black d/Deaf students greatly depends on the individual student and his or her lived experiences. Black d/Deaf students share characteristics and values specific to the d/Deaf community, such as hearing loss and communication barriers, as well as facing issues that are unique to the plight of the Black community, such as historical and systematic racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Matsuda, Lawrence III, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). We live in an inherently racist society (Tate, 1997), and many Black and d/Deaf Americans experience similar challenges, such as a lack of coalition building within the community, the need for role models in education (Aramburo, 1989; Foster & Kinuthia, 2003; Parasnis & Fischer, 2005), continued barriers to success in employment, and interpretations of legislation that seem to undermine intended outcomes (Foster & Kinuthia, 2003; Tate, 1997). The issues I address that seem most salient to Black d/Deaf students' education and academic success are intersectionality and layers of oppression, role models and mentors, as well as challenges within the current K-12 Deaf education system.

### **Intersectionality and Layers of Oppression**

A Black respondent in Foster and Kinuthia's (2003) study on d/Deaf Students of Color said, "No it doesn't matter if you are Black deaf or just Black hearing. Being a Black person period, is difficult... when a person looks at you, they look at your skin color first" (p.

279). However, other scholars have stated that Black d/Deaf students are multicultural (Humphries, 1993) and must “undergo a dual socialization process...learn[ing] the cultures, attitudes, and beliefs of each group” (Wolbers, 2005, p. 185). This is also true for any other social identity they may embrace including gender, sexual orientation, and more. Kimberly Crenshaw (1989) first coined the concept of intersectionality to more deeply explain the lived experiences of Black women related to feminist theory, policy, and systemic oppression. Crenshaw (1989) and other scholars (Collins, 2000; McCall, 2005) have defined the concept of intersectionality as the ways social identities come together at an axis and create a new combined identity and lived experience as well as contributing to the ways in which a person may experience multiple systemic social inequities. Crenshaw (1989) stated, “The intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism; any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated” (p. 40). This too can be said about Black d/Deaf students. It is not possible to separate race and the d/Deaf experience or any other social identity Black d/Deaf individuals may have. Because of these multiple identities, some d/Deaf students may also navigate multiple forms of oppression. Racism does not overshadow audism, but because of the intersection of race and the d/Deaf experience (and other identities), these isms affect a person differently, “compound[ing] the hardship and increase[ing] the barriers to success” (Aramburo, 2005, p. 16). There may be situations where one form of oppression is more easily identifiable, such as when a d/Deaf person is in a majority hearing space and communication is not accessible. However, there may be other situations when it is harder to separate out whether a discriminatory incident is because of either their racial, d/Deaf, or both identities. The epigraph, “You are not able to be Black at

Gallaudet. "You can be deaf, but you can't be Black" (Borum, 2012, p. 12) demonstrates the multiple layers and complexity of discrimination and the intersections of identity. One might assume that Gallaudet would be the safest and the most open place for all d/Deaf students given the historical and current discrimination felt by the d/Deaf community within the U.S. educational system. However, issues of power and privilege and dominant and subordinate oppression exist within the d/Deaf community as well (Simms et al., 2008).

It is critical to examine the intersectionality of Black d/Deaf students because it impacts educational success. Awad (2007) stated, "Given the presumed connection between identity development and academic outcomes for African Americans, an important variable that may be related to academic achievement for African Americans is racial identity" (p. 189). Thus, if a Black d/Deaf student enters school and teachers as well as administrative support only address their auditory needs, then that child is not being fully developed. Educators often do not understand the importance of d/Deaf students learning about all of their social identities, the role this understanding about self plays in educational success, and the impact of culturally sensitive curriculum.

### **Role Models/Mentors**

The Black d/Deaf community, though connected to the d/Deaf community and the Black community, also has its own distinct culture and challenges. Hairston and Smith (1983) said that a major problem within the Black d/Deaf community has been "unfavorable self-image...this is where the real difference lies [between Black and White d/Deaf people]--in the measure of self-esteem. Poor self-image is more pronounced in young Black deaf persons" (p. 79). The question is: *What is happening?* The media and pop culture produces negative and toxic images of the Black community consistently, and the challenge has been

to find enough positive images, people, and narratives to counter the masternarrative. However, most Black d/Deaf children do not get an opportunity to connect with the d/Deaf community broadly and the Black d/Deaf community specifically. There is a lack of d/Deaf role models and limited awareness of Black d/Deaf people who are successful. In addition, the majority of d/Deaf children are born into hearing families (Anderson & Miller, 2004/2005; Foster & Kinuthia, 2003) meaning d/Deaf children are first exposed to hearing ways of being. These ways of being are what become normalized and what some children strive to become even though it is not possible for most. Related to these points, Hairston and Smith (1983) further explained:

Hundreds of Black deaf children never had the opportunity to talk with or meet Black deaf adults during their formative years. They undergo the challenge of having to get along in a hearing environment without role models who can ease their adjustment, give them pride, encouragement, and offer a few tricks of the trade on getting through. (p. 57)

Although there are exceptions, collectively within the educational system, Black d/Deaf students are not pushed to aspire for greatness and are given little encouragement to succeed academically. Similar to hearing Black students, role models and mentors play an integral role in the college success of d/Deaf Black students. There have been a few studies on d/Deaf People of Color and mentoring/role models in postsecondary education (Leake, Burgstahler, & Izzon, 2011; Parasnis & Fischer, 2005; Parasnis, Samar, & Fischer, 2005) as well as narratives written about the positive impact of mentors/role models in helping d/Deaf People of Color succeed (Anderson & Miller, 2004/2005). In Parasnis and Fischer's (2005) study, they focused on the perception of d/Deaf Faculty and Staff of Color on the education

of d/Deaf college Students of Color at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID). Within their findings, d/Deaf Students of Color connecting to mentors and role models (used interchangeably) rose as an important theme. Two participants shared why role models were important:

Role models are essential and critical. (1) Having that kind of representation on campus demonstrates a real commitment on the part of the Institute. (2) Having role models also creates a climate of comfort and a sense of belonging. (3) Having role models inspires self-confidence. (Parasnis & Fischer, 2005, p. 344)

It's important to see other students like you doing well, also to see people like yourself in authority, with high expectations from teachers... That tells students that someone like them has succeeded. If there's only one, that is seen as an exception, "odd." If you see more, you realize it isn't odd. (Parasnis & Fischer, 2005, p. 345)

Other faculty addressed the need for students to have people in their lives who were kindred spirits or similar to them and could demonstrate how to navigate being different. One faculty stated,

The hearing world tends to have false assumptions about deaf people as a whole. If you combine this with looking different you have a double whammy. It's hard enough for hearing, but worse for deaf. One can see how those models succeeded despite being Black. (Parasnis & Fischer, 2005, p. 345)

From the student perspective, Parasnis et al. (2005) conducted a mixed qualitative and quantitative study that examined d/Deaf college students' attitudes toward a variety of racial/ethnic diversity-related issues, including role modeling at RIT and NTID. Working with 157 respondents, composed of Blacks (34), Asians (29), Latinos (18), and Whites (76),

they discovered that Black d/Deaf students “rated the importance of ethnic role models higher than that of deaf role models” (Parasnis et al., 2005, p. 53). This result is a little different than the responses of Black hearing students as the race/ethnicity was not as important to them as having a faculty mentor who was culturally sensitive and student-centered (Guiffrida, 2005; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). The respondents who were enrolled solely in NTID believed that faculty and staff equally supported all students (d/Deaf, Students of Color, d/Deaf Students of Color; Parasnis et al., 2005). Those cross-registered in RIT and NTID felt that d/Deaf Students of Color were the least likely to be mentored by faculty and staff (Parasnis et al., 2005). One Black female, cross-enrolled student, pointed out the shortage of d/Deaf Faculty of Color who were able to serve as role models stating, “The NTID environment needs more minority professors! NOT janitors & custodian workers” (Parasnis et al., 2005, pp. 56-57).

The lack of available role models/mentors is a continuous issue throughout d/Deaf students’ educational experience, and students as well as faculty and staff have confirmed the importance of these relationships, but mentoring is not black and white and does not mean the same thing to everyone. Encouraging, serving as an example, providing emotional and educational support, and providing help in negotiating service systems were examples from Leake et al.’s (2011) study of how mentors help. Leake et al. focused on the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse students with [dis]abilities and the role mentoring played in their success in postsecondary education and transitioning into careers. Data were collected through interview surveys with 198 people of whom 27.8% were Black and identified as a person with a [dis]ability, 12 focus groups in which 3.3% of the 60 members were d/Deaf, and case studies with 11 participants. The most interesting finding from this



study was the importance of informal mentoring, particularly from parents, close relatives, and teachers. Leake et al. (2011) stated:

Very few of the focus group members, and none of the case study participants, described having been involved in formal mentoring relationships. This result raises the possibility that poor transition outcomes for many youth with disabilities may be partly related to the lack of informal mentors and role models among those with whom they routinely associate. (pp. 126-127)

Ultimately, mentoring/role models are effective and critical to the academic, social, and career success of Students of Color with [dis]abilities broadly (Leake et al., 2011). Students are looking for Black mentors, more role models in authority, informal and organic relationships, family support, and culturally sensitive teachers to guide and support them throughout their educational experience. These individuals are critical, and these studies all contribute to our continuous understanding of what aids Black d/Deaf student to successfully persist through college.

### **Deaf Education K-12**

“Do you think that we're products of our environments?”

I think so, or maybe products of our expectations.”

(Wes Moore, personal communication, November 15, 2013)

Black d/Deaf students rely on their families and extended relatives for support. In addition, the Black family is the first connection Black d/Deaf students have to understanding their identities, developing values around education, and building a sense of resilience to navigate society's discrimination. Hairston and Smith (1983) believed that many Black families provided their Black d/Deaf children with a variety of strengths including a strong

work and achievement orientation, religious ideals, and strong kinship bonds, which encouraged students to have solid aspirations for their future. Although this outcome is the reality for some Black d/Deaf students, other students from lower socioeconomic or less educated families remain undiagnosed or misdiagnosed with a hearing loss for a longer period of time and are then delayed in their language and academic development (Wolbers, 2005).

The Black family is not the only key player in Black d/Deaf students' educational success, as the educational system has a huge influence. Simms et al. (2008) stated, "The politics of authority structures, racism, audism, and oppressive language and academic policies often work against deaf children's early struggle to acquire language, an academic foundation, and a healthy cultural identity" (p. 394). There is a larger system of oppression within the d/Deaf education pipeline, and d/Deaf students are being crushed by the seemingly low expectations that plague the educational environment (Stuart & Gilchrist, 2005). This concern speaks to Wes Moore's question of whether individuals are a product of their environment or a product of the expectations individuals and others have of them. I would argue that individuals are a healthy mixture of both.

The pressure of low expectations is intensified for Black d/Deaf students, as they have multiple intersecting nondominant identities (Stuart & Gilchrist, 2005; Williamson, 2007). More than 60% of d/Deaf children are enrolled in mainstream or speech and auditory programs in preschool, but the percentage of students who are actually successful in these programs drops to 30% by middle school and high school (Simms et al., 2008). This decline is an issue because these programs do not allow or teach sign language; thus, many "early classrooms fail to provide early adequate exposure to a complete linguistic code, with the

result being impoverished language skills” (Simms et al., 2008, p. 386). A lack of language skills impedes socializing and prevents students from succeeding in the “battery of tests” (Dunn, 2005, p. 167) they must pass to matriculate through school successfully. Dunn (2005) stated, “What we learn is not necessarily a problem; it’s how we are taught that often determines what or how much we learn” (p. 167). This challenge often leaves Black d/Deaf students tracked into vocation programs (Stuart & Gilchrist, 2005) and graduating from high school with certificates rather than diplomas, which make them ineligible for many jobs and admission into college (Aramburo, 2005; Simms et al., 2008).

Although K-12 education has become more conscious of the importance of culturally sensitive teaching and the need to incorporate ethnic minority and d/Deaf perspectives and history into the curriculum, we have a long ways to go (Wolbers, 2005). This challenge is evident in the limited number of Teachers of Color and d/Deaf teachers we have working with d/Deaf children (Andrews & Jordan, 1993). These factors have meant that collectively the Black d/Deaf community has not progressed economically or academically as well as the Black hearing community within the last 10-15 years (Aramburo, 2005; Stuart & Gilchrist, 2005). Some Black d/Deaf students are struggling in the K-12 educational system, are not adequately prepared for the workforce (Simms et al., 2008; Stuart & Gilchrist, 2005), and are attending college in smaller numbers (Williamson, 2007). Consequently, these outcomes have led to Black d/Deaf people being faced with higher levels of poverty and relying on the government for assistance (Schley et al., 2011).

These data present one set of truths and perspectives regarding the challenges and inequities faced by Black d/Deaf students, and they give us a clearer picture of the mountains and hurdles Black d/Deaf students may confront as they navigate the educational system, but

this is not the full picture. Focusing solely on negative information is often not the most helpful; as Williamson (2007) found, there is “no evidence on improved educational achievement of African American Deaf and hard of hearing students based on recommendations from deficit research” (p. 3). Using a deficit perspective, the limited research addressing Black d/Deaf students mostly focuses on “(a) the characteristics of the population, (b) factors that contribute to failure, and (c) low academic outcomes” (Williamson, 2007, p. 3). However, some Black d/Deaf students have the skills, support, will, and cultural capital to push past, jump over, climb up, and knock down what some would call insurmountable odds. In the next section, I address what is known about Black d/Deaf student persistence and success.

### **Black d/Deaf Student Persistence**

“The lesson learned is that often all it takes is one person to make a difference in the direction one chooses in life.”

(Anderson & Miller, 2004/2005, p. 382)

There is a dearth of research on the persistence of Black d/Deaf college students. There is one study that focused on protective factors or “buffers, insulators, and modifiers that reduce the impact of risk on healthy development and academic achievement” (Williamson, 2007, p. xiii) and how these factors contributed to Black d/Deaf students’ ability to learn resiliency in order to successfully transition through a four-year institution. Using a resilience framework, Williamson (2007) found that parents were students’ major protective factor, followed by their peers in college. In this study, Williamson also discovered that there was little interrelationship between the various protective factors (parents, colleges, and community organizations) within students’ lives, yet they still

succeed. The epigraph above illustrates that the support of one person can make a huge difference in whether a student believes college is an option for him or her, drops a class, joins a student organization, or persists through college. The ability to persist was a conscious act and students had to continuously choose to keep moving forward, navigating obstacles with the support of protective factors. Williamson (2007) found that the students she interviewed not only valued education, but were willing to do whatever it took to make it to graduation. This quality of never giving up, she believed, was a lifelong process that could be taught, but needed to occur at a young age and be continued throughout college. Recommending that resilience programs be established, Williamson (2007) stressed that these programs needed to do the following:

- Unify the family, pre and postsecondary schools, and community organizations efforts;
- Promote understanding and respect of African American culture, Deaf culture, and other cultures;
- Focus on academic achievement as well as healthy social and emotional development;
- Hire diverse staff that includes African American administrators, teachers, and staff to run the program (p. 2).

Williamson (2007) believed it was important for future research on Black d/Deaf students to go beyond just identifying risk factors and to understand that Black d/Deaf students were a heterogeneous group. Importantly, Williamson (2007) said more research was needed to understand the factors that contributed to the likelihood of Black d/Deaf students graduating from predominantly White high schools, colleges, and universities.

### **The Study's Contributions**

“Don't be another sad statistic. Go as far as you can and don't let anybody ever tell you that you can't.”

(Stuart & Gilchrist, 2005, p. 62)

Wendy Armstrong, the first and only Black d/Deaf female campus police officer at Gallaudet University, stated the epigraph above, and I believe it is an appropriate transition from the literature review into Chapter 3, the research layout. From this point on, this study does not focus solely on “sad statistics” or the ways in which Black d/Deaf students are not succeeding (Stuart & Gilchrist, 2005, p. 62). Rather, in this study, I examine how those who have been successful were able to do so. Through Black d/Deaf alumni's stories, readers can get a better understanding of what was successful, painful, challenging, exciting, and motivating, and ultimately obtain insight into the tools these individuals used to matriculate and graduate from college. The following research questions guided this process:

1. How do Black d/Deaf alumni make meaning of their experiences as Black d/Deaf undergraduate students?
2. How did Black d/Deaf alumni experience racist and audist microaggressions while navigating their undergraduate education?
3. How did Black d/Deaf alumni use aspects of Black d/Deaf community cultural wealth to resist racial and audist microaggressions in order to persist to graduation?

I address the problems on which this study was built, including the lack of demographic information regarding d/Deaf students who are persisting to graduation, the low number of Black d/Deaf students entering and graduating, the essentialization of the d/Deaf

experiences as White, the invisible voices of the Black d/Deaf community, and the limited amount of scholarship on Black d/Deaf people. This study expands on Williamson's (2007) work by focusing specifically on college alumni who attended predominantly White colleges and universities and continuing to debunk the homogenous myth within the Black community. In addition, I examined more than risk factors, but rather the skills that students used to aid them in transitioning and persisting through college. With this study, I also contribute to the larger body of higher education literature by highlighting the interectionality of race (Black) and ability (d/Deaf) of students, examining the ways in which race and other forms of oppression (audism) impact college students' ability to persist, and adding a diverse perspective to the larger body of persistence literature.

Chapter 2 highlighted the most relevant literature pertaining to this study and laid a foundation on which the study was built. The scholarship was organized into four areas. The first area was historical snapshots of Black d/Deaf education, offering a perspective from the past. Current issues are built on the backs of discriminatory laws and practices that directly impact the educational system today. The second area was Black students' college experiences with persistence and resistance, as well as an overview of racial microaggressions. There have been a variety of studies conducted that offer insight into the "Black experience," and what aids or hinders students in persisting ,such as racial microaggressions, but most of those studies do not focus on Black students with (dis)abilities broadly or Black d/Deaf students specifically. The third area was d/Deaf students' college experiences with persistence and resistance, as well as an overview of audist microaggressions. There is less literature regarding d/Deaf students and persistence, and the impact of audist mircroaggressions, but d/Deaf students, unlike hearing students, must

navigate their majority hearing campuses in different ways. They have become more aware of what accommodations they need to be academically and socially successful, as well as manage the transition to college. The last area was Black d/Deaf education today, in which I focused on intersectionality, role models and mentors, and the K-12 educational system. With limited literature available on Black d/Deaf college students, this is the area in which this study contributed the most. I used Williamson's (2007) study of resilience and transition as a foundation for this study. Reviewing the literature further illuminated the challenges faced by Black d/Deaf college students and the gaps in the literature. Despite issues of racism and audism, some Black d/Deaf people, through tremendous determination, will, and drive, are achieving. Keeping this sentiment in mind, I embraced a strength-based approach to guide this study, expand upon current research, and contribute to a larger body of higher education literature.

In Chapter 3, I discuss how the research was conducted, including the philosophical and epistemological underpinnings, theoretical and analytical frameworks, methodology and methods, participant criteria and recruitment, as well as quality criteria.



## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN

The eminence of a strong qualitative study is measured on its essence of goodness (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). Elements of goodness include intentionally selecting and linking the epistemology and theoretical framework to a philosophically appropriate methodology (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Jones et al., 2006). The researcher must be transparent and reflexive about power, his or her positionality, and his or her role in the co-construction of knowledge (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Jones et al., 2006). Additionally, the researcher must clearly articulate data collection methods and analysis while ultimately conducting purposeful research that transitions into practical action through solid professional recommendations (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Jones et al., 2006). In Chapter 3, I lay out the research design while addressing issues of goodness throughout. I begin this chapter by exploring my own assumptions and perceptions of the work followed by the philosophical paradigm and epistemological underpinnings of the study. My theoretical frameworks, critical race theory and critical Deaf theory, serve as a bridge between my epistemology and my analytical frameworks, the theory of microaggressions and Black d/Deaf community cultural wealth. Next, I discuss hermeneutic phenomenology, the methodology, in detail, followed by the participant selection process, data collection, and data analysis, which are in line with the overall purpose of this study. I conclude this chapter by discussing quality criteria, addressing issues of authenticity and how the data will be presented.

### Researchers' Assumptions--"This I Believe"

"Never has the need for personal philosophies of this kind been so urgent.

Your belief, simply and sincerely spoken."

(Help, Inc. , 1965, para. 7)

*It was my first professional housing job, and I was anxiously awaiting Resident Advisors (RA) training. Heading back to my office to complete a few last minute tasks, I saw one of my new Deaf RAs unpacking her car and stacking her belongings along the side of the building. I remember looking down at my hands, praying they would not fail me. I had taken two years of American Sign Language (ASL) as an undergraduate student, but had little conversational practice with the language. I had random signs chaotically ricocheting in my head, and I hoped as I got closer something welcoming, friendly, and most importantly understandable would be communicated. I made it through that moment with a brief conversation including--hello, how are you, looking forward to seeing you tomorrow--and then I was off to my office. I had no idea at that time in my life that a seed of passion for working with and within the Deaf community was planted or how much I would grow in understanding hearing privilege, Deaf culture, language development, and more. I had several awkward moments and communication bobbles throughout my first job, but I kept showing up. I constantly advocated for my d/Deaf students' needs around communication. I continued to educate myself on the issues, and I repeatedly pushed hearing individuals to listen more closely. I started listening more closely... to d/Deaf students, faculty, and staff. As a person who had predominantly been pushed to only see my own subordinate identities--Black, woman, lesbian, first generation college student, etc.--for the first time, I was consciously a part of a dominant culture. I was hearing.*

After several years of working with the d/Deaf community in different capacities including as a student affairs practitioner within student housing; internationally as a volunteer at Deaf residential schools in Jamaica and Ghana; and now within my research, I have come to several assumptions or beliefs about d/Deaf people and my work with and within the community, which I believe deeply impacted this study. Jones et al. (2006) stressed the importance of the researcher's reflection process on maintaining goodness, as it has implications on data analysis and presentation; thus I offer these three condensed questions that should be addressed: (1) Why is it that I am engaged in the present study? (2) What personal assumptions do I bring with me to this study? (3) What is my relationship with those in the study?

Searching for a way to answer these questions, I turned to the artistic outlet of "This I Believe," an international essay project that was birthed from a 1950s radio series hosted by Edward R. Murrow (Help, Inc., 1965). The project originally asked listening viewers to write and then record "nothing less than a statement of [their] personal beliefs, of the values [that] rule [their] thought[s] and action" (Help, Inc., 1965, para. 1). They were looking for what people lived by from the position of the "I" and not the "we." The epigraph that started this section is one of the criteria in which people then and now are asked to share their "personal philosophies," "simply and sincerely spoken" in intimate ways using their own words and vanecular. I used these criteria as a guide to answer the researcher reflection questions in transparent ways as this is the level of vulnerability that I asked of my participants.

### **Why Do I Engage?**

I believe as an educated Black woman I am obligated to care for, uplift, speak up for, celebrate with, and research the diversity that lies within the Black experience.

I believe that I have been led to work with, advocate among, and do research with and within the Deaf community by a power much larger than myself. I believe my exposure to the Deaf community and American Sign Language is not a coincidence, but a part of a much larger calling and purpose in my life.

I believe there is not enough research done on the experiences of d/Deaf students and higher education as it relates to culture, intersectionality, and larger systemic issues of oppression.

I believe d/Deaf Black students matter.

### **What Personal Assumptions Do I Bring?**

I believe d/Deaf Black students are fully capable of succeeding in college if given solid educational opportunities, if provided access to communication resources (interpreters, real time caption, video phones, etc.), and if ignorance about Deaf cultures, communities, and needs are addressed within the educational system.

I believe in intersectionality and that identity is fluid and ever changing based on the environment, personal development, and exposure to life and differences. While I am focusing on the intersection of race and d/Deaf experiences, I believe that all d/Deaf students possess a variety of multiple identities that intersect and impact their college experiences.

I believe that racism and audism are socially constructed, have historical roots, and impact the lives of Black people and d/Deaf people.

I believe that strength based research is the most appropriate approach to understanding d/Deaf students' needs and creating systemic change.

I believe my research will create awareness, will make a difference, will have an impact, and will inform new ways of working with d/Deaf Black students.

### **What is my Relationship with the Participants?**

I believe that even though I am a signer, I am still a hearing person who is a part of a dominant group that currently and historically has oppressed individuals within the d/Deaf community; thus, I have to take more time and care to build trust and rapport with the participants.

I believe the participants and I have more in common than we have differences, and we will learn from each other and co-construct truth together.

I believe the participants are friends I have not met yet.

I believe I am accountable to the participants to facilitate socially just, transparent, and collaborative research.

### **The Philosophical Paradigm and Epistemological Underpinning**

"It has been long recognized among deaf people that as long as hearing people continue to determine what quality of education our deaf children receive, we will never be free of oppression."

(Dunn, 2005, p. 166)

This study was shaped by my beliefs that there are multiple truths; thus, the ways in which individuals make meaning out of their lives is impacted by historical happenings, constructed by issues of power and privilege, and informed by their interactions with others.

The beginning epigraph is an example of this belief, as Dunn (2005) alluded to the historical oppression that d/Deaf people have faced at the hands of hearing people related to their freedom to make choices about their lives and their children's lives and to be seen as competent people. This study is based on the philosophical paradigm or basic belief system of constructivism. Guba and Lincoln (1994) stated, "Inquiry paradigms define for inquirers what it is they are about, and what falls within and outside the limits of legitimate inquiry" (p.180). Constructivism is about the alterability of reality and embracing multiple and sometimes conflicting truths (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It allows for the findings within this study to be co-created between myself and the participants throughout the whole research process. It does not support static thinking, consensus building around truth, or a hierarchy of truth (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

To meet the criterion of goodness, the inquiry paradigm and epistemology must be complementary (Jones et al., 2006) as they build the foundation in which the study rests and "provide a context or broad map for the research process" (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002, p. 451). A constructivism paradigm is in line with the ways of knowing that inform this study because similar to other minoritized epistemologies, such as Feminist and Black epistemology; Deaf epistemology (DE) seeks to understand the world from the individuals that live the experiences, d/Deaf people (Paul & Moores, 2012). A Deaf-centered perspective has been influenced by critical and cultural theories (Paul & Moores, 2010). As stated by Holcomb (2010), "the epistemology of the minority consists of theories of knowledge created by members, about members' modes of knowing, for the purpose of liberating members" (p. 471).

Proponents of Deaf epistemology state that knowledge is socially constructed; thus, centering d/Deaf voices, d/Deaf ways of operating in the world, and using personal accounts to document knowledge (Holcomb, 2010; Paul & Moores, 2012) is paramount. This study focuses on the constructed and situated knowledge of Black d/Deaf alumni, who may share partial truths and realities that have been informed by historical happenings, oppression, and interactions with others. As Moosa-Mitha (2005) explained, “It is not possible for someone to know what it feels like to be racialized [or disabled ] unless one has had the experience of being racialized [or disabled ] and even then, there are differences within the experiences” (p. 66). In line with a constructivism paradigm, this epistemology is anti-essentialist and makes no claims that there is one d/Deaf way of being or knowing. Parasnis (2012) stated:

There is little reason to believe, and certainly little or no objective research, to support, the idea that multiple dimensions of racial, ethnic, linguistic, and social diversity are not potent and interactive factors that may shape unique forms of complex Deaf identities and lead to diverse personal epistemologies within the Deaf community. (p. 65)

This epistemology is vital to understanding the experiences Black d/Deaf alumni had as undergraduate students because it is flexible enough to allow being d/Deaf and other intersecting identities to co-exist in the center. Though society may see Black d/Deaf people as Black first, through communication they will realize they are also d/Deaf (Aramburo, 1989).

Although Deaf epistemology focuses on non-deficit research and methodologies, it also values medical and cultural views on the d/Deaf experience. The medical view focuses on hearing loss and ways to fix deafness, while the cultural view focuses on Deaf identity,

the use of sign language, and Deaf community and culture (Paul & Moores, 2012). Because the d/Deaf community is diverse and there is no one way to see or experience being d/Deaf, both views have produced valuable knowledge for the Deaf community. There is also no way to take the d/Deaf community out of a majority hearing world. The world d/Deaf people understand is both consciously and subconsciously co-constructed with hearing people. Sometimes that co-construction comes from a place of oppression and discrimination and other times it is co-constructed from a place of support and advocacy. With this contradiction being acknowledged, issues of oppression can be directly addressed, as Deaf epistemology has created a lens through which “to describe assumptions and attitudes of audiocentricism as privilege exhibited by most of the dominant hearing majority” (Eckert & Rowley, 2013, p. 104).

The support services Black d/Deaf students need to be successful in college rely heavily on higher education practitioners and faculty understanding both the d/Deaf and racial aspects of students’ identities. Language, how a d/Deaf student learns, not focusing on deficit models, and understanding the unique experiences of d/Deaf students are critical to the type of experiences Black d/Deaf students are having and how colleges and universities can best support their growth (Holcomb, 2010) and aid them in persisting to graduation.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Angel Ramos shared:

They had selected about 20 leaders to speak out in support of the [Gallaudet DEAF NOW] protest. I thought to myself, “There are no Black leaders up there; there are no



Hispanic leaders up there.” I am not saying this was intentional, but it was the same kind of oversight we minority Deaf experience again and again in the deaf world.

(Stuart & Gilchrist, 2005, p. 61)

Using Deaf epistemology, this study centers Black d/Deaf alumni’s college experiences, how racial and audist microaggressions influenced their experiences, and how they resisted these microaggressions to persist to graduation. There is no single theoretical lens that would offer insight into these experiences; therefore, I used a blend of critical race theory (CRT) and critical Deaf theory (Deaf Crit) as my theoretical frameworks. Bring together the tenants of CRT and Deaf Crit, I was able to create a framework that caters to d/Deaf People of Color more specifically. In the following section, I provide an overview of CRT and Deaf Crit and the importance of these frameworks to this study.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory was birthed out of critical legal theory in the 1970s and is an interdisciplinary movement that has been influenced by feminist theory, ethnic studies, Marxist theory, and more (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Basic tenants of CRT center race as a socially constructed phenomenon and assume that racism is endemic, fed by a hegemonic White supremacy ideology (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Levit & Verchick, 2006; Matsuda, Lawrence III, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). CRT also contests color-blindness and meritocracy by honoring counternarratives to help deconstruct masternarratives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Levit & Verchick, 2006). The notion of intersectionality and anti-essentialism are seen as key to CRT through the valuing of unique voices of color as legitimate truths (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). As CRT has expanded from the legal world into education it has been used to challenge dominant policies, missions, pedagogy, and

general university practices that are used to oppress certain racialized groups (Solórzano, 1998). CRT allows scholars to look at the experiences of Black students on college campuses through a lens of race and not just as students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). CRT has several tenants but the following will be the stepping stones on which this study is built: Acknowledging that racism is an epidemic; the notion of intersectionality and anti-essentialism; contesting color-blindness; validating counternarratives and unique voices of color as forms of truth (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Although CRT stems from racialized oppression, I believe there is something to be said about how other forms of oppression intersect with race and then create a different lived experience for an individual. Black d/Deaf students could be experiencing a variety of microaggressions because of their racial, d/Deaf, or other minoritized identities. Microaggressions are subtle and unconscious verbal, nonverbal, and sometimes visual acts of discrimination that happen to an individual or a group because of their race, gender, sexual orientation, or ability (Ortiz & Jani, 2010; Solórzano et al., 2000). Microaggressions oftentimes go uninvestigated, but have a real impact on the individual or group to which the aggressions are happening (Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2007). The beginning epigraph is an experience shared by a Latino instructor at Gallaudet during the Deaf NOW protest. Though he stated the lack of inclusion of d/Deaf People of Color was unintentional, it still impacted him and other d/Deaf People of Color in that moment. This is an example of a racial microaggression that stems from color blindness, or the idea that “a White person does not want to acknowledge race” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 276). Critical race theory is fundamental in starting to investigate and understand racial microaggressions experienced by Black d/Deaf alumni as undergraduates. It honors intersecting identities, but primarily centers race,

racism, and racialized incidents. Nonetheless, Black d/Deaf people do not only hold a racialized identity, but also identify as d/Deaf; thus in the next section I address Deaf Crit.

### **Critical Deaf Theory**

Critical Deaf theory (Deaf Crit) centers issues of audism and is a framework in which d/Deaf identity is centered. Critical Deaf theory has been defined as a branch of CRT. Genie Gertz (2003) originally coined Deaf Crit as a result of her study with Deaf adults born and raised in Deaf families. Deaf Crit was a way to examine and talk about audistic subordination and the marginalization of d/Deaf people (Gertz, 2003). Gertz (2003) believed that the Deaf Cultural Movement was parallel to other marginalized group movements including the Black Civil Rights and Latino's Bilingual/Bicultural Movements, as they too fought against dominant ideology and historical oppression. She stated, "The Deaf community has shifted from a group of disabled people to a unique linguistic and cultural group" (Gertz, 2003, p. 418). Similar to how CRT has adopted a stance to challenge "the dominant group's linguistic and cultural snobbery, and to respect non-dominant discourses" (Gertz, 2003, p. 419) as it related to race; so too, had Deaf Crit focused on the liberation of d/Deaf individuals. Deaf Crit allows d/Deaf experiences to be centered and examined in this study as an identity with which d/Deaf people are targeted and discriminated against. Deaf Crit tenants are informed by the foundational principles of CRT and include the following: centrality and intersectionality of d/Deaf people and audism; challenge of dominant hearing ideology; commitment to social justice for d/Deaf people; centrality of d/Deaf experiential knowledge; interdisciplinary perspective to broaden the understanding of d/Deaf people (Gertz, 2003, p. 422).

In this study, I focused on the intersected Black and d/Deaf experience; thus, it is critical that CRT and Deaf Crit are combined to form the theoretical framework. Together they strengthen the theoretical foundation of the study, providing a rich structure in which both identities can be examined. Both address discriminative acts from a micro and macro lens, rooted in history as well as allowing flexibility for other intersecting identities. The following are the combined Deaf Crit and CRT tenants and definitions used in this study:

**Racism and audism are endemic.** The purpose of this study was not to prove if racism and audism are real, but the frameworks are used as justification that racism and audism are real, historically rooted, and have systemic impacts.

**Honor the intersectionality of d/Deaf People of Color.** Although this study focused on the participants' racial and d/Deaf identities, the frameworks used do not negate the fact that the participants possess multiple identities that intersect, inform, and influence their lived experiences.

**Challenge dominant hearing and White ideology.** The collective frameworks challenge the notion that all d/Deaf people are White (color blindness) and that hearing is superior to not being able to hear. This is a not a comparison study nor will hearing or White ideologies be privileged within the research process.

**Validate and center the unique voices.** In line with Deaf epistemology, the framework allows participants to speak from a racialized and d/Deaf space. Their unique stories serve as counternarratives to what is traditionally known about d/Deaf people and People of Color respectively. d/Deaf People of Color should not be essentialized, as all voices are unique and represent truth.

**Commitment to social justice for d/Deaf People of Color.** The frameworks push for action. In line with goodness, “It is not for the sake of research that we embark upon this work, but rather to improve the lives of others” (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002, p. 450). These frameworks require that this study seek out and hunt for socially just ways to conduct research, report, and act for the good of d/Deaf People of Color.

### **Analytical Frameworks**

McCall (2005) stated, “Intersectionality has introduced new methodological problems ... In a nutshell, research practice mirrors the complexity of social life, calling up unique methodological demands” (p. 1772). These unique methodological demands require that researchers think outside the box and at times use multiple frameworks to understand, analyze, and more fully grasp the experiences of multidimensional, complex, and diverse people. I used the theory of microaggressions as well as Black Deaf community cultural wealth (BDCCW), which is a blend of community cultural wealth (CCW) and Deaf community cultural wealth (DCCW) as the analytical frameworks for this study. In this section, I share an overview of the theory of microaggressions, CCW, DCCW, and BDCCW as well as the ways in which they were used to explore and make sense of the data.

### **Theory of Microaggressions**

Microaggressions have been identified and studied by a variety of scholars; thus, we know that over time, microaggressions can deeply impact students’ success in college (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2008; Sue et al., 2007). One of the purposes of this study is to determine how Black d/Deaf alumni experienced racist and audist microaggressions as undergraduate students. For this study, the theory of microaggressions

has been defined as “brief, common-place, and daily, verbal, and environmental slights and indignities directed toward [Black d/Deaf people] often automatically and unintentionally” (Sue et al., 2008, p. 329), which can be experienced on a micro or macro level. It was used to identify the audist and racial microaggressions within the participants’ stories. Once the microaggressions were identified, I continued the analysis looking for how the alumni resisted the microaggressions.

### **Community Cultural Wealth**

Community cultural wealth (CCW) uses critical race theory to critique and challenge the ways in which Pierre Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory has been interrupted and used as a deficit approach to understanding the knowledge Students of Color bring to education (Yosso, 2005). Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory states that Students’ of Color academic and social outcomes are lower than White students because they lack the social capital that is valuable within hierarchical society (Yosso, 2005). However, the social capital of White upper class students can be obtained and social mobility could be improved for Students of Color by accessing the knowledge of the upper class and attending formal schooling (Yosso, 2005).

Yosso (2005) used the five CRT tenants on which this study is also built to create the CCW model, which is a counternarrative to cultural capital and deficit theorizing, stating, “One of the most prevalent forms of racism in U.S. schools is deficit thinking” (p. 75). Cultural capital theory narrowly defines knowledge, centers White upper class hearing knowledge, and does not take into consideration the multiple ways in which d/Deaf Students of Color obtain, use, and share knowledge.

Using an interdisciplinary approach, Yosso (2005) drew from ethnic studies, sociology, linguistic studies, and others to identify six forms of capital, which make up CCW including:

- *Aspirational Capital*. “The ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (p.77);
- *Linguistic Capital*. “The intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style” (p.78);
- *Navigational Capital*. “Skills of maneuvering through social institutions” (p.80);
- *Social Capital*. “Networks of people and community resources” (p. 79);
- *Familial Capital*. “Those cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition” (p. 79);
- *Resistant Capital*. “Knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenge inequality” (p. 80).

Within CCW, each of these capitals build on each other and are a part of a dynamic process in which People of Color successfully make meaning, negotiate, and navigate their worlds (Yosso, 2005). CCW was created and has been used to look at the experiences of hearing Students of Color; thus it is unable to fully analyze the varying capitals that d/Deaf student may obtain, but has informed the creation of Deaf community cultural wealth.

### **Deaf Community Cultural Wealth**

Rooted in Yosso’s (2005) CCW, Garrow et al. (2014), defined Deaf community cultural wealth (DCCW) as “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by the [Deaf community] to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (p. 5). Similar to Students of Color, d/Deaf students have been judged and

labeled as having deficit skills needed to be academically and socially equal to hearing people. However, d/Deaf students have also developed skills to resist and persist through oppression. Garrow et al. (2014) have redefined Yosso's (2005) six capitals to more specifically fit the experiences of d/Deaf people. The following are the six forms of capital and how they are defined for DCCW (Garrow et al., 2014):

- *Aspirational Capital.* Having a desire to succeed and to achieve despite societal barriers and limiting expectations and using alternative paths to success when necessary.
- *Linguistic Capital.* Having a language or access to learn a first or second language.
- *Navigational Capital.* Having the ability and desire to step out of one's comfort zone and break down social barriers in order to succeed in oppressive spaces.
- *Social Capital.* Having support on or off campus not including people identified as family but not limited to mentors, professors, advisors, friends; someone able to guide the d/Deaf student, as well as a sense of belonging to a community.
- *Familial Capital.* Any one identified as family or someone with whom the d/Deaf student had kinship feelings and experiences and who offered the student emotional and moral support.
- *Resistant Capital.* Having the awareness that oppression is real and directly affects d/Deaf students in unique ways as well as the desire to challenge and change these inequities.



### **Black d/Deaf Community Cultural Wealth**

Similar to how CRT and Deaf Crit were blended to better address the intersection of Black d/Deaf alumni, CCW and DCCW also needed to be combined to form an analytical theoretical framework that could analyze the intersected lived experiences of the participants. The following six capitals were created using Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth and Garrow et al.'s (2014) Deaf community cultural wealth. I also used Jayakumar, Vue, and Allen's (2013) research, which focused on Black high school students who participated in a Young Black Scholars program and how this program aided them in obtaining community cultural wealth in ways their high schools were unable to teach. Their research adapted and highlighted how Black students obtained certain types of capital from their families and community. Using insights from this study along with CCW and DCCW, I created criteria for aspirational, linguistic, navigational, social, familial, and resistant capital possessed by Black d/Deaf students entitled Black d/Deaf community cultural wealth (BDCCW). The following capitals were used to analyze how the Black d/Deaf alumni who took part in this study resisted microaggressions in order to persist to graduation:

**Aspirational Capital.** This capital is “encapsulated by the notion of resilience” (Jayakumar et al., 2013, p. 557) and having the aspiration to succeed and achieve despite societal barriers and beyond limiting expectations (Garrow et al., 2014; Yosso, 2005). Also, included is the gumption to seek out, find, and act on alternative paths if barriers are unable to be broken in order to be successful, particularly within education (Garrow et al., 2014).

**Linguistic Capital.** This capital included having a language or access to learn a first or second language, including English and/or American Sign Language (Garrow et al., 2014). In addition, the ability to code-switch, such as using “a language of critical consciousness

through which to talk about oppression, [and the ability to] name and critique inequity and differential treatment” (Jayakumar et al., 2013, p. 569).

**Navigational Capital.** This capital included having the ability to maneuver through educational systems that were not created for or by Black d/Deaf people (Yosso, 2005). Having the skills and desire to step out of one’s comfort zone and break down social barriers in order to succeed in oppressive spaces (Garrow et al., 2014).

**Social Capital.** This capital included having a network of support on or off campus to assist with emotional, social, and educational resources and to help guide the student to success (Jayakumar et al., 2013; Garrow et al., 2014; Yosso, 2005). This network could include but not limited be to mentors, interpreters, professors, advisors, friends, the Black, d/Deaf, and Black d/Deaf community. This capital assists in countering “negative social images of African Americans [and d/Deaf people], particularly with regards to academic potential” (Jayakumar et al., 2013, p. 566). Social capital included having a sense of belonging to a community, but does not include individuals identified as family or kin (Garrow et al., 2014).

**Familial Capital.** This capital included family, kin, individuals who are close to kin (God parents, unofficial aunts, uncles, and cousins, neighbors, etc.), and chosen family (close friends) who offered emotional, moral, and familial support (Garrow et al., 2014). It incorporated community history, memory, and cultural intuitions (Yosso, 2005) such as passing down of cultural values (e.g., storytelling, importance of education, etc.) and creating a space in which oppression resistance behavior could be observed.

**Resistant Capital.** This capital included having the awareness that oppression is real and directly affects Black d/Deaf people in unique ways (Garrow et al., 2014). It also

included the desire and ability to learn and use oppositional skills in order to challenge and change social inequities, particularly within the educational system (Garrow et al., 2014; Yosso, 2005).

This study primarily focused on the racial and d/Deaf identities of Black d/Deaf alumni. Theoretical and analytical frameworks were needed that could more closely speak to these intersecting identities. Blending CRT and Deaf Crit as the theoretical framework in which to situate the study and theory of microaggressions and BDCCW to analyze the data, I was able to complicate and center the raced and Deaf experiences of Black d/Deaf students. Because of the historical context of both racism and audism, CRT and Deaf Crit were useful to acknowledge the racialized and d/Deaf identities of my participants as well as the systematic influence of racism and audism within higher education. These frameworks introduce a White and hearing privileged society to a new way of thinking about oppression. They also give Black d/Deaf people frameworks in which to communicate their experiences of discrimination as related to being d/Deaf and Black.

### **Methodology**

“No God’s eye view of deafness.”

(Paul & Moores, 2010, p. 3)

Goodness criteria require that the methodology is philosophically appropriate, theoretically justified, and able to aid in uncovering participants’ perspectives and stories (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of Black d/Deaf alumni while they were undergraduate students, the experiences they had with racial and audist microaggressions, and how they resisted this oppression to

persist to graduation. A phenomenological methodology was most appropriate for this study as it focuses on the lived experience, but there are many different types of phenomenological studies including heuristic, transcendental, and empirical to name a few (Moustakas, 1994).

Hermeneutic phenomenological methodology guided this study. Hermeneutic means to interpret and “interpretation is seen as critical to [the] process of understanding” (Lavery, 2003, p. 9) the lived experience. This methodology is “concerned with the life world or human experience as it is lived. The focus is toward illuminating [or interpreting meaning of] details and seemingly trivial aspects within experience that may be taken for granted in our lives” (Lavery, 2003, p. 7). There is not a lot of research that focuses on the experiences of Black d/Deaf students; thus, this methodology was appropriate as it illuminates a population of students who are often unaccounted for and disregarded. Racist and audist microaggressions are subtle and can be overlooked as trivial or brushed off as People of Color and d/Deaf people being overly sensitive (Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2007).

Hermeneutic phenomenology guides inquiry that is looking to uncover the obscure aspects of the lived experience. Its adherents also believe a person’s ability to understand his or her life and make meaning of what is happening is influenced by their historicity or background (Lavery, 2003). This study focused on Black d/Deaf alumni’s reflections on their undergraduate experiences. These experiences were influenced by their upbringing, past educational experiences, and past encounters with racism and audism. Historical components need to be taken into consideration to understand the phenomenon being studied.

Although hermeneutic phenomenology has distinct characteristics, it is similar to phenomenology in many ways. There are four critical elements for phenomenological inquiry. First, in a phenomenological study the researcher assumes that at the core of inquiry

are essences that are mutually understood and commonly experienced by participants (Patton, 2002, p. 106), but this understanding does not mean there is only one essence as it relates to hermeneutic phenomenology. Van Manen (1990) stated, “The meaning or essence of a phenomenon is never simple or one-dimensional. Meaning is multi-dimensional and multi-layered” (p. 78). The phenomena investigated in this study was Black d/Deaf alumni’s experiences with racial and audist microaggressions as undergraduate students. Some of those experiences were similar while some were very different. No two participants were exactly alike. The epigraph stated that there is no one ultimate Truth on being d/Deaf, and there is no ultimate Truth on how Black d/Deaf students experience college.

Seidman (2013) would say that a phenomenological approach tries to understand a participant’s subjective viewpoint or truth and not necessarily a specific Truth. This position is also supported by the theoretical frameworks of this study, as CRT and Deaf Crit value the unique experiences of d/Deaf People of Color and believe that multiple truths about an experience are possible and important. Second, a phenomenological study is most interested in knowing what people experience and what meaning they make of those experiences (Patton, 2002; Seidman, 2013). As the researcher, I am trying to engage with my participants in a way that allows them to “carefully, and thoroughly capture and describe how [they] experienced [the phenomenon of being a Black d/Deaf college student] – how they perceive[d] it, describe[d] it, [felt] about it, judge[d] it, remember[ed] it, [made] sense of it, and talk[ed] about it with others” (Patton, 2002, p. 104).

Third, in a phenomenological study it is important that the researcher experience the phenomenon intimately and directly (Patton, 2002). I am not a Black d/Deaf person, but my goal is to understand, investigate, and feel the phenomenon from the participants’ personal

perspectives. Unlike other phenomenological researchers, my positionality will not be bracketed out of the study, as hermeneutic phenomenology allows me to engage in a process of self-reflection in which my assumptions are embedded and are critical to the entire research process, including data collection, analysis, and synthesis (Laverty, 2003). The interaction between the researcher and the participants is the exchange that aids in construction and refining of truth for the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The co-construction of truth occurs through the reflection process as Patton (2002) stated, “Phenomenological reflection is not *introspective* but *retrospective*” (p. 104), which is the fourth component of the phenomenological approach. This study focused on Black d/Deaf alumni and not current Black d/Deaf students to better understand the racial and audist microaggressions experienced in their undergraduate education, their meaning, and how they were resisted. A person cannot reflect on and live an experience at the same time (Patton, 2002; Seidman, 2013). The methodology is directly connected to the ways in which data are collected. The next section addresses participant criteria and selection process.

### **Participant Selection**

“Nothing about Us without Us!”

(Charlton, 1998, p. 3)

The epigraph is most known for its connection to the Disability Rights Movement. It was coined at an international [dis]ability rights conference and later used at rallies around the world, as book titles, and ultimately the slogan has marked a Civil Rights Movement (Charlton, 1998). This slogan most succinctly expresses one of the most important components of this research process--The participants. Phenomenological studies typically focus on a small group of participants (Creswell, 2007); hence, I recruited a purposeful

sample of six Black d/Deaf alumni. Patton (2002) stated, “The logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding and selecting information-rich cases whose [perspectives] will illuminate the questions under study” (p. 46). Using a constructivist paradigm, uncovering and constructing truth happens between the researcher and the participant (Guba & Lincoln, 1994); thus, I needed participants who could most effectively reflect on the phenomenon under study (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Creswell, 2007). Additionally, a purposeful sample was important to this study because this technique allowed me to select a sample that best fit the participant criteria and was diverse in regard to gender, d/Deaf identity, and graduating institutions, which is in line with my theoretical framework tenants. In the following sections, I address the participant criteria and participant recruitment strategy.

### **Participant Criteria**

A criterion for goodness is selecting participants who are able to speak to the underlining phenomena of the study; thus, specific criteria were identified for the selection process (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). Participants must have identified as d/Deaf or hard of hearing as this identity was critical to the study. This study focused on the sociocultural aspects of Black d/Deaf alumni’s experiences; hence, someone who did not identify as d/Deaf did not meet the criteria for participation in this study. Black d/Deaf experiences and not the experiences of Students of Color more broadly were the focus of this study. It is problematic to aggregate all minoritized people into one identity group because ethnic groups within this country have had varying historical relationships with racism and Whiteness. Each minoritized group has its own rich culture and diversity within their community. Because this study focused on the ways in which being Black and d/Deaf were experienced

within the United States, participants must have attended a U.S. institution, but could identify as a Black immigrant. The purpose of this study was not to introduce an international component, but to not essentialize the Black d/Deaf experience as meaning you have to have been born in the U.S. to understand and/or to have felt the impact of racism and audism was also important. Also, the population size is small; so, limiting participants based on where they were born would have been a challenge for this study. In order to not essentialize all Black people's experiences, participants were asked how they identified their race within the context of Blackness including ethnic groups such as African, Black, African American, Black Caribbean, and Black Latino to name a few.

I specifically selected alumni who graduated from a four-year institution. This study did not focus on the two-year or community college experience as the purpose was to look at persistence to a bachelor's degree. The participant sample was small, so requiring that each person had attended the same university or one of a few different institutions may have challenged my ability to maintain their confidentiality. Environmental context is important in understanding student experiences and too much variety in institution type, culture, and context could have been challenging to manage; however, having participants from three different institutions added richness and diversity of perspective to the study. Lastly, this is not a comparison study; thus, it only focused on Black d/Deaf alumni. The alumni must have graduated between 2007-2013. This study focused on the alumni's undergraduate experiences, and the further a person is away from an experience the harder it may be to recall stories and feelings of that time.



## **Recruitment of Participants**

Purposeful sampling has several different strategies by which participants can be recruited; this study used snowball sampling (Patton, 2002). Snowball sampling required that I locate “information-rich key informants” (Patton, 2002, p. 237) who had access to the population on which I was focusing. The informants were critical to my study as I did not have direct access to Black d/Deaf alumni and informants helped in the beginning stages of building rapport (Fontana & Prokos, 2007). I worked with the National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA), a nonprofit organization founded in 1982 that promotes social equality, educational opportunities, and safeguard of Black d/Deaf people, as one way to connect with potential Black d/Deaf alumni (National Black Deaf Advocates, 2013). NBDA posted information about my study on their national website and sent a research announcement through their membership listserv. I also contacted d/Deaf friends and colleagues who also conduct research with the d/Deaf community. These individuals posted my research announcement on their Facebook pages and emailed it out to people who fit the participant criteria. I was able to recruit 10 potential participants, eight of whom completed the screening process and fit the participant criteria; six joined the study. In the next section, I address how data were collected.

## **Data Collection Methods**

“I believe in broken, fractured, complicated narratives, but I believe in narratives as a vehicle for truth, not simply as a form of entertainment.”

(Greenblatt, 2001, para. 1)

The methodology gives a “more specific grounding to a study’s logic, approach, and process” thus offering clarification on how data should be collected and analyzed (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002, p. 452). Phenomenological methodology draws from the experiential and lived experiences of participants and particularly investigates the essence of a particular phenomenon (Patton, 2002). The researcher must collect information from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, but there are various methods for collecting data including long interviews, conversations, action research, focus groups, and participant observation (Patton, 2002). When thinking about phenomenological methods, Lester (1999) stated, “If there is a general principle involved it is that of minimum structure and maximum depth, [with the] establishment of a good level of rapport and empathy” (p. 2). With this idea in mind and informed by phenomenology methodology, I collected data using three methods including a participant survey, a building rapport videophone meeting, and the three-series phenomenological interviews.

### **Participant Survey**

The participant survey (Appendix A) asked questions specific to three categories: identity, school, and the interview process. The identity questions uncovered demographics including race/ethnicity, d/Deaf identity, gender, and where they currently lived. The school questions uncovered where and when the participants completed their undergraduate degree, campus activity involvement, type of K-12 education obtained, and residency as a student. The interview process category covered the logistics of setting up future interviews, technology, and language preferences. The participant survey served two purposes. First, it allowed me to select a purposeful sample and to thoroughly screen the participants in order to obtain the most diverse sample possible. Second, as a nonnative American Sign Language

user and more specifically a hearing person, I used the information to get to know the participants better and to establish a context for each of them, so the interviews would run smoothly. The participant surveys were completed during the building rapport videophone meetings.

### **Building Rapport Video Meeting**

I needed to establish a positive rapport with the participants, and from a Deaf epistemology perspective, visual interactions are important (Holcomb, 2010). Making personal connections, using the participants' preferred language (a visual language; Fontana & Prokos, 2007), and sharing who I am, were all critical to the first step in relationship and trust building. At first, I had a difficult time recruiting participants, but people were more willing to set up a time to talk when they realized I was able to sign, they learned more about the project, and they got to know me better. The video meetings were conducted through Skype, videophone, and Face Time. Because the participant surveys were completed during the video meeting, I was able to determine if there would be any challenges in communicating in sign language for future interviews, test out technology, and began to better understand their subjective viewpoints or truth (Seidman, 2013) through random conversation. Narratives can be highly personal, so it was critical that I built in time throughout the research process to personally connect. During these 60-minute video meetings, I also went over the inform consent and answered any questions the participants may have had about the process or me. I shared my background and how I came to the study. If the participant met the participant criteria for the study, then a consent form was emailed to them and future online interviewing days and times were set up as well as a deadline to have the consent form returned.

## Interviews

Patton (2002) wrote about the importance of “in-depth interviews of people who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest; that is, they have ‘lived experience’ as opposed to secondhand experience” (p. 104), which ultimately helps the researcher and the participants co-construct truth and provides greater insight into what is happening for individual people related to the phenomenon under study. The “broken, fractured, complicated narratives” that Stephen Greenblatt (2001), an American literary critic, theorist, and scholar, spoke of are what makes the “lived experiences” or narratives gathered through in-depth interviews rich tales of personal truth. I used the three-series phenomenological interview method to conduct participant interviews. All three semi-structured video recorded interviews were between 90 minutes and 2 hours. Seidman (2013) recommended that interviews last no longer than 90 minutes, but there were additional circumstances that needed to be addressed. For example, time was extended for technology issues. If the internet was running slow then the connection with Skype was poor, causing the screen to be pixelated or hands to be blurry, which required the interview to move slower and adjustments to be made. Also, as a nonnative signer, I recapped periodically throughout the interview to make sure I understood participants’ stories, the emotions behind them, and the meaning they were trying to communicate to me.

The first interview focused on life history. The purpose was to “put the participant’s experience in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about him or herself” (Seidman, 2013, p. 21). This gave me insight into the participants’ educational past, their family as it connected to education, college life, personal interests, and other major lived experiences in and out of school. The second interview focused on the details of

experiences. The purpose of the second interview was “to concentrate on the concrete details of the participants’ present lived experiences in the topic area of the study” (Seidman, 2013, p. 21). This interview focused more directly on their experiences with racism and audism as undergraduate students, moments when they had been treated poorly, and the ways they navigated those situations. It also focused on their most important positive experiences throughout their undergraduate education as well as the people and situations that encouraged them to persist to graduation. The third interview focused on reflecting on meaning they had made from their experiences. The purpose of this interview was “to address the intellectual and emotional connections” between their life and the phenomenon under study (Seidman, 2013, p. 22). This interview focused on the participants’ understanding of their experiences in college, what these experiences meant to them, and how they used these experiences to persist toward graduation. They were asked to share advice for future Black d/Deaf students, their thoughts on the larger issue of undergraduate dropout rates, and what they believed they learned throughout the interview process.

I conducted all the interviews through Skype using the communication method with which my participants were most comfortable, which was American Sign Language. Each interview was scheduled up to three days apart, as this spacing gave the participants enough time to think and process in between interviews but not enough time to lose track of what they shared (Seidman, 2013). The interviews were recorded using Quick Time and a video camera. Even though all the participants selected Skype, the Quick Time program provided them the option of using multiple online video services including Google plus, Oovoo, Facebook, and more because the system recorded the whole screen. The video recording was used as a backup. In terms of building rapport, it would have been more ideal to physically

sit in the same space with the participants as they shared their stories and I shared mine (Fontana & Prokos, 2007), but this strategy was not feasible because the participants lived in six different states across the country. The online Skype interviews still allowed for face-to-face interactions, which were suitable for sharing sensitive material and were a more appropriate way to collect vulnerable information (Fontana & Prokos, 2007). This method also offered flexibility for participants. Although each interview was prescheduled, some of the participants needed to change their interview times and days for personal reasons; this was an easy accommodation to make. The night before their interview, I emailed a reminder as well as the semi-structured questions. Each participant knew that some of the questions would not be asked or that they might not be asked in that order. The purpose of emailing the questions was to assist with communication. There are regional differences in sign language, and I have a hearing accent. In line with my values and Deaf epistemology, communication and multiple ways of communicating are fundamental. Providing the questions was another way of providing access to information and aiding in the interviewing process.

In a phenomenological study, a researcher is attempting to experience the phenomenon as intimately as possible (Patton, 2002), which requires time with participants and exploring various aspects of the experience. In-depth interviews can be used “in a way that facilitates the centering of the participants’ voices that critique and contest mainstream or dominant truths and representation of the Other” (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 67).

Narratives are not only written or spoken, but can be displayed in many forms as they are complicated and rich. Thus, the participants were asked during the last interview to bring biographical material including pictures, journals, clothing items, and other personal items to

help them reflect back (Creswell, 2007) over their undergraduate time. Also, these items helped me gain greater insight into what they experienced and what it meant to them. They were asked to select items that represented something that was really important in helping them succeed as well as something that negatively impacted their success as an undergraduate student. The artifacts were not a part of the analysis, but were tools to help spark memory. After each interview, I reviewed the videos and journaled in order to follow up on misunderstandings, seek out early themes, and create follow up questions for the next interview. In the next section, I address how data were analyzed.

### **Data Analysis**

“The essence of meaning making is the art of interpretation and representation.”

(Arminio & Hultgren, 2002, p. 455)

One of the culminating components of research is the process of making meaning of large amounts of data by spending significant time reading through transcripts, identifying meaningful statements and patterns, running the data through analytical frameworks, and comparing and interpreting the data (Patton, 2002). This process concluded as the epigraph expresses, artfully bringing together and representing the experiences of participants in a way that offers greater insight into the phenomenon. Hermeneutics phenomenology has distinct steps of data analysis that vary from phenomenology. The purpose of this analysis was to “make something of a lived experience by interpreting its meaning...determin[ing] what the themes are...grasping and formulating a thematic understanding [that] is not a rule-bound process but a free act of ‘seeing’ meaning” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 79). Unlike phenomenology, the epoche or my positionality (Creswell, 2007) was not bracketed out, but

weaved throughout the analysis. How I have experienced the research process and my understanding of the phenomenon both have the ability “to broaden [my] ability to see, understand, and describe [the] phenom[on]” (Patterson & Williams, 2002, p. 39).

Although truth is co-constructed in this study between the participants and myself, it is important to be transparent about the ways in which my lived experience might have influenced and contributed to the findings as well as to acknowledge that I am not the expert of the participants’ stories (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002).

Hermeneutic analysis focuses on the uniqueness of the individual’s experience while balancing the possibilities that collectively individuals could have shared meaning around a phenomenon (Patterson & Williams, 2002). Parts of individuals’ lives create the larger phenomenon and the phenomenon influences the individuals’ lives, which may ultimately impact groups of individuals, but not necessarily everyone in the same way. The exploration of parts of the interviews (words, tone, phrases, and body language) in relation to the whole phenomenon is critical to the process of analysis and is called the hermeneutic circle (Patterson & Williams, 2002). A circle is used as a metaphor for this analysis because it is a continuous process of watching the videos and reading through each participant’s transcription summary, then using the analytical frameworks to dig deep into the individual experience and coming back to the individual video and transcript summary looking for greater and more informed insight. The practice of moving back and forth between the part and the whole is seen throughout the entire analysis process, including participants and the phenomenon, the phenomenon and theoretical framework, participant to participant, and so forth. In this type of process there is no definite end to the analysis as understanding is constantly changing because “our historical, cultural, and technological understanding



changes” (Patterson & Williams, 2002, p. 27). Ultimately, the analysis comes to a temporary conclusion until new insight, new information, or new understanding picks up from where the analysis ended. Although this process is flexible, this study went through four fluid phases of analysis using the hermeneutic circle as the foundation. The four phases include: (1) organizing system, (2) identifying meaning units, (3) thematic labeling, and (4) creative synthesis.

### **Phase 1: Organizing System**

The first phase was the organizing system, or the process of putting the data into a format in which it could be more easily examined (Patterson & Williams, 2002). As an aspect of the hermeneutic circle, the recorded interviews were reviewed throughout the interview process, so future interviews could benefit from initial findings and additional questions. The initial interviews were revisited after later interviews were completed; I was continuously searching for deep and more robust meaning. Counternarratives, centering the voices of Deaf and minoritized people and allowing people to speak for themselves, were key values within this study, given the epistemology and theoretical frameworks. In line with these values, two steps were taken to start synthesizing the interviews.

Step one, I watched each interview and wrote an interpreted summary including my audit trail notes and my interpretation of the interview. The purposes were to recap what happened; to make sure overarching ideas, meaning, and details were correct; determine gaps in the interview; and put their stories into written words. In addition, the videotaped interviews were used as three-dimensional transcriptions. The purpose of a written transcription is to have a verbatim account of the interview. This process would not be possible as American Sign Language is a visual language that draws its meaning from body

language and the movement of the hand; thus, solely relying on written transcriptions or summaries would dilute the rich stories told. The summaries and videos were used together to understand the participants' stories, analyze the data, and conduct member checks with participants.

Step two was to email the summaries and videos out to each participant to read, watch, and offer feedback, changes, or additions. These methods were used to maintain the integrity of each participant's story and to allow each participant to speak for him or herself before analyses was conducted. To make adjustments to the summaries, some participants set up Skype meetings with me to talk through changes, while others emailed me their thoughts and corrections. To remain familiar with the interview content, the summaries and videos were watched and reread several times, reviewing for clarity and meaning.

### **Phase 2: Identifying Meaning Units**

Meaning units or "segments of the interviews that were comprehensible on their own" were identified (Patterson & Williams, 2002, p. 47). The meaning units are actually statements from the participants that are relevant to the phenomenon. Three different sets of meaning units were identified. First, meaning units that spoke to how the participants' experienced college including by not limited to involvement opportunities, mentoring experiences, campus climate issues, interactions with faculty, staff, interpreters, and their peers were pulled out. These experiences were labeled *experience meaning units*. Second, using the blended tenants of CRT and Deaf Crit, I pulled out meaning units that identified incidents of racism, audism, or unjust treatment of the participants. These were labeled *incident meaning units*. Third, using the definition of microaggressions, I highlighted what the aggression (racial and audist) was within the incidents. These are labeled *aggression*

*meaning units*. The meaning units did not create a full picture on their own, but were the building blocks to more clearly understanding the participants' experiences (Patterson & Williams, 2002). As I identified meaning units, I continuously went back and reread the interview summaries and rewatched the videos to make sure I had captured all of the relevant components as this cyclical approach is in line with the hermeneutic circle.

### **Phase 3: Thematic Labeling**

The next step was thematic labeling. Each participant's experience meaning units were collected into one list of all of the units. Common experiences were brought together, while outliers were put under their own category. The themes that rose from the experience meaning units now labeled *context* as well as the incident and aggression meaning units were displayed in a story map. A story map is a way to visually organize data; it "gives a shape to individual stories and allows for a more penetrating analysis in relation to the objectives of the research" (Richmond, 2002, para. 3). Within hermeneutic analysis, visually displaying data during the analysis process is key because it allows the researcher to "see, understand, and explain the interrelationships among themes [in order to offer] a holistic and insightful interpretation" (Patterson & Williams, 2002, p. 48).

Using an excel sheet, the top row listed the following: *alumni pseudonym, context, incident, aggression, oppression, feelings, reaction, impact, and capital*. The left column listed the alumni's pseudonym name so individual stories could be identified while also being able to visually see and understand their collective experiences. First, the alumni's pseudonyms as well as the context in which the situation happened were put into the story map. Then, the incident and aggression meaning units were inserted followed by the type of oppression experienced- racism or audism. Reading through the summaries and watching the

videos, the participants' initial feelings about the incident and aggression were assessed and inserted in the story map under feelings. BDCCW was used to analyze the participants' reaction and the impact of the aggressions. How they responded, what they did, who they asked for help or the lack there of were all examined. The capital(s) the participants used were identified in the final column labeled *capital* as well as if the participant did not use a capital or resistance. If a capital was not used the participants' responses were still identified.

In line with hermeneutic phenomenology, CRT, and Deaf Crit, multiple truths can coexist within a phenomenon; thus, BDCCW did not limit the thematic labeling process as multiple capitals could be listed, and new thematic labels were created for any meaning units that do not fit within the six capitals (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Gertz, 2003; Patterson & Williams, 2002). The data were examined and sorted several times looking at the individual and the collective experience.

Also during this phase, hermeneutic conversations, or collaborative discussions took place with my peer debriefer. Van Manen (1990) stated that there are many formal and informal ways in which to work with a peer debriefer including sharing and dialoguing about the data, organizing research processing groups as well as co-analyzing data. I set up weekly dialogue meetings with my peer debriefer, Dr. William Garrow. He is a Deaf Studies faculty member who has conducted research in and with the Deaf community focusing on issues of micro, meso, and macroaggressions. He was also instrumental on the research that created Deaf community cultural wealth. We talked through my story maps as well as outlying meaning units. The purpose of these meetings was to have an open dialogue where he questioned how I came to my thematic labels and my overall thinking, helped me strengthen

weak connections between my initial analysis and my theoretical and analytical frameworks, as well as pointed out gaps I had in my analysis.

#### **Phase 4: Creative Synthesis**

The themes identified during the thematic labeling phase are “not objects or generalizations; metaphorically speaking they are more like knots in the webs of [participants’] experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 90). The final phase of analysis was creative synthesis in which the knots were brought together to show patterns, relationships, and connection to the phenomenon under study (Laverly, 2003). In order to acknowledge collective themes and outlying themes, there were two steps within the synthesis phase. The first step synthesized what happened. Using story maps, I looked at what capitals were acknowledged the most and least in the participants’ stories. I compared participants’ experiences and story maps. I used the story maps to identify what racial (Appendix B) and audist (Appendix C) microaggressions were experienced and what capitals the participants used to resist the microaggressions.

The second step synthesized what themes connect to the phenomenon. Van Manen (1990) claimed one of the most challenging aspects of phenomenological studies is “differentiat[ing] between essential themes and themes that are more incidentally related to the phenomenon under study” (p. 106). To overcome this challenge, the method of free imaginative variation was used to deeply examine what makes a phenomenon what it is and identity what a phenomenon cannot exist without (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). Free imaginative variation is a process in which “imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversal and approaching the phenomenon from

divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions” (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 97-98) are used to push pass just facts. The following two open-ended questions guided my free imaginative variation process: “a) Is this phenomenon still the same if I imaginatively change or delete this theme from the phenomenon? b) Does the phenomenon without this theme lose its fundamental meaning” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 107)? This process allowed me to get at the themes that were most salient to the all the participants’ experiences as well as identity and clarify any other possible themes that were not easily realized.

### **Quality Criteria**

“In interpretative and critical research, truth is constructed.

It is not ‘out there’ to be discovered.”

(Arminio & Hultgren, 2002, p. 456)

There is no one random Truth waiting to be found; as stated in the epigraph “truth is constructed”; thus, it is the responsibility of the researcher to establish confidence in the findings and the truth that is constructed by adhering to specific quality criterion (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). Maintaining a standard of goodness throughout this study, has “allowed for moving out from under the shadow of empirical-analytical expectations of interpretive and critical work” (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002, p. 449) and allowed the study to be judged by qualitatively appropriate standards of goodness and not quantitative rigor criteria. This study used authenticity criteria to evaluate goodness. Authenticity has five criteria: (a) fairness, (b) ontological authenticity, (c) educative authenticity, (d) catalytic authenticity, and (e) tactical authenticity (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003).

## **Fairness**

Fairness is taking the time to comprehensively examine and take into consideration multiple perspectives of the participants including their values, environments, backgrounds, social identities, histories, and culture when analyzing and sharing findings as well as constructing practical recommendations (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003). Rodwell (1998) stated, “Fairness calls for serious attention to minority reporting mechanisms” (p.108), which means contradicting and outlying perspectives are included and taken into consideration when trying to understand the larger phenomenon at hand. To meet the criteria of fairness, I used contextual descriptions within the participant descriptions (Re-presenting section) and incorporated various details within the composites to highlight the participants’ diversity, their backgrounds, and the stories they have shared (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003). I took the time to get to know the participants through the rapport building meeting and conducting the phenomenological three-series interview, which attempts to meet the criteria of prolonged engagement with the participants (Lewis-Beck, et al., 2003).

Some of the five criterion overlap and one task fulfills multiple criteria. I conducted member checks, which insured fairness and tactical authenticity (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003). Member checks were an opportunity for the participants to verify that the data collected clearly and accurately communicated their perspective. It allowed the participants to have agency or an active role in how the findings were understood and what was ultimately shared. After I translated the interviews into summaries, the participants had an opportunity to check the transcribed summaries and watch their recorded interviews in order to clarify, correct, or make additions to their interview. Guba (1981) claimed, “The process of member

checks is the single most important action inquirers can take, for it goes to the heart of the credibility criterion” (p. 85).

### **Ontological Authenticity**

Ontological authenticity is determined by how participants and the researcher have expanded, matured, and improved their consciousness and awareness of the phenomenon being studied (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003). Rodwell (1998) explained ontological authenticity as “consciousness raising that leads to greater sophistication. It may mean ‘getting smarter’ about the sociopolitical, economic, or cultural contexts that aid in the framing and bounding of the reality under investigation” (p. 108). This consciousness can happen all at once or over time throughout the research process. To meet the criteria of ontological authenticity and capture increased awareness throughout the research process, I completed audit trails. Audit trails are a part of goodness that verifies meaning making (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). It is the process of reflecting and documenting my feelings, thoughts, and new awakenings about the research process and phenomenon itself as well as my interview notes (Guba, 1981). Keeping an audit trail in the form of a research journal also met the criteria for fairness and educative authenticity (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003).

### **Educative Authenticity**

Being aware of one’s understanding of the phenomenon is one way to determine authenticity, but educative authenticity calls for the participants and researcher to understand, appreciate, and respect how others see, experience, and make meaning of the phenomenon (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003; Rodwell, 1998). There is no right or wrong way to understand a phenomenon, but multiple ways. To meet the criteria of educative authenticity, I completed audit trails and used a peer debriefer. Dr. Garrow is an expert on my topic, but not attached



to the study. He was able to ask questions as an outsider and offer new perspectives related to analysis, theme development, and the overall research process (Patton, 2002). Having a debriefer allowed me to talk through the data, aided me in determining if certain voices were being left out, and highlighted how I might be learning from all my participants. At the end of the study, I asked my participants about their learning throughout the process and included their feedback as a reflection in Chapter 6 (Rodwell, 1998).

### **Catalytic Authenticity**

Catalytic authenticity focuses on the extent to which the study ignites purposeful action (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003; Rodwell, 1998). The study must do more than just educate, as catalytic authenticity “captures the praxis dimension of knowledge” (Rodwell, 1998, p. 114). To meet the criteria of catalytic authenticity, I ended my dissertation with strong practical recommendations. To maintain goodness, Arminio and Hultgren (2002) stated, “Goodness requires that researchers offer recommendations for how practice can be transformed due to the insights gained from the study” (p. 458). This study offers higher education practitioners and faculty insight on the importance of recognizing racial diversity among d/Deaf students as well as challenges them to work with Black d/Deaf students in more culturally sensitive and socially just ways.

### **Tactical Authenticity**

Tactical authenticity focuses on empowering participants throughout the research process, so that they ultimately feel encouraged to take action as a result of participating in the study (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003; Rodwell, 1998). Using consent forms and maintaining confidentiality at all times are important criteria in achieving tactical authenticity (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003). These are the beginning steps to building a trusting relationship and

helping the participants feel comfortable throughout the process. Also, agreements about power were discussed in the beginning of the interview process (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003). Participants clearly understood that they were co-constructors of knowledge within the research process and the importance of their feedback and insight throughout the process, specifically during member checks. Although tactical authenticity can be hard to determine within the time constraints of this study, Rodwell (1998) stated, “If all the participants are better off because of having participated in the process and are able to provide evidence to demonstrate this, then there is hope that the real emancipatory elements of the inquiry have been implemented” (p. 115). Participants were asked what they learned throughout the process, and this information was included in Chapter 6 as personal reflection.

### **Re-Presenting the Stories**

Drawing from Critical race theory and Deaf epistemology, the data were shared through counternarratives, which are a blend of real stories, symbolism, and various data sources to highlight the lives and happenings among marginalized people (Patton & Catching, 2009). Using the co-constructed themes drawn from the videos, transcribed summaries, and literature, the counternarratives were written through a practice called compositing, which is the process of developing characters that are created from the participants’ stories and lives to construct a critical race and d/Deaf counternarrative (Patton & Catching, 2009). Compositing “brings similar themes that arose across narratives together to present a more cogent picture of the participants’ experiences, while simultaneously allowing unique experiences to unfold” (Patton & Catching, 2009, p.717), which is in line with the philosophical underpinnings of this study, constructivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The participants and I co-constructed meaning of their experiences through engaging in a dialogue, questioning and answering, reading summaries, watching the videos, and using pictures and objects from their undergraduate experience to make meaning. With the participants, communal and individual stories arose as pertinent to the larger phenomenon.

As a hermeneutic phenomenological study, the purpose was to illuminate an invisible population and to pull out details that were taken for granted yet important to understand the undergraduate experiences of d/Deaf Black college students (Lavery, 2003). Through symbolism and creative storytelling, composites highlighted the common and outlying themes that came up in the study. This method allowed for intersectionality to be valued, essentialism to be challenged, and the reality of racism and audism to be situated within a micro (participants' lives) and macro (greater society) context, which are the key tenets to this study's theoretical frameworks, critical race theory and critical Deaf theory. In addition, Deaf epistemology or d/Deaf way of knowing require that the experiences of d/Deaf people are understood from their perspective and voices. Re-presenting the data this way centered the participants' stories and voices while protecting their identities as it would be easy to identify them if direct quotes and information were shared. However, it is important to collectively know the real participants as I hoped this study would contribute to the literature by infusing more racial and ability diversity into d/Deaf and Black education research as well as purposefully seeking out a diverse demographic pool of participants. I introduce the participants in the way that I discovered them, with the help of William Edward Burghardt DuBois's (1903) words.

### **The Unexpected Talented Tenth: Thriving Within the Margins**

*I was feeling heavy and sad at the end of one of the participants' interview series. I really liked her. I had an opportunity to process my own life and I feel like I contributed to hers. WE hit a level of intimacy, connection really. She encouraged me and I her. This is something I could do forever in this really weird exhaustive kind of way. Talking to people who are as hungry and curious about the world as I am...wow... forever... I really think. Today, during our last interview, she asked me one of my own questions, "Did I feel successful?" I was totally stumped. Why had I not thought about my own questions as they related to me? Through these interviews with her, I became a part of my study. How had I made it? Who was my support system? What were my experiences with oppression? The participants are my peers and I theirs. I am not an outsider. I wasn't something or someone separate from my work or the struggle to succeed in college. We are a part of the larger Black community...the successful educated Black community...the gifted... "The Talented Tenth" (DuBois, 1903).*

W. E. B. DuBois proclaimed, **"The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional [people]. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth"** (Du Bois, 1903, p. 33). Black d/Deaf people were not the Blacks Du Bois was originally denoting; in fact, he was not referring to women, gays, lesbians, differently able, or poor Blacks. His vision was clear, but narrow. The participants in this study are the Unexpected Talented Tenth, thriving within the margins often unseen yet fulfilling the command of their ancestors that if one is able then one must be educated. **"You misjudge us because you don't know us"** (Du Bois, 1903, p. 33). Six participants contributed to the study-- two men and four women. They were all between the ages of 25-

29 at the time of interviews. They all identify as culturally Deaf, but three are auditorially hard of hearing. Two were born Deaf, three were born hard of hearing, and one became Deaf before the age of two because of illness. Five were born in the U.S., and one was born internationally in London. Two were raised with strong Ghanaian and Tanzanian culture. They currently live in five different states including California, New York, Texas, Iowa, and Pennsylvania. **“I freely and cheerfully acknowledge that I am of the African race, and in colour which is natural to them, of the deepest dye”** (Du Bois, 1903, p. 34). All the participants identified under the umbrella of Blackness, but the racial labels they used for themselves varied. Two people identified as African, one African-American, two as Black, and three as Multiracial, but culturally Black. Five participants were raised with a mother and a father. One participant was raised by grandparents and one by a single mother. Five out of the six have hearing parents. Every participant has siblings, but two have d/Deaf siblings and one participant’s whole immediate family is Deaf (mom, dad, and three siblings).

**“They stood as living examples of the possibilities of the Negro race”** (Du Bois, 1903, p. 39). They all attended varying types of mainstream K-12 education programs. For some, mainstream education meant attending oral Deaf education programs where they learned to read lips and use their voices with a small group of d/Deaf children. Others worked with teacher’s aides and used interpreters in all predominantly hearing classes. Some did not use an aide or interpreter, but relied on a FM system (amplified sound device), their hearing aids, and lip-reading to make sense of the classroom experience. One person attended an oral Deaf residential school, but no one attended a Deaf residential school where American Sign Language was used as the primary method for instruction as most of their

parents knew very little about these programs. Some participants have taken years of speech therapy, learned most of their sign language from interpreters, and learned all of their Deaf cultural knowledge from college courses and peers; however, one participant came from a Deaf family, so sign language and Deaf culture were a part of this person's upbringing. They all graduated from high school with diplomas and not completion certificates.

**A university is a human invention for the transmission of knowledge and culture from generation to generation, through the training of quick minds and pure heart, and for this work no other human invention will suffice, not even trade and industrial schools.** (Du Bois, 1903, p. 45)

Even though some of the participants were discouraged from reaching for their highest potential and happiness, all the participants graduated from a 4-year institution between 2007-2013. They represent three institutions including Gallaudet University, California State University Northridge, and Rochester Institute of Technology/National Technical Institute for the Deaf. They graduated with a diverse range of degrees including social work, history, business, chemistry, and biotechnology. Two participants have also completed their master's degrees. **“Who are to-day guiding the work of the Negro people? The ‘exceptions’ of course”** (Du Bois, 1903, p. 42), as they are not a homogenous group of Black d/Deaf participants. They are more than just academically the expectation, but have multiple intersecting identities including immigrant, poor, pansexual, Christian, and introvert, which make them a unique group of participants. However, as **“sure as this Talented Tenth is pointed out, the blind worshippers of the Average cry out in alarm, ‘These are exceptions’”** (Du Bois, 1903, p. 42). The blind worshippers are the voices from deficit research findings, hearing focused educational methods, and racist/audist practices. To the

limited and discouraging expectations and research that has been done, my response is yes, these participants are the exception, but they could be the norm. Within the Black community **“a saving remnant continually survives and persists, continually aspires, continually shows itself in thrift and ability (persisting to graduation) and character (resisting racism and audism). “Exceptional it is to be sure, but this is its chiefest promise; it shows the capability of Negro blood, and promise of black [people]”** (Du Bois, 1903, p. 42). The future does not have to look like the past, and this study’s strength based approach hopes to highlight how the Unexpected Talented Tenth thrived within the margins, resisted issues of racism and audism, and persisted to graduation. They are the hope, aspiration, and promise.

Chapter 3 focused on the research design, and how elements of goodness were addressed throughout the study. My assumptions were clearly stated along with the philosophical paradigmatic (constructivism) and epistemological (Deaf epistemology) underpinnings of the study. The theoretical (critical race theory and critical Deaf theory), analytical (the theory of microaggressions and Black d/Deaf community cultural wealth), and methodological (hermeneutic phenomenology) frameworks were addressed along with the participant selection process, data collection, data analysis, quality criteria, data representation, and general participant descriptions. In Chapter 4, I present the findings weaved into composite counternarratives.

## CHAPTER 4

### COMPOSITE COUNTERNARRATIVES

“We were the people who were not in the papers. We lived in the blank white spaces at the edges of print. It gave us more freedom. We lived in the gaps between the stories.”

(Atwood, 2014, para. 7)

Margaret Atwood, a Canadian author, wrote *The Handmaid's Tale*, a futuristic story told from the perspective of a woman about the downfall of the United States and the militant, racist, and sexist dictatorship that took over, forcing all minoritized people, particularly women, into servitude. They were denied education and basic human rights. The above epigraph speaks to the feelings of invisibility and silencing of the voices of these marginalized people. I have adapted this epigraph to better speak to what it means to thrive within the margin or “gaps between the stories” (Atwood, 2014, para. 7), as it is the foundation on which these composites were built.

We [Black d/Deaf people] are the people who were not in the papers. We [Black d/Deaf people] lived in the blank white spaces [of the masternarratives]. It gave us more freedom, [and in an ironic contradiction, our absence from the papers has allowed us to develop our resistance and write a story that is for us]. We lived in the gaps between stories [in the rich sweet parts, full of color, culture, and pride].

(Atwood, 2014, para. 7)

The four composites in this chapter are written like a play with four mini scenes. Touching on all three research questions, the composites have incorporated the major areas or aspects of college life that the participants identified, their stories of audism and racism,



and how they resisted oppression. These composites were, however, written as inverted versions of the participants' stories. Why inverted counternarratives?

*As I was thinking about writing these composites, I started looking at Deaf artwork, the situations that participants had in common and the outliers, and who my audience would be. I have facilitated workshops on hearing privilege and often incorporated issues of audism into my conference presentations. As a hearing person, I believe it is my responsibility to educate my own community on the ways in which hearing people have and continue to oppress the d/Deaf community. I wanted the composites to continue down this path as an educational tool for hearing people to better empathize with what that oppression feels and looks like when it is turned onto them.*

*I wanted the composites to be creative and rich with explanation. In addition, the participants often talked about the stress of being the first d/Deaf person and/or the only Black d/Deaf person in spaces, the challenges of navigating a campus environment that was not designed with them in mind as well as the desire to connect with more Black d/Deaf people.*

*I have also experienced moments of being the first Black woman or person in a space and wanted to write from a different vantage point. I wanted to create narratives where Black d/Deaf people were centered, normed, and privileged in multiple ways and places, and hearing White people lived within the margins. Dominant groups can be oblivious to their privilege until a different world is painted for them; thus hearing and White people experience numerous moments of discrimination and challenge within the narratives while Black d/Deaf people reap the benefits of unearned preferential treatment.*

*I also inserted the participants' voices in brackets throughout the narratives. The purpose of doing this was to offer a balance to the inverted counternarratives. The goal is to never privilege White and hearing perspectives, so the inserted comments are a gentle reminder of the reality of the story being told. My own internal struggle was to craft complicated narratives that spoke to situations from an inverted vantage point, while not losing the voices and meaning behind the participants' reality.*

Through our conversations and member checking process, participants shared many challenges they faced with racism and audism as undergraduates within the classroom, with faculty and their peers, and within the campus environment. I used the theory of microaggressions to extract the racial and audist microaggressions from their stories and analyzed how they resisted those microaggressions by using Black community cultural wealth. Twelve incidents of audism and 13 incidents of racism were extracted from their narratives. I used all the stories in which participants identified an incident of oppression and communicated the ways in which they resisted the issue(s); thus the composites are made up of 11 audist incidents and 10 racist incidents. All six of the Black community cultural wealth capitals were used by participants and in some situations, multiple forms of capital were used to resist and persist. In regard to the incidents in which participants did not communicate resistance, I was mindful of those moments. Participants did not resist because of a lack of tools needed to do so or in order to survive. In some case they did not possess the capital needed to resist, as some capitals were gained prior to entering college while other forms of capital were gained along their journey throughout college. These stories were incorporated into the composites, as well as important exceptions and valuable insight regarding the varying experiences of the participants.

Using the participants' personalities and unique characteristics as well as their stories, environments and backgrounds, I created four composite stories that offer a glimpse into the everyday life of three composite characters, Addie D, Hardo, and Tasha at Eyeth University (EU). The composites start off with an overview of the nation of Vineyard (the Black d/Deaf nation), the premiere institution, Eyeth University, located in the community (state) of Sims, and the composite character bios. The first narrative focused on a campus rally hosted by Black hearing and White Deaf students in protest to the exclusive campus culture and privileging of Black d/Deaf students by the administration at EU. The second narrative focused on Hardo, Tasha, and other hard of hearing and hearing students' experiences with Vocational Rehabilitation counselors as gatekeepers or positive guides into and through college. The third narrative focused on Hardo, Tasha, and other marginalized hearing students and their challenging experiences in classrooms and with curriculum that was not created with them in mind. The final narrative highlighted Hardo and Addie D.'s exploration of the complexities of intersectionality in finding a team for Hardo to join for the [In]Justice Games.

### **The Nation of Vineyard**

The topmost educated and wealthy Black d/Deaf families moved into Mississippi and slowly started buying land, which turned into taking over whole states, and then spreading to the nation. They had always had the dream of creating a Deaf nation, a Black d/Deaf homeland if you will. Their dream eventually became a reality and the nation of Vineyard was unearthed. Named after Martha's Vineyard, which in the 1880s had a large Deaf population, Vineyard has a mostly Black d/Deaf population (60%) and the remaining population (40%) are White, Bi and Multiracial, Latino, Asian and a mixture of hearing and

d/Deaf people. Vineyard is a strong and thriving nation made up of five communities (i.e., states) named after prominent Black d/Deaf leaders—Sims, Foster, Hill, Wright, and Allen. Sims is the largest community, covering most of the Southeastern part of the old U.S., including the old states of Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia and a handful of other states that people no longer remember. There seems to be a substantial pocket of hearing people in certain communities and Sims is one of those communities.

To be hearing or a race other than Black is unusual because the dominant gene is d/Deaf and Black. Hearing people are typically born into Deaf families, and about 10% of hearing people are born into hearing families and referred to as a Hearing Child of Hearing Adults (HCHA). Hearing people are unable to learn American Sign Language because of a damaged occipital lobe, which controls vision in the brain. In the past 15 years, technology has advanced, creating ocular glasses that hearing people can wear to be able to more clearly see hand movements and learn sign language. Once getting the glasses, hearing people need to go through ASL therapy to learn how to use their glasses as well as comprehend and use the language. Not all hearing people are medically eligible for the glasses and health insurance doesn't cover them, so only hearing people whose families can afford the glasses get access to them. For hearing children who have them, they receive one to two hours of ASL training a week in school. For those who are medically ineligible or cannot afford the glasses, they must use English interpreters or find other ways to navigate their lives.

Because most hearing children are born to Deaf parents they do not always know the best ways to support their children; thus, they spend a tremendous amount of time advocating for their education and rights. Because the dominant culture is d/Deaf and Black, there has been a history of intentional and unintentional oppression against White or hearing people.

There are few to no White people in leadership within Vineyard, and their needs are often overlooked or just not considered when decisions are being made. Black d/Deaf people consider them to just be d/Deaf and seldom consider their race an issue or factor that needs to be discussed.

However, all hearing-like behavior (e.g., talking on the telephone, using one's voice to communicate, and listening to music) is harshly criticized. The assumption is that hearing people and behavior is less than because they are not as smart due to their damaged occipital lobe. They often live in their own hearing subcommunities and the assumption is that they are incapable of fitting into the d/Deaf mainstream society. Despite putting equal right laws in place, the oppression and biased behavior against hearing and White people is still experienced and felt within the five communities.

Most people hope their children are Deaf, but at times, children are born hard of hearing and families have the option of putting them in regular schools or mainstream schools. Mainstream schools are designed for children to spend half the day in a regular classroom and the other half with hearing peers. Most hard of hearing people are not Deaf, but not hearing, so they must navigate the world a little differently depending on their needs and language ability. Because hard of hearing people only have an underdeveloped occipital lobe (not damaged like hearing people), they can often benefit from ocular glasses or with the support of their family and a solid education can stimulate development and overcome their slight hearing disability. There are two different types of hard of hearing people— those who assimilate into mainstream culture, learn ASL, and leave behind any and all hearing behaviors and values and those who do not. Depending on what a hard of hearing person is able or wants to do, they are seen as Deaf or discriminated against like hearing people. For

this reason, most families opt to send their hard of hearing children to regular schools. Their hopes are that their children will have a superior quality education and more opportunities for the future if they are fully immersed in the culture, Deaf culture.

### **Eyeth University**

Eyeth University (EU) is the premiere institution in Vineyard, located in Sims. It was founded by Dr. Glenn Anderson, one of the founding fathers of Vineyard. In 1982, the institution opened in hopes of serving and educating the best and brightest of the Black d/Deaf community; thus, the student population is mostly Black, Deaf, and hard of hearing. In 1988, the only historically White hearing institution opened in Wright called A.G. Bell College named after Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the phone and a strong supporter of Deaf eugenics. The institution serves primarily hearing White students, but is on the other side of the nation. Seeing a need and potential niche in Sims; in the 1990s, EU started reaching out to the local hearing community offering educational workshops on job obtainment, ASL skills, and basic socialization into Deaf culture. Over time, the institution has recruited and enrolled more hearing as well as White students into the university and has been seen as a place where hearing and White students can receive support and a solid education.

There are 13,000 students enrolled with 50% Black d/Deaf, 25% White d/Deaf, 10% Black hearing, 10% White hearing, and 5% other racial and ethnic groups. Most of the hearing people are from Sims or the adjacent community, Foster, but there has been an increasing number of White Deaf students coming from all over the nation. Their mascot is the Mighty Chameleon, which is a symbol of wisdom, wit, and diversity. With 360 degree

vision, the chameleon can take in knowledge and communicate from a distance as well as express itself by changing colors. These visual ways of communicating as well as its ability to change colors, represents the diverse student population served by EU and is in line with Dr. Anderson's founding vision. These qualities makes the chameleon a prized mascot for the institution.

### **Character Bios**

The composites focus on three main characters: Addison D'Power, Hardo Fhearing, and Tasha Cochlear.

**Addie D' Power** (Addie D for short) is a third year Black Deaf student studying history. She grew up in Sims within an all-Deaf family (three siblings) and a large Black Deaf community. She has been taught to respect people regardless of the color of their skin or ASL ability. Coming from a well-respected family in the community, Addie D is introverted, and has been sheltered from the challenges faced by those different than her. Because of this lack of exposure, she can come across as insensitive or ignoring others when around diverse groups of people. She loves her school because it is so diverse, and she is becoming more knowledgeable about oppression and other injustices in the world. She has one and a half year before she graduates and then plans to go straight to law school, as she wants to help people who find themselves oppressed by the system. She serves as the Treasurer on Student Government, and lives on campus with her two best friends, Hardo and Tasha. She and Hardo grew up together because Hardo's dad works for the D'Power Law Firm as a legal aide. Addie D is a legacy of EU.

**Hardo Fhearing** is a biracial (mom is Black and dad is White) second year hard of hearing student who just recently changed his major to art history. He too grew up in Sims and his parents are Deaf. Frustrated at times by his very light skin, he is often mistaken for a White person; although, he culturally identifies as Black. He is the only hard of hearing person in his Deaf family, but he has had a hard time learning ASL even with a pair of ocular glasses. He hates the way they look and only uses them in school. Because of his challenges, he was sent to mainstream schools in hopes of developing his ASL skills. Despite this challenge, he found other ways to communicate with his family, but in many ways he felt isolated growing up. Prior to college, his friendship circle was made up of mostly hearing people besides Addie D, and he enjoyed many hearing behaviors such as listening to music. Hardo barely got into EU, but coming to college has opened up his whole world, and he has had the opportunity to explore many of his social identities, including seeing himself as a Deaf person and almost never needing his ocular glasses to overcome his hearing disability.

**Tasha Cochlear** is originally from Wright, and her family moved to Allen when she was younger, to be closer to her grandparents. She is Black and she and her whole family are hearing. Her family could not afford ocular glasses when she was younger; thus, she went to hearing schools growing up. Encouraged by her Vocational Rehabilitation counselor, she was accepted into a precollege program at EU, the summer before her first year. The program provided her with ocular glasses and intensive ASL training until school started. Now, a third year Biology student, she is doing well in school, has made friends, but still struggles with feeling comfortable as a hearing student on campus, advocating for herself, and signing in front of people. She met Addie D and Hardo her second year, and she has



been living with them on campus for two years. She has not been active in student organizations, but she is considering joining the Black Hearing Student Union.

**Narrative # 1: Inclusive for All... If You're Black and d/Deaf!**

“Resistance is a powerful motivator precisely because it enables us to fulfill our longing to achieve our goals while letting us boldly recognize and name the obstacles to those achievements.” (Bell, 2014, para. 6)

*[Since the beginning of the school year, campus has been tense. Black hearing and White d/Deaf students have been requesting more recognition and support. They have mostly been ignored by the upper administration, but the tide was slowly beginning to change particularly since a pep rally had been planned by a few student organizations: the Black Hearing Student Union, the Historically Hearing Fraternity and Sorority Council, and Deaf White Pride. Tasha meets up with Addie D to walk over to the rally].* Tasha approaches Addie D by the food court:

**Tasha:** Hey what's up? *[Big hug]*.

**Addie D:** Good... good girl... just getting out of class. It was boring. This rally should be interesting...huh? Have you been attending the Black Hearing Student Union (BHSU) meetings?

**Tasha:** Yes, of course. Brian asked me to run for the President of BHSU. I just don't know! Things are getting really political, and I'm not into politics like that. I told him I would attend the rally and let him know.

**Addie D:** Brian is the President right, that medium built dark skin guy. I almost forget he is hearing because he signs so well for a hearing guy. No accent or anything...and

**Tasha:** RUDE!

**Addie D:** What? He does sign well for a hearing guy. I don't mean anything by it, but most hearing people sign slowly and have no idea about Deaf culture. I'm not talking about you, Tasha. Everyone had different upbringings, so some fit in better than others.

**Tasha:** *[taking her ocular glasses off to rub her eyes and putting them back on]* How can you forget he's hearing. He wears ocular glasses. We're not invisible! See, this is why we are hosting the rally today. As a hearing person, I feel invisible sometimes and have had so many challenges here. Do you remember my first year? Oh my god that was a challenging transition. As the first person to attend college in my family, I was lost in the beginning. I had a difficult time with time management and trying to figure out this whole mentor thing.

**Addie D:** Yeah, I guess I had a hard time managing my schedule too, but I already knew people on campus, so finding a mentor was pretty easy and just naturally happened.

**Tasha:** Yeah, people in your family graduated from EU. My situation is so different. On top of figuring out school stuff, I was still learning sign language and getting used to my ocular glasses, so I needed interpreters for all of my classes. That Earth science teacher... Ugh! That teacher just refused to work with me. I had to work my way up to the Dean of the college to get an interpreter for that class because they said I had maxed out on my

“Yes, it can be stressful managing discrimination. I think that by becoming a leader, it taught me that I can take action and do something about it.”

“I think it's just part of what, you know, you have to do when you're the first Deaf person to enter into a program. You have to be willing to fight. They [hearing people] don't know what to do.”

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interpreting services credits. Only three classes allowed because it was just too expensive to provide hearing students with more support...that is crazy!! I needed all four classes that quarter for my major. I finally got an interpreter, but that was after a lot of fighting, advocating help from my interpreter, working with the Hearing Services Office, and not giving up. If it weren't for my family encouraging me, my interpreter's support, and my own determination, I wouldn't still be here. And... Don't you remember my second year here when I was looking for a roommate? I met Brenda, the Black Deaf woman from Foster, who said she didn't want to room with me because she thought I would have too many hearing friends over and that they might steal from her. What? Seriously, all hearing people don't steal! That's the year we met, and I ended up rooming with you and Hardo. Oh! It can be really frustrating and takes a lot of energy to be successful here as a hearing person. Then even when we, hearing people are successful, then only certain types of hearing people are recognized by the institution. I mean my friend James, a hearing White alumnus, who has done amazing things including securing a job with the National Health Institute, interning overseas, and excelling in basketball while he was a student has never been recognized. Why you ask? I'm glad you asked...because he is hearing and White. "How many White hearing alumni make it to the video log alumni newsletter, *For Eyes Only*?" I mean seriously, the video logs are filled mostly with the successes of Black d/Deaf students with a sprinkle of White d/Deaf students. It's just not right. This institution says they support hearing students, but I'm just not convinced. This rally is about resistance. The ability to resist is our way of doing something about these injustices and communicating to the administration that this campus climate and culture isn't good enough.

**Addie D:** Whoa... okay...okay Tasha... I get it. All the Black d/Deaf students are to blame for hearing students not having the support they need. I guess I need to go to this rally and learn more. I'm sorry. Okay... okay.

**Tasha:** That's not quite what I mean, but maybe you'll get it after you watch the speeches at the rally.

*[They arrived at the rally a quarter past 12 and one of the speakers was already up at the podium. A loud boom and vibrations came from the speakers on stage. Everyone turned and focused in on Brian].*

**Brian:** Thank you, fellow student body, for coming out to participate in this rally for diversity at EU. My name is Brian, and I'm the President of the Black Hearing Student Union. I will be signing and speaking everything in my native tongue, English today. We have tried to make this rally accessible to all. We, hearing people, should all have a right to use our first or second language, whether it is sign language or English on campus, in the classroom, and in interacting with one another. We have two speakers lined up to share their experiences on campus and why this issue of diversity and inclusion is so important. I'd like to introduce Simone, she is a hearing White student heavily involved in a historically hearing sorority. I believe she has some very good points to make.

**Simone:** Hello everyone! I'm a member of Phi Lambda Beta Sorority, and I identify as a White hearing student at EU. I am proud to be hearing and a proud member of the Greek community. I'm here representing the hearing Greek community and many other student concerns. We are tired of Black d/Deaf organizations getting special treatment on this campus. Two years in a row all the dates during Greek History Month have been given to Black d/Deaf organizations for Black d/Deaf programming or campus events. This

campus has always been more partial to Black d/Deaf students. Our services, programs, and Go Greek events are important and every student group should be given the funds and support by the administration to thrive on this campus. The Greek community has come together with the Black Hearing Student Union and Deaf White Pride to talk with the Vice President and Provost about how to make this campus more friendly to all students regardless if they are the majority population or not! *[Deaf clapping-hands waving in the air - Simone leaves the stage].*

**Addie D:** Wow she is really mad! I had no idea the hearing Greeks were struggling with hosting events or that they felt like the administration didn't value them on campus. I mean... we, the Student Government, value the hearing Greeks... Well... I mean...I guess when I really think about it, as the Student Government Treasurer, a large amount of our budget and time goes into making sure Black d/Deaf events and organizations are taken care of and fully funded...hmm...

**Tasha:** Yeah... exactly!

**Brian:** Thank you Simone. Up next, we have Darren, the president of Deaf White Pride, to educate us about incidents that have happened on campus this semester *[Deaf clapping].*

**Darren:** Thank you Brian, and everyone for coming out today! I'm here to talk about issues of discrimination against White d/Deaf students on this campus and at the Deaf high school down the street. A month ago, we hung Spring Movie Night flyers, and they were defaced with derogatory words. We reported it to the Student Activities office, but unable to prove who did this, the flyers were taken down. That didn't stop us from having our programs. We remade the flyers and had our events anyways *[loud yells with fist pumps in*

*the air for support*]. I come from a long heritage of White d/Deaf people who should not and cannot be ignored!! I have attended the National Laurent Clerc Deaf Advocates (NLCDA) summer leadership institute for students, a nonprofit community organization that supports the interest, history, and well-being of White Deaf people. I have been taught by NLCDA, my family, and this community that you can't just give up when people knock you down. You brush yourself off, call it what it is, "DISCRIMINATION," and fight back!!

Also, last month two White Deaf students were chased and harassed by two Black Deaf students off campus. This behavior is unacceptable. The students were suspended, but this type of behavior does not create a safe space for White Deaf students in that high school or on this campus. Eyeth University's president, Dr. Defblac's response to these issues was shocking as she told the media, "It wasn't serious...students at the high school were just messing around." This type of behavior is not funny or playful and should never be dismissed as such [*another loud outcry and fist pumps*]! There has been a history of the exclusion of White Deaf people from EU and the leftover residue of that discrimination still impacts students today. We want action!

**Addie D:** Ugh... wow Tasha... I know the campus was founded by Black d/Deaf people, so of course this campus will cater to us. I just have never had to think about these things before.

**Tasha:** I know Addie D. That's called privilege. You have the privilege to not think about it. Everything about this campus is set up to work for you. You have Black d/Deaf faculty and role models. The foundation, hopes, and vision all had you in mind when this school was created. I remember when they hired the first hearing administrator, Dr. Earrington, as the Assistant Dean of Students. It was amazing to see a hearing person on

campus in leadership. It made me feel like as a hearing person I could be a leader one day, too. Have you ever noticed that most of the upper administration is Black and d/Deaf?

**Addie D:** You're right...Hmm... *[Itching her head, with a puzzled look on her face as she tried to think of any hearing staff and faculty that she knew]*. I don't think about having an interpreter for class because every teacher here uses my language, ASL. Events and activities that interest me are happening on campus all the time. Most of the leadership on this campus looks like me and some even know my family. I don't have to worry about much.

**Tasha:** Exactly!! The university has intentionally or unintentionally privileged Black d/Deaf students in many ways, and others of us have had to use skills taught to us by our families, the hearing community, mentors and more to navigate this system. Heck, sometimes I don't know what to do, so I just walk away, like with the whole hearing people stealing roommate issue *[shaking her head]*.

**Addie D:** Hmm...wow Tasha... you definitely should run for the President position in BHSU. You'd be really great. I mean you have taught me a lot today and you're right, there clearly are a lot of things that make this campus unfriendly to hearing and White students that need to be addressed.

**Tasha:** It felt good to be at this rally. Even though there are obstacles to our achievements, it feels like we are doing something and that feels powerful and motivating (Bell, 2014). You know Addie D; I think I might just run for the President position... *[She signed President Tasha]* oh yes that has a nice look to it!

**Addie D:** *[Ha Ha]* Girl, come on... let's go get lunch.

*[The rally ends and students disperse to their next class while the student leaders who organized the rally hang out, talk one-on-one with students, and pass out ribbons for people to wear on campus as a symbol of solidarity to fight for diversity and inclusion at EU].*

### **Narrative #2: The Freedom to Choose for Some, but Not All**

*[Addie D and Tasha were eating lunch at the Bistro. Hardo comes in signing vigorously with his mom on his iPhone. He hung up and bum rushed the table, dropping his book bag on the ground, and despairingly falls into a chair in a slump of frustration].*

**Addie D:** Whoa dude, what's up with you?

**Hardo:** *[He puts his ocular glasses on]*

**Addie D:** I see you wearing those less and less these days.

**Hardo:** Yeah... I'm feeling more comfortable not using them, but I'm just feeling tired. It's been a long day and I tend to need them less during the day and more in the afternoon. Just had an appointment with my Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselor. I wish every community in Vineyard had the same rules around VR support. The counselor I have now is an idiot. I hate to say that, but... but...things work out so much better when you have a Deaf VR counselor! I just got transferred to my third counselor and this new hearing

“VR limits us! I had a really good Deaf VR counselor! I was pushed to a community college and vocational schools. I got no support from VR for graduate school. My VR paid for graduate school because they knew I would need it. I couldn't major in Art. I could major in whatever I wanted. They helped me out financially when I needed it. The post-graduation job list was pointless. I loved my VR counselor. I hated my VR counselor.”

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guy doesn't have a clue. I changed my major to art history and now they will no longer pay my tuition. He said, "You pick a major because it will get you a job not because it makes you happy." What a jerk! Do only Deaf people get to choose majors that make them happy now? My mom is trying to help me figure out tuition for next quarter, but the counselor keeps giving us the run around.

*[All hard of hearing and hearing student are assigned a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor when they graduate from high school to help them find employment or gain additional skills to become employable. The federal government provides funds to each community within Vineyard to serve their hard of hearing and hearing students, but each community determines their own rules and policies for distributing funds as well as limitations on the funds].*

**Tasha:** Ugh...sorry Hardo... I have had a wonderful VR counselor. Our city is pretty liberal when it comes to helping us out, and yes, I would agree Deaf counselors seem to be more helpful and understand the system better. My VR was very supportive of me majoring in Biology and coming to EU. She thought this was a great fit for me and got me connected to a precollege summer program, which provided me with ocular glasses and intensive ASL classes before school started. It really gave me a jump start on language development.

**Hardo:** I remember when I first walked into my VR counselor's office in high school. I was so excited about college. I really wanted to be a teacher. He told me I'd never get a job because my signing skills weren't strong enough. I was too hearing! I just kept my frustrations to myself... I knew I could learn, but what was I going to say in the moment. By the end, I was just happy to be going to college and not a vocational school, which is where

he was trying to push me. He only gave me three choices for schools that he would pay for; EU, Vineyard Community College, and Next Step Vocational Programs. He was super surprised I got into EU, but we finally agreed on me selecting an accounting major and coming here. I just can't keep that major. Not only am I not interested in it, the program is just too easy and I'm bored. I learned a lot of this in an intro accounting class in high school, the faculty doesn't seem very interested in students, and there are very few internship opportunities. I'm also not sure what I would do with the degree after graduation as I'm much more passionate about art history.

**Addie D:** Are your counselors paying for everything?

**Hardo:** No, only tuition and books.

**Tasha:** Mostly, yes... I have books, tuition, and housing covered, but I have financial aid for the fees.

**Addie D:** You know I have heard horror stories from EU alumni about their VR counselors and their transition after graduation. Julie Ann's last tuition payment never made it to her account, so when she graduated, EU said she still owed the school money. VR said they sent it, so she was forced to pay for her last quarter on her own. It took her a year to pay it off and then EU sent her degree and final transcripts in the mail. It was stressful, but luckily it all worked out with her family's support.

**Tasha:** That sucks!! I have also heard of people having a hard time after graduation. My friend Barc tried to use VR services to find a job post-graduation, but the job lists were outdated and nothing was relevant to what he was qualified to do. They helped him find a volunteer internship experience, and after that said they could no longer support him. His

family helped him find internships, and he did his own job searches online. He just kept on applying and searching and ended up landing himself a government job.

**Addie D:** Wow! Was he hard of hearing? I heard that if you're hard of hearing your chances are better at getting your foot in the door than if you're hearing. If you can only speak, it's more difficult to get an interview with d/Deaf employers.

**Tasha:** Yes, he is hard of hearing and signs really well. He has to use his ocular glasses, but people can understand him clearly. He doesn't have to set up an interpreter for the interview and can get himself in the door, which can be more challenging for hearing people who only speak.

**Addie D:** Do you all ever worry about not finding a job or being qualified to get the job you want once you're out of here?

**Tasha:** No, I want to go to graduate school, and I know my VR counselor included graduate and perhaps a PhD degree into my career plan paperwork, so I'm covered for a while.

**Hardo:** Must be nice! My VR isn't going to pay for anything past a bachelor's degree. I was wasting my time getting that accounting degree because I had no access to relevant internships or faculty support, so switching feels good. My VR may not think I can be an art teacher, but I get to decide for myself what I want for my life. I'll pay for school on my own to be able to be independent. VR counselors are like gatekeepers. They keep some hard of hearing and hearing students out while trying to support others. I'm going to have to apply for internships and really work on making myself marketable. I'm not going to be able to depend on my VR counselor or even my program to help me get the skills I really need.

The art program is a better fit, I enjoy learning about art, and I know it makes me happy. I'll

have to figure out my own job opportunities once I'm done and learn to navigate the best I can, while connecting with my community and leaning on my family.

**Addie D:** Wow... yeah... I had no idea people were having such different experiences with VR counselors. You get funding support, but some students lose their autonomy and ability to choose the type of college experience and possible future career they want. On top of that, they may or may not be able to help you succeed once you leave here. Just more stuff I have never thought about. I think my brain is hurting today *[She itches her head]*!

**Hardo:** *[looking at his watch]* Oh crap, I'm about to be late for anthropology. Gotta go!

**Tasha:** Yep. I got a meeting.

**Addie D:** What meeting?

**Tasha:** Just a meeting with some students. It's no big deal. I'll catch you later.

**Addie D:** Okay... I'm going to finish my lunch and head home. I see a nap in my future. I'm exhausted. See you all tonight at the house.

*[Hardo and Tasha scarfed down the rest of their lunch, quickly pack up, and head out. Addie D finished lunch and headed home].*

### **Narrative # 3: One Academic Experience Fits All...Or Does It?**

#### **Hardo's Academic Experience**

*[Walking into the class a little late, he finds a seat and slips on his ocular glasses. He has enjoyed this class up until the last week when the professor started focusing on cultural differences and norms. Dr. Knowitall, a short Black Deaf chubby man with strong Afrocentric and Deaf cultural values, made definitive statements about whose culture*

*counted in their society and who could claim to be a part of specific cultural groups. The conversation has rolled over in today's class].*

**Dr. Knowitall:** Good afternoon. We'll pick up from where we left off last week. I believe I was talking about the U.S. culture and how Black culture is the dominant and primary culture influencing, inspiring, and leading this nation. There are many subcultures such as White culture [*he looks over at Hardo and Peter, a White Deaf student*], but these cultures have had very little influence on the shaping of our society or why we are a great nation today. Now...

**Hardo:** [*internal dialogue: feeling uncomfortable and uneasy in his own skin as each word falls off of Dr. Knowitall's hands. He drifts off into his own thoughts*]. Wait, does he think I'm White? Seriously, I'm biracial, but culturally Black. I hate when Black people can't tell that I'm Black. I may be light, but I'm not White!!

[*Peter drops his book off of his desk vibrating Hardo's chair and passes him a note in his chicken scratch handwriting. It reads*]

I can't believe he thinks our culture is a subculture. White people have done a lot to shape our world and without them we'd be a very different nation.

[*Hardo, responded back*]

I'm not White...I'm biracial, but I believe a lot of different people have contributed to this nation being great. You should say something. This guy is nuts! [*Peter hesitantly shrugs his shoulders and looks back at the teacher*].

**Dr. Knowitall:** I hope you are recording this lecture with your iPads as this will be on the final exam.

**Hardo:** Crap... this guy drives me crazy, but I gotta stay focused.

**Dr. Knowitall:** Ok moving on... Now, Deaf culture. Vineyard is a nation rich with diversity. Over time, hearing and hard of hearing people have learned more about Deaf culture, ASL, and Deaf history, but this doesn't make these individuals culturally Deaf or a part of the real Deaf community. They are another subculture of the real culture. You must have specific cultural experiences to really be...

**Hardo:** *[internal dialogue]* Are you kidding me right now? I may be hard of hearing, but I do think of myself as Deaf now. I grew up in Deaf spaces and almost all of my relatives are Deaf. Is this teacher really telling me I'm not Deaf enough to be in the Deaf community? He's right, I didn't go to regular schools, and I use ocular glasses, but I'm relying on them less and less these days. I'm connected to the community. My family has taught me the traditions and stories. I'm just as Deaf as anyone else *[feeling the pressure and anger rising in his gut, he decided he had to do something to show the teacher how wrong he was about White culture and who makes up the Deaf community]*.

**Dr. Knowitall:** Okay that is it for today's class. Your research papers are due in two weeks. Please let me know if you have questions.

**Hardo:** *[Encourages Peter to come up and talk with the teacher with him to express their joint concerns]* Dr. Knowitall, Peter and I were thinking more about what you said about White and Deaf culture, and we're not sure what you mean by the fact that White and specific types of Deaf people aren't a part of the real culture of Vineyard.

**Dr. Knowitall:** Well, you are not the real Vineyard culture. Your needs are not as important. If there is an action that is good for Black Deaf people, then it is important for us not to focus so much on being politically correct and do what's right for the majority.

**Hardo:** *[Shocked at how discriminative his words were, he decided it wasn't worth the fight].* You know, I think it is clear. *[sarcasm and walked away]*  
*[Fuming, Hardo went to his faculty mentor, Dr. McCaskill, for advice. She is one of the few hard of hearing faculty on campus]*

**Dr. McCaskill:** Hi Hardo, how are you?

**Hardo:** I'm dropping my Sociology class!

**Dr. McCaskill:** What? Why? Are you having a hard time understanding? Have you been using your ocular glasses?

**Hardo:** No and Yes. Dr. Knowitall is an awful discriminatory teacher, and I just can't sit in his class another day. All the students who have ever taken him have complained about his value judgments in class and I can't do it. I'm dropping! I'm tired of being told in subtle ways that I don't fit in.

**Dr. McCaskill:** Wait, wait. Do you need this class?

**Hardo:** Yes.

**Dr. McCaskill:** Then you can't drop it. If you drop the class then he wins. You have to think this through. What's your real issue with him?

“Hearing people never understand the deaf mind or deaf way, but they can learn to understand.”

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**Hardo:** He is discriminative against hard of hearing and White people and really anyone who is not Black and Deaf. I think that is a huge problem!

**Dr. McCaskill:** Okay, then what do you have within your power to change?

*[Leaving the office and taking in what his mentor said he decided not to drop the class, but to try to educate the teacher by writing his research paper on two different people, a White*

*person and a hard of hearing person who defied the odds and made a real difference in the U.S. Feeling a little nervous he submitted his paper. After the papers were returned, Dr. Knowitall approached Hardo and said he did a really good job on his paper. He felt good and proud that he had shown Dr. Knowitall a different perspective if only for this one time].*

### **Tasha's Academic Experience**

*[Tasha has decided to attend a hearing student support group entitled Listen UP facilitated by the counseling center. She hasn't told Addie D or Hardo that she is attending as she is a little embarrassed that she hasn't been able to deal with her challenges in the classroom on her own. It has taken her a long time to reach out for help, but the stress and frustration has come to a head. She decided that attending at least one meeting wouldn't hurt. She walks into the Student Support Services building and into the counseling office on the third floor. She checks in and within minutes, a tall beautiful Black woman comes out and calls her name. She isn't used to hearing her name out loud at school because everyone is signing. She quickly stands up and follows her into a small light blue room, where three other students are chatting in a circle].*

**Counselor:** Hello everyone. Thank you for coming to our second meeting of Listen UP. My name is Dr. Olivia Karen and you can call me Dr. OK if you'd like. I thought we might start with quick introductions and why you came to the group since we have a new person with us. Who would like to start?

**Lanora:** *[light skinned Black woman with ocular glasses]* I can start. My name is Lanora Jackson, and I'm from a small hearing suburb inside of Foster. Most people have never heard of it. I'm a third year student in accounting. I have been saving up my money to purchase a pair of ocular glasses, but I still have a long ways to go. They are just so



expensive. I'm attending this group because I needed some extra support here at school. You all can call me Nora for short.

**Icantay:** *[White man with buzz haircut]* My name is Icantay Hearu, and I'm from Ghana. I am a second year student in engineering. I came to EU because it has a strong engineering program. I am attending this group because I'm hard of hearing and there are many ways that this campus is not set up for me. In my country, I don't qualify for ocular glasses because I can understand some Ghanaian Sign Language. My issue here is that I'm still learning ASL and so if a person signs too fast, doesn't move their lips, or don't sign directly at me I'm lost. I use interpreters in about half of my classes. I am having a lot of problems working with Deaf students and faculty in class. My faculty mentor suggested I try this group.

**VOice:** *[bronze colored skin with dark curly hair].* Hi my name is Razer V. Oice. You can call me VOice for short. I am hearing, as I'm sure you can tell, and I'm a senior Culinary Arts major. I am navigating a lot right now with trying to study abroad and stay focused on classes. Some days are great and others are a real challenge at EU. I just got my ocular glasses last semester. This whole thing is new for me. I joined the group because... well...I just wanted to be around other hearing people that might understand my experiences.

*[The room sits quiet and everyone looks at Tasha].*

**Tasha:** Ha ha *[nervous laughter]*... I guess it's my turn. So...my name is Tasha Cochlear. I'm from Allen, but my family moved to Wright when I was 11, so we could be closer to my grandparents. Being a hearing person is all I really know. All of my family is hearing, and I went to hearing schools growing up. I'm more comfortable working with English interpreters because I didn't get my ocular glasses until the summer before starting

school *[feeling fortunate that she has them at all]*. I am a third year student, and I'm still having a hard time adjusting to EU culture, and I'm always anxious about participating in class without an interpreter. Ha ha... well... I guess that's all. Thanks for having me!

*[Internal thought... ugh... what a dumb thing to say. This is only an hour. I can get through this. Take a deep breath.]*

**Dr. OK:** Great! It's so good to have everyone here. I'd like to open the floor for any successes, thoughts, feelings, issues, or stories that anyone might want to start us off with today.

**Nora:** Well, yes! I would like to share really quick that my HC 100 Hearing Culture class is going really well. I have never had the opportunity to learn about hearing people, our history, the English language, or the ways that we have resisted oppression. The class primarily talks about Black hearing people, so I know more about Black people than White, but I have learned a lot and it feels good. I'm starting to see myself differently and have more pride in my hearing culture. It makes me want to do well in school and make the people that came before me proud.

**VOice:** You know, I decided to take an ES 100 Contemporary Caucasian People course last semester. I thought it would be important that I learned more about White people and our history since this is rarely taught, but the class mostly focuses on d/Deaf White people, and I'm having a hard time relating to the stories and experiences. I'm hearing, so the way I've navigated, and see the world has been different.

**Nora:** That's interesting because when I took that class I could relate to material and found it really helpful as well. Maybe it's the teacher? *[Lanora shrugs her shoulders, unable to figure out why their experiences have been so different]*.

**VOice:** I don't know. I'm not going to be taking any Caucasian Studies classes because it just feels like a waste. Perhaps I'll check out the Hearing Studies classes next semester. I do have another frustration that was on my mind. I just had my appointment with the study abroad office about going to Italy this summer. I talked with the director about getting an interpreter for the trip since everyone going, including the teacher is Deaf. All of the tours and class lectures will be done in ASL. The director told me that wasn't their responsibility and sent me back to my academic department. My department said they couldn't afford to pay for an interpreter. I've been running around trying to figure everything out for about two weeks. I assumed that an interpreter would be taken care of since study abroad is a class and a part of my education. I already paid my nonrefundable deposit, so I'm stuck. I really want to go and another hearing friend of mine also applied to go. He doesn't know any ASL and the ocular glasses don't work for him. My ocular glasses are new, and I'm starting to be able to communicate, but I'm a newbie. I hope I know enough ASL to get by because it looks like I will be interpreting for both of us. It's just not right. Deaf students don't have to think about this type of stuff.

**Dr. Ok:** I can hear the frustration in your voice.

**VOice:** Yeah, I'm frustrated. I've gone to a few of the trip meetings and met with the faculty member one-on-one to talk through how students can connect with my friend and me. I told her we could use our phones and text back and forth as well as write notes, but I doubt very seriously if anyone is going to do it.

**Dr. OK:** So how are you feeling about that?

**VOice:** Well, I really want to go to Italy, and this would be a great opportunity to show Deaf students that hearing people can travel, too. It's going to be a lot of work, but

we'll stay near the teacher during tours in case we need information clarified and during the evenings my friend and I can go off on our own. It's frustrating and not fair, but I'm not going to let it stop me from studying abroad. It's only a week. I will just have to figure it out.

**Dr. OK:** It sounds like you have thought through this, figured out what you needed, and are on a path to making it happen.

**Icantay:** Wow...man that is great you get to go. Being an international student myself, I know what it is like trying to navigate a totally different culture and not having proficient access to language like you want. Navigating all of that with no interpreter...that's wrong, particularly because Deaf students don't have to think about that. They just sign up and go, but major props to you for figuring it out and not giving up.

**VOice:** Thanks...

**Icantay:** I have a frustration I'd like to share as well.

**Dr. OK:** Yes, please share Icantay.

**Icantay:** Well, I'm in a Business Management class, and I have had a hard time working in all Deaf project groups. Sometimes a teacher will create a hearing student team if there are enough hearing people in the class, and I typically join that group because it's easier for me, but this class there is only one hearing person and me. So...I'm the only hard of hearing person in a group of six and they see and treat me like a hearing person. We have a

“If communication access was easier, I would feel like okay. I would want to prove myself and show what I know. I would want to use my language because we'd be on the same page. If the class is full of all hearing students, I'm signing and not speaking and I have an interpreter who is just sitting there with their fist on their chin on knee staring at me. I just feel cut off (should shrug). I feel voiceless period.”

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huge project that we've been working on and the first several meetings have already been an issue. They sign so fast, they don't move their lips and their finger spelling... good grief... the finger spelling! It's like lightening on their hands. They move so fast. I can't get context from their lips, and I continue to ask them to slow down so I can keep up, but they just ignore me. It takes me some time to figure out what everyone is talking about, figure out what I want to say, translate it into ASL in my brain and then actually get it out. By the time I'm ready to contribute they have already made all of the decisions, divided up the tasks and moved on to the next assignment. I take whatever tasks they give me, which are usually putting the Power Point together or editing the paper. I leave the group feeling defeated and I just let it go. I'm not a leader in this group, which is different in hearing groups. I can't show what I know so I do enough just to get by.

**Dr. OK:** Wow... Icantay, that must be really frustrating and hard to want to contribute in class and with peers, but your peers are not willing to work with you. Does anyone have suggestions on how to handle this type of situation?

**Nora:** I often feel that way in class, but I can't focus on that. I'm in the class to learn, so I read everything assigned and help in whatever way I'm given for the group to get a good grade. It's about doing well in class. I just have to stay focused on doing well and keep pushing forward. I also rely on my interpreters, the Office of Hearing Services, and my teacher to help me advocate for myself. My interpreter will sometimes speak up and say, "Wait, I can't keep up," or "Slow down so I can get all the information."

**Dr. OK:** Nora, It sounds like you really use all of your external resources as well as personal aspirations and commitment to get through these tough moments.

**VOice:** Yeah... **BUT**, what do you do when it's the teacher? I have a teacher who just ignores me half the time. I have to wave really big in the air for him to call on me. I once had a teacher who only liked having a captionist in the class and not interpreters because she felt like they were a distraction. She never asked the hearing or hard of hearing students in the class what they needed.

**Nora:** The same thing with teachers. I had a teacher that would not meet with me and often told me to go work with my tutor. I really wanted to work with the teacher and have my questions answered during office hours, but since that didn't happen I met with tutors. I just have to get the assistance any way I can. It's not ideal, and I wish it was different, but at the end of the day I want to graduate and be successful. I needed to do what I needed to do regardless of my teacher liking me or wanting to help me get there.

**Tasha:** *[Slowly raising her hand]* Well, I had a similar situation last semester with the whole captionist verse interpreter request. There were about seven hearing students in this class. We tried to use the captionist for about two weeks, but it wasn't effective. It took forever to read the notes on our screens and by the time you read it the class had already moved on before we had a chance to ask our questions or offer our thoughts. All the hearing students came together to talk about it, and we decided that we needed to confront the teacher and ask for an interpreter, so that's what we did. We collectively asked for what we needed, and the teacher requested one for the next class.

**Dr. OK:** Good for both of you and good examples to share with the group. Using alternative paths, relying on each other, coming together, and pushing back when your needs aren't met are all really great suggestions. Thanks for sharing! We are coming close to an hour, so are there any final issues anyone wants to put on the table?

**Tasha:** Well, if we have a little time. The biggest issues I have been navigating are teachers' expectations, grading methods, and assignments. I often feel like I'm being judged based on Deaf expectations. I didn't grow up signing, so when I do class presentations my words don't always come out as clear. I have a hard time transferring my written thoughts into signed thoughts. I get up in front of people and I freeze. I get my grade back with comments, and I don't necessarily know how to fix it. I'm told to go to the Presentation Practice Center, but I'm tutored by Deaf people who give me similar feedback that just isn't helpful. I love school, but I hate assignments. I just wish I could show the teacher what I know in a different way, like writing a paper or speaking my presentation with an interpreter. I'm not dumb, but my mind just works differently than Deaf students.

*[The culture on campus is that learning and understanding is measured by how well you can communicate thoughts and ideas in ASL. Writing long papers or essays is not valued and is used sparingly to access learning].*

**VOice:** hmm... yeah... I feel you. When you get a teacher who really understands...who takes time to learn more about hearing culture and is flexible enough to meet you where you're at... Man...those are good experiences! I had one teacher who let me write a paper instead of a presentation. She was totally shocked at how much I knew. I've been in college a while, and in the beginning, I just didn't have the confidence to confront a teacher and asked for what I needed. Over time, I learned what I needed to do to be successful and how to advocate for

“I love education, I love going to school, I hate, hate, hate the work! The teacher doesn't understand how my mind works. They [teachers] would mark up my papers and judge me from a hearing perspective as if my paper was from a hearing voice.”

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myself.

**Icantay:** I totally have that same experience. I didn't come to school with all the skills I needed and I was used to teachers coming to me and talking me through assignments and my feedback. I don't want special treatment, and I know this is college, but I just want the opportunity to really do my best, and I can't get that when the bar is set too high and I'm graded based on Deaf values and ways of understanding.

**Nora:** Yep! Me too!! You're not alone. Can you imagine if everyone in the class used English? I would want to really show what I knew. I would be super engaged in conversations and debates. Now, I have an interpreter. Sometimes they translate what I'm saying right, and other times I can tell by the professor's face and the questions they ask me that something got lost in translation. It can be embarrassing!

**Dr. OK:** Wow! Well, it seems we have found more common ground. How does it feel to know you're not alone? *[Everyone replies with a head nod and looks a little less anxious than when they walked into the door].* Well okay, we are at time. We may not have gotten all the solutions to your frustrations today, but I think you all were able to share some meaningful strategies with each other, and we clearly have a good place to pick up next week. I hope to see everyone again.

*[Everyone thanks Dr. OK and collects their things to head out. Tasha was pleasantly surprised at how helpful it was to just get her frustrations out and to know she was not alone. This group support thing might just be what she needed to keep pushing forward. Not graduating isn't a choice anymore].*



#### Narrative # 4: [In]Justice Games

“Oppression is filled with such contradictions because...a matrix of domination contains few pure victims or oppressors” (Collins, 2000, p. 287).

*[After arriving home, Addie D decided to take a quick nap before starting in on some homework. She had a late night and quickly caught a case of the itis (food coma), once she walked in the door. Fifteen minutes wouldn't throw her off, so she got comfortable on the couch and quickly fell asleep. Finding herself back on campus, she knew she had to be dreaming. “Where am I?” She thought, as campus didn't look normal. Suddenly, Hardo came running up to Addie D, signing and half out of breath].*

**Hardo:** “Addie D...Addie D... did you see the video log school paper, *Show Your Hands?*

**Addie D:** No, what are you talking about?

**Hardo:***[Hands her his iPad]* see.. It's that time of year again...the Great...*[deep breath]*...[In]Justice.. *[deep breath]* ... Games.

**Addie D:** What? What are you talking about? What are the [In]Justice Games?

**Hardo:** You know the games that divide the campus up into their cultural groups and we compete to see who is the wittiest, strongest, and luckiest. Each year it divides the campus and it takes us months to mend hurt feelings and have campus pride and unity again.

**Addie D:** Um... That sounds awful! What are the rules to these games?

**Hardo:** RULES *[haha]* ...the rules are hidden! No, No, it's a great time! Don't be so serious and sensitive. They just released the team names and captains. Here, watch the videos on my iPad.

**Edwin:** *[a Black d/Deaf student and the student body President, popped up on the screen fiercely signing with excitement]* **THE GREAT [IN]JUSTICE GAMES!** Who will win the chameleon crown? Who will represent their cultural group with pride? Come try your hand at wit, strength, and luck. Sign up now to be a part of one of the cultural groups. The following teams will be hosting sign ups today on the quad...

*[The screen changes to Maggie, a tall, dark, skinny woman, and the team captain for the A. Fosters for Life. They are named after Andrew Foster, the first Black d/Deaf man to successfully graduate from A.G. Bell College.]*

**Maggie:** We are looking for the best and brightest Black d/Deaf students on campus. We have four team spaces open and would love to add pride filled Black d/Deaf members. We believe in not boxing people in, so come see us on the quad and sign up!

*[Mandy, comes on the screen next, a pale, short, thick Deaf White woman. She signs sharp and fast with finesse that only a native speaker could acquire. She is a Resident Advisor, the president of Epsilon Alpha Rho (EAR) sorority, a historically hearing sorority, and the team captain for the Dainty Dolls.]*

**Mandy:** We are looking for four d/Deaf...*[rolling her eyes]* I mean hearing women to join our team and perhaps our sorority. You must know ASL and be a bit confrontational to fit in with us. If this sounds like you then join us!

*[The screen transitions to Brian. He went to mainstream schools, so he knows sign language pretty well, but has tremendous hearing pride. Known for his involvement with the Black Hearing Student Union, Brian was the team captain for the Black Hearing Students United team.]*

**Brian:** Come all Black hearing folks! This is our time to show what we can do. To prove we are just as smart, witty, and lucky as Black d/Deaf people. Don't be afraid, come out today!

*[Darren and Nicole, who could both be described as arrogant and outgoing, appear on the screen. They both come from strong Deaf family lineages, and are active within almost every sport and club on campus and are now the captains for the Gallaudet Power, Coed Deaf Team. Darren has been actively involved in rallies on campus].*

**Darren:** DEAF POWER!!

**Nicole:** DEAF POWER!! *[Both signing passionately].* Come out to the one and the only co-ed Deaf team. We are strong, powerful, and full of pride. These games were meant for us and only us!!

*[Last, but not least was the new team, The Privileged, representing White hearing men. The team captain is Jeffery. He is typically quiet on campus, but a group of White men got together last year and said it was only fair that they had their own team, so The Privileged were born.]*

**Jeffery:** We, The Privileged, are here to show our pride. Have you felt left out and underrepresented in the past? Well here is your chance, White hearing men, join forces with us and win the Great [In]Justice Games!!

**Edwin:** *[comes back to the screen and closes off the video log stating],* "The games will start this evening, so sign up today and get ready to represent your group with pride...oh, and may the odds be ever in your favor!

**Addie D:** Wait, didn't that come from a movie? Hardo, something doesn't see right or fair about these games.

**Hardo:** Oh Addie D, you're such as Debbie downer. I'm going to sign up for a team today and you should come, too. I think I have the wit, strength, and luck to bring home the Chameleon crown.

*[Apprehensively, Addie D follows Hardo to the quad to determine the best team for him to join].*

**Hardo:** I'm going to start at the Black Hearing Student United (BHSU) table. I've always been passionate about advocating for Black people, learning Black history, and being a part of the "movement." I'm sure this is the team for me.

**Addie D:** But Hardo, you're not hearing and you're biracial?

**Hardo:** That doesn't matter! I don't look White and my experiences are as a Black man in this society. It shouldn't matter if I'm hard of hearing or not. They won't even know. I'll wear my oculars, and look just like them.

*[Hardo proud and excited walks up to the BHSU table].*

**Hardo:** Hi! I'm Hardo Fhearing and I'd love to join the BHSU team.

*[Brian turns around. Looks at him and looks away]*

**Addie D:** What was that about?

**Hardo:** *[he tries again]* Hi! I'm Hardo Fhearing. What types of things are the BHSU looking for in members?

*[Again he is ignored by the table. He is standing in front of the table as students all around him are being talked to and encouraged to join the team. Feeling awkward, hurt, and confused, Hardo slowly backs away from the table.]*

**Addie D:** Oh Hardo! I'm sorry. I'm not sure what that was about.

**Hardo:** Yeah... *[disappointed face]* my dad told me that sometimes light skin Black people aren't considered "Black enough" to be a part of the Black community. He said there are historical roots of internalized oppression, or colorism, within the community that are still true today. There is no way they knew I was hard of hearing, so it must have been that. I hate when that happens. I know I have less privilege because my skin is lighter, but Black people come in all shades. I wish all Black people could appreciate our differences!

**Addie D:** Well... okay... Let's try a different group *[Realizing how important joining a team has become for Hardo, Addie D gets on board to help him make a connection. They head to The Privileged table next].*

**Hardo:** Hi! I'm Hardo Fhearing *[feeling confident that his speaking voice is clear and understandable].*

**Jeffery:** What?

**Hardo:** Hi! I'm Hardo Fhearing.

**Jeffery:** Oh okay. H-I! N-I-C-E T-O M-E-E-T Y-O-U *[signing slowly and enunciating every word. Addie D and Hardo look at each other oddly].* We are The Privileged group. We are new to these games, but excited to be here. So there are several events in the games. You have to be able to do things on your own and work in a team. Are you sure you can do these things since you are hard of hearing and not hearing or Deaf?

**Hardo:** Of course! How did you know I was hard of hearing? You seem to have pretty low expectations of me, and I'm not even on the team yet. I have some great ideas about getting through the trivia and the obstacle course.

**Jeffery:** *[He ignores the question]* Oh really? Do share!!

*[Excited that Jeffery is interested in his ideas, Hardo begins sharing his thoughts and why winning the games are important. He has strategies and friends in different groups that they could ally with. Jeffery nods his head taking notes. After about 20 minutes of chatting. Jeffery makes it pretty clear that Hardo is not going to be the best fit for The Privileged team, but that he has great ideas. He encourages him to try the Gallaudet Power group].*

**Hardo:** What?? You totally used me for my ideas, but don't want me on your team!!! What??  
*[Addie D pulls Hardo from the table].*

**Addie D:** These games are set up to not be fair, Hardo. Everyone is trying to get a leg up on other groups in order to be successful. This is total madness. The Privileged need you to win these games. It's kinds of ironic... they are White and hearing... the least privileged of all the cultural groups. They should be begging you to stay to help them navigate these games. Forget about them! Your talents would be better used on a different team *[Whoa...Addie D shocked herself as she thought about what she was saying. She had been talking to Tasha earlier that day about privilege and she was seeing it play out now].*  
*[Angered by their last experiences, they pass by the Dainty Dolls on their way to the Gallaudet Power Group. The women wave Addie D down and ask her to stop. Not wanting*

The thing that bothers me the most is hearing people being extremely sensitive ... when they are the most privileged people in the room and the most fucking comfortable like a baby all swaddled and warm. That privilege is wrapped around them and when it's taken off they huff and cry, and I'm like really. Then I see them for who they really are whimpering and such. They depend on that privilege to be successful, but they could succeed without it.

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*to be rude, Addie D stops to hear the women's recruitment pitch, while Hardo goes on to the Gallaudet Power table].*

**Mandy:** Hi. I'm Mandy, and this is Nicole, Lexis, and Jeni. We are the Dainty Dolls team and we'd love to have you on our team. What is your name?

**Addie D:** I'm Addie D

**Mandy:** Oh okay. We are always looking for more strong Deaf women to join the team and perhaps our sorority once this is all over.

**Addie D:** But isn't this a hearing sorority [*looking at them oddly?*]

**Mandy:** Yeah... yeah... we have enough of them. [*She looks left and right to make sure no one is directly watching her*]. Yes, our founders were hearing, and yes, we work on hearing issues and causes, but you just have to say that stuff is important to you until after you join [*wink wink*] and then we do what we want!

**Addie D:** What?

**Mandy:** I mean if that stuff is important you, then all the better... I guess [*shoulder shrug with a puzzled look on her face*]. I'm just saying that is the past, and the team and sorority is mostly Deaf now, so it doesn't matter that much!

**Addie D:** This is wrong... so wrong... I'm not even sure how the hearing members are letting you get away with this.

**Mandy:** What do you mean? We love hearing people. We just think the team and sorority should be comfortable for Deaf people, too. Hey... I'm one of you... and you should be happy that we are turning this hearing sorority into a Deaf one...

**Addie D:** You know, never mind! I'm not interested in being around people that can't acknowledge their own privilege or how they are contributing to this madness. This

sorority is supposed to support hearing women, and Deaf women just can't take over it. This is hearing space!!! *[Addie D walks away and rejoins Hardo at the Gallaudet Power table. Oh my goodness... this has to be a dream... I just need to wake up. I really need to get out of this crazy place. Searching for Hardo, she sees a large group around the Gallaudet Power table. With a lot of energy and signed conversations happening, she located Hardo standing with the captains as they were asking him a thousand questions. She approaches him and watches in].*

**Darren:** So you sign and talk?

**Hardo:** Well yea... sometimes.

**Nicole:** Do you talk on the phone?

**Hardo:** Of course, that's how I stay connected to my hearing friends.

**Darren:** Do you wear oculars?

**Hardo:** Yes, I'm hard of hearing, so I wear them from time to time *[his signing is becoming bigger and more agitated]* Let me also share that I listen to a lot of music, watch tons of TV, and use my voice often *[Addie D touches Hardo's shoulder. Calm down, Hardo!]*

*[Darren and Nicole turn their backs and vigorously signing back and forth. I just don't know if he is Deaf enough. He doesn't have Deaf culture. He signs kind of slow. Forget signing slow... he signs and talks at the same time! I'm just not sure this is a good fit. Okay... so we agree the answer is No. Yes!]*

**Darren and Nicole:** Hi! So we talked about it and we just don't think this is going to work out for us. You seem very nice, but we are looking for members that have deep Deaf roots. You know what we mean? This is a Deaf space.



**Hardo:** Deaf Space?

**Darren and Nicole:** Yes, a Deaf space. There are a lot of deaf people, but not in relation to the number of hearing people in the world. Deaf people can't afford to just ignore each other or brush each other off. So if we invite a hearing person into this space or our team then you may bring your hearing culture such as talking and limit access to Deaf members.

**Hardo:** WAIT! I'm not hearing. I'm culturally Deaf. I have grown up with Deaf people my whole life. I'm technically hard of hearing, but that shouldn't matter.

**Darren and Nicole:** In Deaf space, we should be able to join any conversation of interest within eyes range and have equal access like a hearing person. If you are talking or doing other hearing things... We don't know... We just need to feel good in our space. That's it!

**Addie D:** *[Interjects as Hardo is getting ready to physically launch out at Darren and Nicole]* You know *[looking at Hardo, but making sure Nicole and Darren can see her signs]*, some Deaf communities are very exclusionary. We are not all like this, but there are some people that are not as open to Deaf members who have not attended Deaf residential schools or have Deaf parents. Deaf space is tremendously important, and yes, Deaf people do need to stick together, but how we define the Deaf community must expand. Deaf people are very diverse and come from all walks of life. We come in all shades and colors, different ranges of signing ability and different ranges of hearing loss. That's really too bad they aren't open to you, Hardo *[as she furiously cuts her eyes at them]!* They really missed out on a great team member. We may value some of the same things, but this team isn't what we're all about! *[Frustrated, the light bulb went off and everything she had heard from Tasha and*

*Hardo about their college experiences being more difficult and overcoming obstacles became clear. She had privilege at EU...Black d/Deaf privilege].*

*[Disheartened and beaten up by the games before they had even started. Hardo and Addie D began walking away from the quad].*

**Maggie:** Hey there... are you two looking to join a team? I'm Maggie, the captain of the A. Fosters for Life. You might want to give us a chance.

**Hardo:** No... just forget about it! I know... I know... I don't quite meet your cultural qualifications. I was used by The Privileged group... I'm a guy, so the Dainty Dolls are out. I'm hard of hearing so Gallaudet Power is out. I'm not Black enough so the BHSU is out... and I'm probably not Black or Deaf enough for you... **SO** just forget it!

**Maggie:** Whoa... whoa! Let me ask you some questions. How do you identify?

**Hardo:** Well, I'm culturally Black, but I am technically biracial. I'm culturally Deaf, but I'm technically hard of hearing. I have a tremendous amount of Deaf pride and believe my lived experiences are of a Black person and not White.

**Maggie:** Okay, so do you identify as a Black d/Deaf person?

**Hardo:** Well, yeah. Of course!

**Maggie:** Then you are the man we're looking for. Join our team!

**Hardo:** What? Really? Um... *[looking at Addie D]* okay... sounds great!

**Maggie:** We don't make you choose a particular identity. You can just be yourself. We consider ourselves a counterspace. We realize the whole world isn't like Vineyard. There are many places out there where Black d/Deaf people are isolated and have a hard time finding a place to call their own. We know our history and that not so long ago Black d/Deaf people were denied education, grew up in segregated communities, and had no options for a

higher education. We stand on the backs and souls of those who came before us. We have a Black d/Deaf culture that is real with Black sign language, history, heroes, and heroines. We compete in these games in order to show our pride, but there are few groups of people that do not find themselves both the oppressor and oppressed. So many people forget that. Our campus is no exception. More simply put...You don't have to choose here! You can be whoever you are!!

**Hardo:** Wow... yes...I'm totally inspired. I guess I was so caught up on winning that I forgot the bigger picture. I do have a rich cultural background. So where do I sign up!  
*[Hardo is jumping around with excitement waiting for the opening ceremony to begin. Addie D, I did it! I'm on a team!! That's great Hardo! He shakes Addie D...can you believe it! Addie D's body is slowly moving back away from Hardo. That's great... that's great! She can see the campus gospel choir signing the Black National Anthem, and the Black d/Deaf elders lined up on the stage preparing to offer libations to the ancestors before the games begin. That's great Hardo... That's great].*

**Hardo:** *[shaking Addie D]* Addie D... Addie D... wake up. What's great?? It's dinner time.

**Addie D:** *[feeling out of it and hazy]* What? Oh... I was dreaming... this crazy... you were... I was... the [In]Justice Games...*[long sigh]* oh thank goodness I'm back! It was **MADNESS!!**

**Hardo:** *[laughing]* Okay, Addie D. Well, Tasha made dinner tonight and it's getting cold, so tell us all about it, but at dinner *[laughing]!*

**Addie D:** This privilege thing is so deep. I had no idea! What a day!!

### Post Reflection

*It was complicated to think through a world that was completely inverted. I had to create a chart to remember to look at characters and situations differently. It did not come naturally as I too have been fully immersed in a world that does not cater to me or allow me to see myself or d/Deaf people as the norm, the center, or the reality in which all others are based. This frustration I felt, and the time I had to spend thinking through how to invert the stories allowed me to more deeply look at the situation and how it played out in reality. The challenges with racially biased curricula, the drain of insensitive faculty and students, and the ways in which the hidden curriculum soaks into the pours of a campus life, creating an unwelcomed feel for Black d/Deaf students became clearer. It felt ridiculous to begin to invert the story. Reading these composites out loud seemed crazy, as if no campus could operate this way or something would be done. I sat with the uncomfortable feelings of seeing the word White and hearing on the paper over and over and how hard they had it at Eyeth University while at the same time writing Addie D as a character who was oblivious to her privilege. I realized at the end that the purpose of this inverted counternarrative was to evoke feelings of discomfort and confusion while also highlighting the many experiences that the participants had. Reading this counternarrative required me to pause and think about my own privilege and impact on the d/Deaf community. I believe this type of thinking is what is needed in order to think and feel through the complexity of oppression and higher education professionals' role in leveling out the play field for all students.*

Chapter 4 focused on four composite counternarratives set in a majority Black d/Deaf community called Vineyard. Addie D, Tasha, and Hardo, the three main characters, attended Eyeth University. Their stories were the inverted compilation of the participants' college

experiences, including issues with racism and audism and how they resisted. Chapter5, the analytical discussion, will expand on the ways in which the composites answered the research questions and the problems that guided this study.

**CHAPTER 5****ANALYTICAL DISCUSSION**

“The phenomenological inquiry is not unlike an artistic endeavor, a creative attempt to somehow capture a certain phenomenon of life in a linguistic description that is both holistic and analytical, evocative and precise, unique and universal, powerful and eloquent”

(Manen, 1984, p. 43).

Through composite stories and characters, the participants lived experiences were collected in “an artistic endeavor [to] creative[ly] attempt to capture a certain phenomenon of life” (Manen, 1984, p. 43), the phenomenon of Black d/Deaf alumni’s ability to resist and persist through racist and audist microaggressions as undergraduates. Although there is no one essence or way that alumni navigated; their stories breathed life, offered perspective, and provided a deeper understanding of what their world looked and felt like at their respective institutions.

This hermeneutic phenomenological study was guided by the three following research questions:

1. How do Black d/Deaf alumni make meaning of their experiences as Black d/Deaf undergraduate students?
2. How did Black d/Deaf alumni experience racist and audist microaggressions while navigating their undergraduate education?
3. How did Black d/Deaf alumni use aspects of Black d/Deaf community cultural wealth (BDCCW) to resist racial and audist microaggressions in order to persist to graduation?

In this section, I offer an analytical discussion of the composites using the theoretical frameworks, critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and critical Deaf theory (Gertz, 2003), and the ways in which the participants spoke through the composites to answer the three research questions. In addition, the problems driving this study are addressed by highlighting the ways in which this study begins to solve those challenges.

### **Discussion of Research Questions**

The social context of this study is higher education, which is portrayed in the composite counternarrative as Eyeth University. Within this social context there are specific spaces such as the classroom, school offices, campus environment, and residential halls as well as actions such as college transition, social identity development, student involvement, and career development that occurred and influenced how the participants made meaning out of their college experiences. In addition, within these specific spaces, and throughout the various actions, some participants experienced racist and audist microaggressions, which is seen throughout all the counternarratives with Hardo, Tasha, and other hearing and White students. The participants had interactions with a variety of players within their social context or campus including family, faculty, peers, Vocational Rehabilitation counselors, and interpreters. At times, these players helped them resist and contributed to their learning and using Black d/Deaf community cultural wealth, while other times they were the people enacting and causing the behavior that needed to be resisted. Using the five blended tenets of critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and critical Deaf theory (Gertz, 2003): (a) Understanding that racism and audism are endemic, (b) Honoring the intersectionality of d/Deaf People of Color, (c) Challenging dominant hearing and White ideology, (d)

Validating and centering the unique voices of d/Deaf People of Color, and (e) Showing commitment to social justice for d/Deaf People of Color, the following three sections use this theoretical framework, current literature, and the composite stories to answer the research questions.

### **Question #1 Making Meaning of their Undergraduate Experience**

The participants in this study shared a variety of stories about their childhood, K-12 educational experiences, their families, and college life. Those stories were similar and varying and offered unique and valid perspectives that created the five themes for question one. These themes are made up of specific spaces and actions that rose from their anecdotes about how they experienced college including: (a) Campus environments, (b) Social identity development and college transition, (c) Peer and family support, (d) Classroom and faculty experiences, (e) Vocational Rehabilitation counselors. All five themes were not experienced by all of the participants, nor were they experienced in a particular order or in the same way. However, each of these themes was woven into the composites as they highlighted the majority and outlying experiences that aided participants in making meaning of their undergraduate experiences.

**Campus environments.** The participants attended three different institutions with different campus environments that served as a canvas on which their college lives rested. Whether the campus was majority hearing or d/Deaf it impacted how they made meaning of their experience. There is no place like Eyeth University, predominantly Black and d/Deaf, but some of the participants had similar communication ease like Addie D. They attended an institution in which there was a large population of d/Deaf students, access to communication and connection with people was seldom an issue for them, and the campus catered to d/Deaf



people. Other participants were represented by Tasha, as there were smaller numbers of d/Deaf students within their institution and they had to rely on interpreters to negotiate hearing spaces and communication with their peers and professors. At times, this requirement influenced how involved they were or with whom they chose to be involved.

All the participants went to predominantly White institutions, which is the exact opposite of EU. Eyeth University's students spoke out against White and hearing students not having their needs met in similar ways as participants spoke to their frustrations as Black d/Deaf students not have their needs met. Similar to EU, the institutions the participants attended each stated they were committed to diversity, valued inclusiveness, or were a diverse campus; however, mission and vision do not always equate to action that actually makes a campus feel welcoming (Museus, 2008). Many times, institutions mistake what they strive to be for what they actually are, which gives Students of Color a false impression of what campus is really like (Bonner, 2010). An example of this issue is in the first counternarrative where Simone talked about the frustration of the historically hearing fraternities and sororities not having access to campus resources. The inverted version of this story rang true for one participant's campus. Greek Life was mostly White and received substantial funding and priority for event dates, often leaving groups such as the Black Student Union with no available weekends to host Black History Month events. Also, in the first narrative, Darren spoke to derogatory words being written on a student organization flyer. The administration rarely stepped in and or did little to follow up on these situations. It is these types of racially connected environmental incidents that may seem minor, but Cureton (2003) stated if not addressed can ultimately impact Students' of Color academic progress.

The participants also spoke to these racialized issues happening around campus, which the first counternarrative re-presented when Darren spoke about the off campus harassment of White Deaf students by Black Deaf students. The ways in which administration responded to those incidents further illuminated the campus's commitment or lack thereof in making the college atmosphere safe, friendly, and open to diverse student populations. This study takes Kuh and Love's (2004) perspective a step further, as it is not only the "complexities and subtleties of the interactions between students and institutions that affect persistence" (p.197), but also the lack of communication, interaction, connection, and visibility. Some participants fought to be seen on their campus on a micro and macro level. This struggle can be seen on a macro level in the first composite at the student rally. Student organization leaders were calling for administration to take their needs into consideration. This re-presents one participant's experience with being active within a student movement on her campus meeting with administrators, pushing for d/Deaf Students' of Color voices to be heard and their needs to be met, as well as fighting for the hiring of more d/Deaf Staff of Color. On a micro level, Tasha's hearing support group, *Listen Up*, was filled with micro examples of students desiring connection in the classroom, but they were unable to get it because of hearing privilege within student work groups, communication issues and insensitive practices with faculty, and biased curricula.

Major shifts in administrative leadership changed the climate and how students saw themselves. In the first counternarrative, Tasha said that she remembered when they hired the first hearing administrator and how she felt she too could be a leader simply by having a role model to look up to. Some participants felt this way as well when their institutions were making decisions about their future president, and they were directly or indirectly involved

with the political fight to not only give d/Deaf candidates a fair chance, but Black d/Deaf candidates an opportunity. Having the opportunity to see themselves, Black, d/Deaf or Black d/Deaf, within the leadership of their institution was acknowledged by a few of the participants and is consistent with the literature (Bonner, 2010). These experiences changed their sense of awareness about how the institution operated and their belief in the power of student protest. The hearing rally at EU is symbolic for these types of experiences that alumni were a part of. Some were like Tasha, not wanting to get involved with the politics of the campus yet having strong feelings about the outcomes, while others were more directly involved like Simone, Darren, and Brian, actively meeting with upper administration, organizing other student organizations, and trying to make a real change on their campus particularly related to diversity issues.

**Social identity development and college transition.** The participants' transitions to their respective institutions were pivotal in shaping the people they became. They experienced general college transition issues such as time management and trying to select a major, but most were first generation college students; like Tasha in the first counternarrative, they struggled with being unaware of resources such as the ability to transfer, the need for mentors, how to get a mentor, the importance of internships and the post-graduation job search process. As the participants reflected back over their undergraduate years, they were able to see the ways in which they missed out on experiences because of a lack of knowledge or mentors to guide them. Some alumni blamed themselves for missed opportunities, while at the same time, believing their institutions miscommunicated major requirements and under-communicated job, internship, and special academic program opportunities.

The major transition that most participants talked about was the exploration and development of their race/ethnic and d/Deaf identity as well as the intersecting of these identities. This exploration was complicated because of intersectionality. The participants' racial and d/Deaf identity intersected with a few different communities including d/Deaf White, Black hearing, and Black d/Deaf. All the participants arrived at college and were most aware of the new d/Deaf community they were entering and the fact that it was mostly White. Because of their diverse family and educational backgrounds, each participant had different levels of adjustment and learning curves once they entered into their campus's Deaf community, particularly as it related to Deaf culture.

Although Humphries (1993) stated that all Deaf People of Color are multicultural, most participants did not have access to Deaf culture growing up. Attending formal classes in college was one way the participants connected and developed their d/Deaf identities. The inverted version of this process can be seen in the third counternarrative with Nora and VOice. They talked about taking hearing and White cultural classes respectively. All but one participant took Deaf studies classes and one person minored in Deaf Studies to understand Deaf culture and history better. Most of the participants had very little exposure to d/Deaf people or culture in school or home while growing up. One participant was from a Deaf family, but she never saw being Deaf as an identity. It was not until college that she developed a sense of Deaf pride and cultural understanding. On the same note, one participant said she had gained a better understanding of being Deaf, but was keenly aware of the fact that her new knowledge had its basis in White d/Deaf history and people similar to Nora in the counternarrative. One participant took a Black d/Deaf studies class, and another had a section about Black d/Deaf people in his Deaf culture class. Each student left these

classes understanding the historical oppression that Black d/Deaf people experienced, particularly within the school system, which they said increased their self-determination and helped them to comprehend why some Black d/Deaf people struggled today.

This study primarily investigated race and d/Deaf identity, but in line with the theoretical frameworks, intersectionality was honored beyond just these two social identities by allowing participants to identify other social identities and to talk about those identities within their college experiences. Wolbers (2005) stated that Black d/Deaf people must undergo a dual socialization process as it relates to understanding culture, but this study shows that Black d/Deaf students are not only a heterogeneous group (Steward, 2009; Williamson, 2007), but may go through several socialization processes depending on their multiple intersecting identities. During this study, the participants talked about other social identities such as socioeconomic status (two participants identified as poor), sexual orientation (one participant identified as Pansexual), personality types (two participants identified as introverted), as well as religion (one person identified as a Christian). Although important to acknowledge and understand, this study, the participants, and the composites primarily focused on their d/Deaf and racial identities.

In the fourth composite, Hardo Fhearing, is an example of this navigation or self-reflecting process that occurred for many of the participants with their race and d/Deaf identity (Steward, 2008). As a multiracial and hard of hearing student, he fell within the cracks of the hearing/Deaf and Black/White binary. This was true for the participants who identified as multiracial, but culturally Black, hard of hearing, but culturally Deaf, visually a Black person, but African in identity. Throughout Hardo's process of trying to find a team to

join for the [In] Justice Games, he continuously ran into issues as each team represented a specific box in which he did not exclusively fit.

The participants in the study talked about the frustration of connecting with Deaf and Black peers and enduring biased and limiting class assignments and curriculum similar to Hardo in the third counternarrative with Dr. Knowitall. Some people on campus tried to force them to be only Black or Deaf or did not see them as a part of either the Deaf or Black community at all. Their frustration led a few of the participants to find refuge in counterspaces or cultural enclaves (Kuh & Love, 2004), which were made up of Black d/Deaf friendship circles, faculty mentors and student organization advisors, their families, or Black d/Deaf community organizations on and off campus. Tasha's hearing support group, *Listen UP*, in the third counternarrative is an example of a counterspace or cultural enclave. Tasha used this space as an opportunity to vent, get advice, be affirmed, and connect to people like her. The same was true for many of the participants in their counterspaces or cultural enclaves, as they felt most comfortable to just be and further explore what it meant for them to be Black and d/Deaf. Within her counterspace, another participant surprisingly realized that she had less in common with Black d/Deaf Americans and more in common with African d/Deaf students. She came from a racially diverse town, but not an ethnically diverse town. All Black people were considered Black Americans, but at school she had an opportunity to more deeply explore her African heritage and found a counterspace within a very different international peer group. Similar to Hardo at the end of the fourth counternarrative, some participants were surprised by the groups that not only accepted them, but in which they felt the most at home.

It is important to point out that intersectionality complicates what is needed in a cultural enclave space in order to have a positive impact. Cultural enclaves have “values, attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions that are congenial with one’s culture(s) of origin” (Kuh & Love, 2004, p. 205); however, the participants were navigating more than one culture and in some cases more than two. It may be assumed that primarily Black hearing or White d/Deaf organizations or spaces are the places that participants felt at home or received support, but such feelings of acceptance were not always the case because of communication issues and the residue of historical oppressive behaviors perpetuated within the groups. This pattern can be seen in counternarrative four when Hardo interacts with a diverse group of his peers while trying to fit into an [In]Justice Games’ team. This narrative re-presents the complexity many of the participants’ felt while trying to gain a sense of belonging on their campuses and develop their own intersected sense of identity. Unlike Hardo, most participants had very small Black d/Deaf peer groups on campus in which they could form a cultural enclave.

**Peer and family support.** Deaf cultural learning happened outside of the classroom as some participants had to get used to louder Deaf spaces, being confronted for speaking on their phones and using their voices, learning ASL, using interpreters, and navigating the internalized oppression within the d/Deaf community. The inverted version of this type of oppression can be seen in the first counternarrative with Tasha talking about the challenges of adjusting to EU her first year. Tasha relied on her peers, Addie D and Hardo, to help her adjust. In line with the literature (Boutin, 2008; Harper, 2008; Williamson, 2007), the participants also seemed to rely on their peers, particularly their Deaf peers, to persist, navigate, and negotiate college life. They shared how their peers helped them learn sign language and understand Deaf cultural norms. As some of the participants became more

comfortable within their new d/Deaf community, their peers became their roommates, collaborators in creating inclusive spaces on campus, as well as their closest friends. Their peers provided an abundance of support, from pushing them outside their comfort zone to being a sounding board when times were challenging. Addie D, in the first counternarrative, encouraged Tasha to run for the Black Hearing Student Union leadership position and advocated for Hardo when their peers ignored him during the [Un] Justice Games in the fourth counternarrative as a re-presenting of these experiences.

The participants' peers were important in all five of the themes, but I felt I needed to address peer support directly because, in line with the theoretical frameworks and in order to honor the most common and outlining narratives, it is important to share the positive and challenging aspects of peer relationships. As much as peers were supportive, their rejection was deeply felt as well when participants challenged the status quo or did not assimilate into Black or d/Deaf cultural norms. Counternarrative four addressed the varying peer interactions of which the participants spoke. Hardo was trying to join the Black Hearing Student Union, but they ignored him. A couple of participants who attended predominantly hearing institutions talked about the struggle to connect with their hearing Black peers, particularly in the NAACP and the Black Student Union, because of communication issues and internalized racism (i.e., they were not Black enough). Two participants took Black Studies classes to learn more about Black history, but they walked away with very different experiences. One participant loved the classes and minored in pan African studies, while another participant walked away after only taking one course because of an inability to relate to the Black hearing experience.



Hardo also tried to connect with the Deaf Power team, but was told he was not Deaf enough to be accepted. A few participants also talked about the challenge of connecting with students who identified as Deaf because they signed faster and more fluently, and they were quick to criticize or become frustrated if the participant did not know their “Deaf cultural norms.” The participants who experienced this treatment tended to stay away from those students and gravitated toward hard of hearing peers when they first entered college. These students were more willing to sign slowly, accepted them the way they were, and had more in common, such as attending mainstream schools and using hearing aids themselves.

Along with their peers, their families were critical to their success as most completed this statement: If it had not been for... my family... I wouldn't be here today. Aligned with the literature on parent involvement (Barnett, 2004; Bonner, 2010; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Kuh & Love, 2004), the participants' parents, siblings, kin, chosen family, and grandparents informally passed down the importance of education through taking them to the library when they were younger, encouraging them to stay in school when times got hard, helping them find internships when the university was not helpful, driving them to college, making academic success a priority, and the list goes on. Most of the participants talked about their family as background support in various ways. This pattern can be seen in the counternarratives with all three characters; Addie D came from a family who had gone to college and had an expectation that going to college was the natural next step after high school, as described in her bio. Tasha's family encouraged her to stay in school through her rough transition into college her first year in the first counternarrative, and Hardo's mother tried to help him negotiate paying for school and working with his new VR counselor in the second counternarrative. Not all the participants had this type of support from their families

and, as Guiffrida and Douthit (2010) said, family can also be a liability to students' success. Some participants saw college as a way out of their poor neighborhoods and away from their families and homes that lacked access to communication. School was their outlet to a better life and their opportunity to create a chosen family of friends who could communicate with them and understood them better than their hearing families.

**Classroom and faculty experiences.** The classroom was a place where audism and racism were deeply felt by all the participants in a variety of ways with a handful of really positive moments. The second counternarrative, *One Academic Experience Fits All... Or Does It?*, was written in two parts with Hardo and Tasha, addressing the participants' many different experiences including their in-class experiences with peers, poor classroom set ups, positive and challenging interactions with faculty, and for some the challenge of being in predominantly hearing academic spaces. The participants shared examples of how faculty complied with the basic requirements of ADA, but not the spirit of the law, which is inclusiveness (Ballenger, 2013). The students in the *Listen Up* support group re-presented the varying struggles, including VOice's challenge with being ignored in class and having faculty only request classroom accommodations with which they were most comfortable. The participants encountered faculty who did not want interpreters in class, as they were a distraction to their teaching, only requested a captionist without asking students what they needed, encouraged students to meet with their tutors instead of attending office hours, and did not encourage them to apply for internships and or jobs. The research shows that faculty mentorship is critical to Black d/Deaf students' ability to persist (Anderson & Miller, 2004/2005; Barnett, 2004; Bonner, 2010; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010), and the participants were able to navigate these situations because of strong mentors as well as family and peer

support. One participant who attended Gallaudet specifically identified three Black Deaf faculty members who she believed without their help she would not have persisted to graduation. These faculty members were a sounding board, offered refuge from a non-inclusive campus, affirmed her, and encouraged her to keep going.

Some of the participants had access to strong faculty mentors. Additionally, there was other faculty at the predominantly hearing institutions that were creative and they connected one-on-one with the participants. One faculty member allowed a participant to present her final paper in ASL. The participant said the faculty member was surprised at how much she had actually learned, but for the participant it was about being able to show her learning in a way that made sense for her. This is one example of a faculty member who understood that creating an inclusive classroom was more than support services, but also faculty teaching and evaluation methods (Foster & Brown, 1988; Foster, Long & Shell, 1999). Tasha's story re-presented the impact of positive support when VOice said, "When you get a teacher who really understands...who takes the time to learn more about hearing culture and is flexible enough to meet you where you're at... Man...those are good experiences!" This was indeed an empowering moment for the participant as she felt validated and respected as a Deaf person, but this type of action happened infrequently.

Beyond challenges with faculty relationships were peer interactions, course curriculum, and evaluation. The same sentiments of exclusion felt with faculty were experienced by three participants within student work groups. They were unable to fully participate or partake in meaningful ways because their peers seemed uninterested in their contribution. Icantay's experience in his business management class re-presented this behavior, as he asked his group members to sign more slowly, so he could contribute, but he

was ignored and given logistical tasks to compete. He experienced the frustration of being excluded because of interpreter communication delays and hearing students unwilling to work with interpreters. This finding is in line with Foster and Brown's (1988) study as their participants also talked about separation from their classmates because of communication issues and perceived lack of interest on the part of hearing students.

Hardo's story in the classroom addressed participants' experiences with isolating and biased curriculum. One participant took a Deaf Studies class and left the class feeling disconnected and frustrated as what it meant to be Deaf was narrowly defined, excluding her from a community with which she identified. Another participant, like Hardo, confronted a teacher about racist material being taught in the class. Overall, some participants simply were not satisfied with their education, believing the standards and curriculum were not college level and the educational resources were inadequate. Two participants talked about having little to no support from faculty to be academically successful during or after college. Even though Palmer and Young (2011) talked about the importance of authentic and caring faculty relationships to encourage persistence, most of the participants in this study were able to persist without those relationships by relying on other resources. The lack of these faculty relationships seemed to taint how two participants felt about their institution and major as they regretted getting the degree they had, did not credit the institution or faculty for helping them be successful at all, and might have considered different institutions if they could do it over again.

Lastly, Tasha, in the hearing support group, shared her concerns about trying to transfer her written thoughts into signed thoughts and the concern of being graded and evaluated base on unrealistic expectations. In this study, a couple of participants talked about

struggling in the classroom with writing and communication, and not feeling like they had the support to improve. Porter et al. (1998) said that d/Deaf students “often face navigating the hidden rocks and sudden whirlpools of college life without the necessary tools” (p. 5), which was echoed by one participant who said her difficulties occurred because she was judged and graded based on hearing expectations and values, and did not have the tools to show her learning in the ways in which it was asked of her. This finding is directly in line with the ways in which universal design could have been used to support all types of learners in the class (Steinfeld & Jordana, 2012), but was often not the case for the participants.

**Vocational Rehabilitation counselors.** The 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was the catalysis for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) service centers opening up across the country (Hairston & Smith, 1983). To aid individuals with [dis]abilities, including d/Deaf people, in finding work or gaining access to higher education, each person is provided a VR counselor to navigate the system and connect him or her to resources (Hairston & Smith, 1983). Although this fact did not directly come up in the literature, Vocational Rehabilitation counselors played a pivotal role in the participants’ college experiences because they served as gatekeepers either positively encouraging them to succeed or creating roadblocks to their success in college. The second counternarrative, *The Freedom to Choose for Some, but Not All*, attempted to capture the roller coaster of experiences the participants had with their VR counselors. In the narrative, VR counselors were available to hearing and hard of hearing people in Vineyard, but VR counselors were actually provided to the participants during their senior year in high school. Similar to Vineyard, each state has its own policies around what services they will provide and the amount of funding offered for training or college.

Some participants had the same VR counselor their entire time in college like Tasha, while others were bounced around from counselor to counselor like Hardo. Some institutions had VR counselors on campus while others went back home to meet with their counselors when needed. Tasha talked about having a great counselor, who connected her to campus resources, supported her major, and assisted her with funding. Some of the participants had wonderful experiences with their counselors. These experiences often happened with Deaf VR counselors, but not always, and included being allowed to select whatever major genuinely interested them, emergency funding provided during the summer term for housing, graduate school being added to their educational plan in order for it to be financially covered in the future, and support to attend the college of their choosing. One participant who had a positive VR experience was given permission and the information needed to attend a precollege ASL program in order to start college with a stronger ASL foundation. This program helped her make friends before school started and boosted her confidence.

Although there were some positive experiences, the participants had more disheartening, frustrating, and audist experiences with VR counselors than positive. Similar to Hardo's story regarding his major change, some participants were not allowed to declare the major of their choice, being told they could never be successful in particular fields or that going to school was about getting a job and not about pursuing their passions. One participant was told she did not have enough sign language ability to be a Deaf teacher, and when the participant said she could learn ASL, the VR counselor said that would be too much for her. We know d/Deaf students' transition into college encompasses different hurdles (Getzel, 2008), and it becomes more challenging when d/Deaf students have their academic abilities or goals belittled before entering college by VR counselors as these

messages do not help them build academic confidence, which the literature (Boutin, 2008; Stinson et al., 1987) states is needed to help d/Deaf students persist. The participants were resilient to VR counselors and they all persisted regardless of negative or discouraging interactions with their counselors. One participant paid for her last year of college because her VR counselor refused to fund the major into which she switched. This independence and resistance was re-presented by Hardo as he pushed back against his counselor's limiting expectations by applying to college and ultimately choosing the major in which he was most interested.

In addition, everyone had different levels of support from their VR services, particularly in regard to funding and post-graduate support. For example, some participants had their tuition and housing paid while others received funding for tuition, housing, and books. Funding was helpful, but the lack of communication when funding was being decreased because of budget cuts was frustrating. One participant had her funding cut weeks before school started, and she had to figure out how to pay her tuition at the last minute. Another challenge was the assistance they thought they would receive after graduating in their job search. One participant is still unemployed and was only aided at getting a volunteer internship before she was told she could no longer use VR services. Another participant talked about the ways in which VR only pushed him to accept entry level jobs, when he was qualified to do much more with a college degree; while another found the job list out of date and not connected to what he was qualified to do.

There were many spaces, actions, and players that shaped the experiences of and contributed to the participants' making meaning of their college experience, but internal drive and determination were salient for all the participants. Similar to Williamson's (2007)

findings on resiliency, the participants were willing to do whatever it took to be successful in college and their ability to withstand or resist challenging moments and situations was a skill they had learned before and during college. Although no participants had the same experience, there were common themes in which the participants talked about their college lives including: (a) Campus environments, (b) Social identity development and college transition, (c) Peer and family support, (d) Classroom and faculty experiences, (e) Vocational rehabilitation counselors. The research questions were not isolated, but built on and within each other. An overview of their college experiences was addressed, and now discussion of question two highlights the specific audist and racist incidents within their college experiences that the participants had to navigate and resist.

### **Question #2 Experiences of Racist and Audist Microaggressions**

The purpose of Question 2 was not to prove if racism and audism were real. The theoretical frameworks are the building blocks on which the study was formed, thus claiming that racism and audism are real, historically rooted, and have systemic impacts is a theoretical assumption. However, the purpose of the study was to identify incidents of racist and audist microaggressions that the participants experienced as undergraduates including what happened, where it happened, and who was involved. Mostly, the participants were able to identify racist and audist discriminatory incidents, but there were also times when participants were not sure if they were being mistreated because of their race and/or because they are d/Deaf. One participant said that looking back, she often could see how audism impacted her life as those walls of oppression were much bigger and harder to get over; however, with racism, she was not always aware because those walls seemed less challenging to maneuver, as if she had a protective shield against this type of oppression.



Throughout our time together, she realized that even though it was not always clear, the mistreatment she experienced could have been a result of racism and/or audism.

Acts of discrimination on intersected identities can be challenging to sort through for undergraduate students, as well as retrospectively for them as alumni, because it is not always clear and microaggressions are typically subtle and hard to prove (Solórzano et. al., 2000). Thus, the situations in which the participants and I were able to identify racist, audist, or both microaggressions, as well as how they resisted the aggression, were the stories that were used to answer Question 2. How the participants responded, as well as the situations that were not easily identified or the participants did not resist, are addressed in Question 3. It is also important to mention that incidents of discrimination did not happen solely between dominant and subordinate groups. There was intragroup discrimination, meaning incidents with the participants and their Black or d/Deaf peers. These incidents have not been labeled as microaggressions but rather as the manifestation of larger systemic oppressive issues playing out among marginalized communities and are outside the scope of this study.

After listening to the participants' stories, I found that some of the racial and audist microaggressions participants experienced fell within the scope of how scholars (Eckert & Rowley, 2013; Sue et al., 2007) had defined and explained them, but there were also situations that occurred that did not fit into the given terms and definitions. I was also attempting to make sense of racism and audism as intersected forms of oppressions. Thus, instead of using terms such as microinvalidation and *lassiez-faire* audism, I found that patterns within the study and in conjunction with literature led to creation of new themes to better communicate the ways in which these participants experienced microaggressions. I

identified four themes in which the microaggressions occurred: (a) Distorted expectations, (b) Invisibility, (c) Trivialization, and (d) Co-opting.

**Distorted expectations.** Incidents of racial/audist microaggressions fit within this theme if the aggression resulted in lower, limiting, or negative expectations of Black d/Deaf students or expectations that were audiocentric, meaning privileging or centering hearing values or ways of being. These examples are connected to Vocational Rehabilitation counselors (VR) and faculty expectations in the classroom.

**Vocational Rehabilitation counselors.** The first example was of limiting or lowering expectations in counternarrative two, *The Freedom to Choose for Some, but Not All*. Har do was told “You pick a major because it will get you a job not because it makes you happy.” One participant was told just that when she went to visit her third new VR counselor in his office. Her paperwork had not been updated in a few years even though she had been in contact with previous counselors. She had changed her major to history a while ago, but officially changed it with the counselor in person this time, only to be told she needed to pick a major that led to a job and not because she enjoyed it. There was no conversation about what her plans were or how she hoped to use the degree. The counselor did not see the direct connection to a job or that she had the skills to make the connections. He did not believe a Deaf person could get a job with a history degree, so he took her funding away. The research shows that academic integration is an important component to persistence and an aspect of integration is being mostly satisfied within one’s major (Tinto, 1993). VR counselors served as gatekeepers and could open the doors of higher education or take participants’ freedom of choice away.

There is a history of d/Deaf people being crushed throughout the educational pipeline by perceived low expectations (Stuart & Gilchrist, 2005). Hardo's counternarrative represents a moment of how one participant felt crushed, "I remember when I first walked into my VR counselor's office in high school. I was so excited about college. I really wanted to be a teacher. He told me I'd never get a job because my signing skills weren't strong enough. I was too hearing! I just kept my frustrations to myself... I knew I could learn, but what was I going to say in the moment." This counternarrative is parallel to one participant, as she wanted to be a Deaf education teacher, but had grown up in oral education. She wanted to work with Deaf children, but the VR said her signing skills were not strong enough to ever be a Deaf education teacher. This counselor did not take into consideration that hearing students major in Deaf education every year. They have to learn ASL as well before becoming a Deaf education teacher, and that this participant would be no different. In fact, we know that Black d/Deaf children struggle to find mentors who look like them throughout their education (Ila & Fischer, 2005), and that Professionals of Color make up about 10% of those in Deaf education (Andrews & Jordan, 1993), so this participant could have made a great contribution to the field of education and d/Deaf Children of Color. To maintain her financial support, this option was taken off the table, and she chose a different major. In this case, audist microaggressions have the potential to have a rippling effect on future generations of Black d/Deaf students. What seems to be a small act is a form of tracking, keeping d/Deaf generally, and Black d/Deaf people more specifically, within certain majors and career paths.

These are both examples of what Eckert and Rowley (2013) would call metaphysical covert audism in which the VR counselors are linking the participants' autonomy and d/Deaf

and perhaps racial (this is unknown for sure) identity with audiocentric assumptions as justification to treat them differently. These are covert ways in which d/Deaf people are underprivileged (Garrow et al., 2014), and how audist microaggressions can impact their college experiences and future career endeavors. State and federal financial aid, including scholarships and grants, are not taken away from hearing students if they do not select certain majors or because a school or financial aid counselor does not believe they will be able to successfully obtain a job.

*Faculty expectations.* Parallel with low and limiting expectations were the values around expectations. A Black d/Deaf students' ability to academically integrate into a majority White and hearing institution lies heavily on their ability to adjust to and navigate White and hearing spaces and values (Boutin, 2008), but audist or racist macroaggressions often occur when the environment does not adjust to support or disadvantages Black d/Deaf students (Sue et al., 2007). Aligned with institutional audism, hearing students receive institutional advantages like having hearing faculty members, the curriculum delivered in their native tongue (usually), and resources on campus that are ready and able to assist them (Eckert & Rowley, 2013). The second example is contrasting to this experience, as faculty hold audiocentric expectations of the participants' academic work and ability. Tasha represented the inverted version of this microaggression in her hearing support group, the third counternarrative, when she shared, "I often feel like I'm being judge based on Deaf expectations. I didn't grow up signing, so when I do class presentations my words don't always come out as clear... I just wish I could show the teacher what I know in a different way like writing a paper or speaking my presentation with an interpreter. I'm not dumb, but my mind just works differently than Deaf students." These were the inverted sentiments of

one participant who felt that she was being held to unrealistic audiocentric expectations when it came to her performance in the classroom.

Faculty create assessment tools to evaluate student learning and the results of those assessments then determine if a student has done well on an assignment and if they pass a class. If the expectations are set too high or low, then faculty members have not met students at their level. One participant felt professors over-emphasized written assessment, and did not take into consideration or value other ways of knowing or showing learning. She said she did not use her speaking voice as much, so she lost the ability to deeply express herself verbally or in writing. She struggled to figure out how her signing voice could transfer to her writing voice in papers. Feeling embarrassed to ask for more help or fearing she would receive harsher criticism from hearing people about her writing (Getzel, 2008), she often struggled in silence. Faculty would give written feedback, but she never knew how to really give them what they wanted. She felt that faculty members assumed she had access to the skills and tools she needed to be successful during her K-12 education (Eiler-Crandall, 2009), but in her reality most d/Deaf students tended not to get the best English access or advanced levels with the language like hearing students. Faculty would tell her to go to tutoring, but the tutors were also hearing. Many did not always have the skills or motivation to help her and would give her the same audiocentric feedback as her professors; thus, this resource was not as helpful as the faculty might have thought.

Faculty need to be prepared to give the greatest amount of access and opportunity to all students. Getzel (2008) said that students with [dis]abilities benefit most when faculty understand how to accommodate their needs. Verbal English was not this participant's native language, nor did she have access to hear how the words were put together like

hearing students in order to correct her written mistakes. This limitation does not mean d/Deaf students are not smart or do not know; it just means there need to be different and multiple ways to approach learning and different tools to be able to match d/Deaf students' ways of knowing and understanding (Steinfeld & Jordana, 2012). Campuses are set up for hearing students, and a hearing mentality plays out in the classroom as faculty assume all of their students will be hearing and come from the same or similar backgrounds. They create a class that caters to those students, not taking into consideration universal design teaching techniques or leaving flexibility to adjust to different learners (Steinfeld & Jordana, 2012). This is an example of how some faculty do not believe their teaching approach or style need to change in order meet the needs of d/Deaf students (Foster et al., 1999) and we must unceasingly challenge this perception. The participants believed the faculty should be able to accommodate a diverse group of student needs versus assuming all students could hear and had the same access to learning and understanding of written English.

Distorted Expectations was the lens in which those in the majority evaluated and determined the participants' potential to be successful. Whether they wished to select their own career path with their VR counselors or demonstrate their learning and understanding in a different way, participants were subjected to lower, limiting, negative, and audiocentric expectations. The examples given focused on audism, but this focus does not mean distorted expectations does not apply to the participants' race as well. Distorted expectations can be closely connected to invisibility because at times the expectations of participants were so low or audiocentric that they were rendered invisible. In the next section, I explain invisibility and offer examples of microaggressions experienced because of this type of microaggression.

**Invisibility.** Incidents of racial/audist microaggressions fit within this theme if the aggression resulted in Black d/Deaf students' experiences, bodies, thoughts, voices, or cultures being intentionally or unintentionally ignored, unnoticed, excluded, or neglected. Invisibility was a common way in which participants experienced audist and racist microaggressions and is consistent with what the literature states about Students of Color often feeling invisible within the educational system (Solórzano et al., 2000). There are four sets of examples that focus on the ways in which the participants felt invisible when working with classmates, within the curriculum, in the process of obtaining accommodations, and as community members on their campuses.

**Classmates.** The classroom was a place that some of the participants felt invisible. Since Eyeth University does not exist, all of the participants as Black d/Deaf people were at institutions that were not envisioned with them in mind (Razack, 2002). The classroom is not a culturally neutral space and those in the majority, typically hearing and White (faculty and students), create, reproduce, and reinforce their own values (Razack, 2002), which can lead to Black d/Deaf students experiencing issues of audist and racist microaggressions. Such was the case with a few participants when working within hearing student groups. One participant was a part of a seven-person student project group, and was the only Deaf member. Hearing students talked over each other, and he continuously tried to tell the group to slow down so he could contribute to the conversation, but no one listened. At the end of dividing the project tasks, he was left with fixing the references and designing the charts and graphs. He did not contribute much to the project nor did he get much from it. In other classes, teachers set up a separate Deaf group, and in these situations he was often the leader and very motivated to get things done. Another participant said he felt ignored in hearing

work groups even though his interpreter tried to advocate for him by telling the group to talk one at a time. These frustrations with hearing student work groups were re-presented by Icantay in Tasha's half of the third counternarrative where he talks about his business management class saying, "I continue to ask them to slow down so I can keep up, but they just ignore me. I take whatever tasks they give me."

From a racialized perspective, this behavior is microinvalidation, but from an audism lens, it is a covert individual audist situation because these behaviors were environmental slights that impacted participants one-on-one by excluding the Black d/Deaf participants' thoughts and feelings from the project (Eckert & Rowley, 2013; Sue et.al., 2007). It is unclear why the participants were rendered invisible within the situations with their peers, as such actions are outside of the scope of this study, but these microaggressions were emotionally harmful and tainted participants' motivation, as some students started appeasing these types of situations versus advocating for themselves (Sue et al., 2007). Congruent with the literature (Foster & Brown, 1988), feelings of inclusivity did not occur because of support services such as interpreters, and in spite of having an interpreter, feelings of exclusion were common because of the disconnect between the participants and their classmates.

Mainstream college education is a good idea in theory, but simply putting diverse people together does not necessarily develop the skills students need to work with diverse people, and may have a negative impact on d/Deaf students' contributions in class. As one participant said, she would be more engaged, ask more questions, and start dialogue in class if she had an equal footing with her peers. This situation is re-presented by Nora, who stated:

Can you imagine if everyone in the class used English? I would want to really show what I knew. I would be super engaged in conversations and debates. Now, I have



an interpreter and sometimes they translate what I'm saying right and other times, I can tell by the professor's face and the questions they ask me that something got lost in translations. It can be embarrassing!

**Curriculum.** In counternarrative two, Hardo's story in the classroom addressed participants' experiences with isolating and biased curriculum. One participant took a Deaf Studies class and left the class feeling disconnected and frustrated. The professor was focusing on a Deaf culture lesson, and he taught the class from a very narrow view of who counted as real Deaf people which included those with Deaf parents, had attended a Deaf residential school, grew up learning ASL, and were connected to a Deaf community. He believed hard of hearing or lower case "d" Deaf people would always be catching up to the real community. This definition was the exact opposite of her experience. She saw herself as a real Deaf person, did not have any of those experiences, and was unable to have her identity fully affirmed within the classroom or from her hearing family. She was also keenly aware that she had learned more about Deaf culture, but White Deaf culture as she did not see herself as a Black woman reflected in the class either. This exclusion is often the case since Black d/Deaf culture is not taught in school and Black d/Deaf people must learn about themselves on their own (Aramburo, 2005). This participant existed some place in the middle (not just d/Deaf or just Black), and blamed this disconnect in the curriculum on the faculty's inability to speak to or educate from an intersectional and multicultural place. A result of invisibility was the continuous dishonoring of intersectionality. Deaf Studies scholars (Kavin & Botto, 2009; Foster & Brown, 1988; Foster, Long, & Snell, 1999) stated that d/Deaf students need a variety of support services, but they did not speak to the ways in which d/Deaf students' other social identities, such as race, might impact their feelings of

inclusion in the classroom as a result of whether the curriculum is taught through a multicultural and race conscious lens. This study illuminates the importance and potential isolating impact of not considering intersectionality, particularly within the classroom.

***Accommodations.*** Even though institutions have to provide reasonable accommodations to d/Deaf students on their campuses, the law does not heavily stipulate what “reasonable” means, nor does it say that accessing accommodations needs to be friendly or easy. Some participants had a challenging time getting their needs met within the classroom and co-curricular activities. Tasha, in the first counternarrative, said, “That Earth science teacher... Ugh! That teacher just refused to work with me. I had to work my way up to the Dean of the college to get an interpreter for that class.” This inverted story represents one participant who had an interpreter but needed to get a special stethoscope for a nursing class, so she could hear the heart beat for a class test.

The process of getting the equipment took several weeks as she worked with the Office of Disability Services, her interpreter, her faculty, and ultimately the Dean of the college. During our interviews, she talked about how stressed out and anxious she was about not getting the resources she needed to be successful and how much time it was taking to arrange the accommodation. It is situations like this that Getzel (2008) would say contribute to students not feeling welcomed or successful on some campuses today, and takes away from their focus on academics, as seen in Fries-Britt and Griffin’s (2007) study with high achieving Black students. The emotional drain and strain of audist and/or racist microaggressions takes a toll on students, inhibiting some Black d/Deaf students from persisting (Sue et al., 2007), as was the case for another participant who left a predominantly hearing institution. He started college the summer before his first year, but the

accommodations that were promised, including an interpreter, were not set up until half way through the summer semester. In fear that his needs would not get met in the fall, he transferred to a new institution a week before fall semester.

Having full access to participate in an array of educational experiences is what Porter et al. (1998) would call living out the spirit of the ADA, including out of class opportunities such as studying abroad. I personally worked with a d/Deaf student who wanted to study abroad, but like one participant, she was told that she had to figure out interpreter needs on her own. In the third counternarrative, VOice wanted to go to Italy and shared with the hearing support group,

The [study abroad] director told me that wasn't their responsibility and sent me back to my academic department. My department said they couldn't afford to pay for an interpreter. I've been running around trying to figure everything out for about two weeks. I assumed that an interpreter would be taken care of since study abroad is a class and a part of my education.

The participant on whose experiences this story was based, got a rude awakening as did VOice, when she had already paid her deposit to go to Europe with a history class. She was told no interpreter would be provided because no one would pay for it. This is a situation where someone could say involves an unreasonable accommodation, it is too expensive, or the ADA does not apply outside of the U.S. However, I would argue that this is an example of how hearing students have unearned privileges on our campuses and d/Deaf students are underprivileged (Garrow et al., 2014). It is a covert institutional audist microaggression that has been allowed to stand without question because there seems to be a perfectly reasonable explanation regarding why it occurs (Eckert & Rowley, 2013). It is this perfectly reasonable

explanation and the subtlety of it makes it an audist microaggression, hard to address, and damaging to students. This participant attended the trip, but because of communication issues she had few to no interactions with other hearing students in the class, and unlike her hearing peers who went off on their own in small groups experiencing Europe, she and a friend stayed close to the professor and were mostly isolated from the group.

*Significant campus community members.* The Black d/Deaf community has successful and accomplished members within it, but many Black d/Deaf students and children typically do not have access to these potential mentors until later in life or ever (Ila & Fischer, 2005). This lack of contact is because accomplished people are not visible in mainstream places, such as the classroom or Deaf professions more broadly (Andrews & Jordan, 1993). In order to have more mentors, I believe student leaders must be groomed, poured into, taught the importance of serving, exposed to leadership development, allowed to make mistakes, and actively guided on how to be a mentor while at college, so they can contribute to the next generation. This process requires that institutions see Black d/Deaf students and recognize their worth and potential to impact future generations. Several of the participants, with or without access to mentors, got involved in student organizations on campus, attended leadership trainings held by the National Black Deaf Advocates, sat on committees, and developed leadership skills in a variety of ways. These participants often fought to be seen and have their needs met on campus. Re-presented by the student rally in the first counternarrative, as Tasha and other characters spoke out against feeling excluded on campus, one participant said her campus offered little support for diverse student groups. She believed there needed to be more support, particularly from the student government. The participant felt Student of Color groups got pushed to the bottom, but should have access to

equal treatment, particularly around funding and campus programming space. It was the patterns of behavioral indignities such as the Black Student Union not having access to campus programming space for the month of February, a microinsult (Sue et.al., 2007), or few to no Black d/Deaf people in high profile leadership positions on campus, a microinvalidation (Sue et.al., 2007), that the participants used as examples of feeling invisible and not seen as significant members of their campus community.

In addition, Black d/Deaf alumni felt invisible to their institutions after graduation. Stuart and Gilchrist (2005) stated, “A sense of invisibility can lead to a lack of self-identity and self-pride” (p.64), which is how one participant felt about not seeing more Black d/Deaf people recognized in the alumni magazine for their accomplishments. As a successful Black d/Deaf graduate, he was angered that his and other Black d/Deaf students’ achievements had not been recognized by his institution. Having attended a d/Deaf institution, he believed the lack of acknowledgement was because he was Black and not because of his d/Deaf identity. Tasha re-presents this frustration in counternarrative one when she talks about her friend James stating, “Then even when we, hearing people are successful, then only certain types of hearing people are recognized by the institution.” Not acknowledging Black d/Deaf alumni’s achievements further excluded their experiences (Sue et al., 2007) as being important and limited current students’ access to mentors and role models who looked like them.

Invisibility was the most common way that participants experienced racial and audist microaggressions, which is consistent with the ways in which Black d/Deaf students have been historically treated from no access to education (McCaskill et al., 2011), to poor segregated schools (Gannon, 1981), to being stripped of race as a d/Deaf person (Parasnis, 2012), to their absence in education literature and research (Williamson, 2007). The

participants experienced invisibility through interactions with their classmates, within course curriculum, while trying to obtain accommodations, and feelings of insignificance as students or alumni of their institutions. Being treated as invisible is different than being recognized but minimized through that recognition. In the next section, I address the ways in which the participants experienced racist and audist microaggression through trivialization.

**Trivialization.** Incidents of racial/audist microaggressions fit within this theme if the aggression resulted in Black d/Deaf students' experiences, bodies, thoughts, voices or cultures being intentionally or unintentionally recognized, but still rendered as unimportant, minimized, or belittled, which has a similar connotation to aversive audism (Eckert & Rowley, 2013) and microinsults (Sue et.al., 2007). These microaggressions happened in very subtle ways and could easily be explained away. They were mostly identified as aversive because at first glance, it seemed the participants were treated with "reasonable accommodations" and seen as Black d/Deaf people until an insensitive, rude, or demeaning action countered it. There are two sets of examples with faculty interaction and their curriculum, as well as administrators that are aimed at showing how participants encountered trivialization.

***Faculty interactions and their curriculum.*** Participants experienced issues of audist microaggressions related to some faculty's expectations, but in trivialization participants encountered moments with faculty in which they seemed open to help, but only in the way in which they saw best. One participant experienced high frustration with the faculty who were not willing to meet with him one-on-one, but would instead refer him to his tutor, as represented by Nora in the third counternarrative stating, "I just have to get the assistance any way I can." He wanted to meet with the professors as they were the ones teaching the

information. The participant still received help, and working with tutors can be essential to Black d/Deaf students' success (Eilers-Crandall, 2009); however, the participant did not feel that hearing students were pushed to tutors first. Plus, having access and connection to faculty is important for all students to learn. These common-place unintentional audist gestures may seem small and insignificant, but continually being put off wears on a person emotionally and cognitively, resulting in a healthy sense of paranoia (Sue et al., 2008), and potentially deters a student from asking for help in the future, which may already be a challenge for some students with [dis]abilities (Getzel, 2008).

There were also several stories regarding how faculty felt about interpreters in their classes. Some did not mind, while others thought interpreters were distracting and pushed against having them sit up front or too close to them in class. As re-presented by VOice in the third counternarrative, "I once had a teacher who only liked having captionists in the class and not interpreters because she felt like they were a distraction." An accommodation was provided, but one participant said he and other students wanted an interpreter so it was easier to ask questions and participate in the class. The first two weeks were frustrating as they read the captionist's notes, and he had to be very patient. Ultimately, an interpreter was requested, but the participant and others did not think it was fair that an interpreter had not been provided from day one. Getzel and McManus (2005) are right that some faculty may not know what the campus offers to support d/Deaf students, but situations like this where the professor had worked with d/Deaf students before and requested an interpreter; it is harder to label this as a situation where she just did not know.

This incident seemed connected to a professor not recognizing her hearing privilege, nor realizing the importance of d/Deaf people making choices for themselves. There has

been a history of hearing people believing they know better or more than d/Deaf people do about their own lives (Trowler & Turner, 2002) and this situation must change. Throughout most of the participants' lives their teachers, families, and other support services have made decisions on their behalf, but it is vital that faculty and support services on a college level respect what Black d/Deaf students say they need. A part of students with [dis]abilities adjusting to college is activating the self-determination and self-management skills they learned prior to college as well as continuously developing them in college in order to be personally and academically successful (Getzel, 2008). This skill includes knowing the resources available on campus and being allowed to use them.

Issues with invisibility within the curriculum was a way in which Black d/Deaf people experienced audist and racist microaggressions, but faculty also have the ability to intentionally or unintentionally stereotype marginalized populations within their curriculum, leaving students feeling unimportant and belittled (Eckert & Rowley, 2013; Sue et al., 2007). One participant had an older White female professor in a liberal arts class who was talking about U.S. culture and said that Black culture was not a real culture, but a subculture in the U.S. There were three Black d/Deaf students in the class who were shocked that the professor had been so forward with her remarks, trivializing the Black experience and culture as something subpar to White culture. The inverted version of this experience was represented in the second counternarrative with Hardo and Peter when Dr. Knowitall said, "There are many subcultures such as White culture [*he looks over at Hardo and Peter*], but these cultures have had very little influence on the shaping of our society or why we are a great nation today." Feeling upset, the participant, like Hardo, talked to the professor after



class and the professor said that Black culture was below American culture. Angered, the participant wanted to drop the class.

Ultimately, she and another student stayed in the class, but one student, a Black d/Deaf male, dropped the class and eventually dropped out of school. The participant did not know why he dropped out, and there is no direct evidence that the male student left the class and school because of this issue, but the literature does talk about how racial microaggressions can cause Black students to feel exhausted, frustrated, and doubt themselves and that these feelings can lead to students dropping classes, changing majors, or leaving school (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2008; Sue et al., 2007). The professor was the only one to teach this required liberal arts class, and other students had complained about her making the same discriminatory remarks in other classes. Faculty have the power to create space in their classes for all students or to trivialize them by how and what they teach.

*Administrators' interactions.* Because racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, Levit & Verchick, 2006) and audism (Gertz, 2003) are inherently cultural realities, incidents of discrimination will happen. Since college campuses are a microcosm of the real world, it is unfortunate, but should be expected, that they will happen on campuses as well. It is how higher education administrators respond to these incidents that determine if a situation is a teaching moment or missed opportunity, a moment of healing or further alienation, a moment of acknowledgement or continuous trivialization of Black d/Deaf students' experiences. Most of the participants were not naïve about issues of racism or audism, but still looked to their campuses to create a friendly, welcoming, and safe environment for them despite larger systemic issues of oppression. However, when administrators did not respond, pushed past

incidents too quickly, did not follow up with, or trivialized racist and audist situations, then Black d/Deaf students did not feel a sense of belonging or reassurance that campus was a safe place away from home (Kuh & Love, 2004).

One participant spoke about two racial microaggressions that occurred near and on her campus and how the administration minimized the incidents. Darren re-presented both incidents; in the first counternarrative, when he talked about his student organization's Spring Movie Night flyers being defaced with derogatory words, and when two White Deaf students were chased and harassed by two Black Deaf students off campus. The first incident the participant shared was a microassault, as its intent was to hurt Black students through name-calling (Sue et.al., 2007). The "N" word was written on the Black Student Union's event flyer around campus. They reported the issue to their student activities center, but because the person who committed the act could not be identified nothing was done, and the participant and friend left feeling unsupported. There was no conversation or follow up with the group. The second incident happened near campus at the Deaf high school involving two White boys who tied a Black boy to a chair and wrote KKK on tape over his mouth, which was a direct racist attack. What happened next was a blend of a microinsults and microinvalidations (Sue et.al., 2007); the incident made national news, and the White President spoke out saying the situation really was not that serious, and that the students were playing a game. Both situations sent a shock wave of confusion, frustration, and anger through the Black d/Deaf community on campus as students tried to make meaning of the situations and process through feelings of powerlessness (Sue et al.,2008). The participant was shocked at the time and looking back wished she had done more than she did, but said she was not as sure of herself back then and did not know what to do. Administrators must

understand and acknowledge the damage of racial and audist microaggressions and the potential role their actions, decision, and good intentions play in perpetuating them through trivialization on campus.

**Co-Opting.** Incidents of racial/audist microaggressions fit within this theme if the aggression resulted in Black d/Deaf students' ideas, culture, or space being taken away from them or intruded on by majority people (White and/or hearing). There are two examples of when participants felt the majority group had co-opted their ideas and space involving student organizations.

**Hearing people co-opting.** “Deaf space! There are a lot of deaf people, but not in relation to the number of hearing people in the world. Deaf people can't afford to just ignore each other or brush each other off, so if we invite a hearing person into this space or our team then you may bring your hearing culture such as talking and limiting access to Deaf members.”

These were the words from Darren and Nicole, in the last counternarrative, when they were talking to Hardo about the importance of hearing people respecting Deaf spaces. Cultural enclaves or groups that share a student's beliefs and values that are in line with their culture of origin, such as cultural centers and cultural specific student organizations, are important to Students' of Color ability to persist (Kuh & Love, 2004). The literature does not speak to what happens in cultural enclave spaces when allies or individuals from the dominant group who say they support the nondominant group enter the group or space. One participant shared at length about how hearing people who claimed to be allies within her Deafcentric student organization continuously disrespected d/Deaf people and values. She defined Deaf space as a different way of living and socializing. It was important to sit in a

circle and not all over a room, so people could converse and connect, having clear lights and visual clarity, equal access to information preferably in ASL, the ability to join any conversation of interest within eyes range, as well as supporting other d/Deaf people no matter what. Because hearing members did not respect Deaf space within her organization, they began to take over the space resulting in several audist microaggressions occurring on a regular basis.

The fears Darren and Nicole expressed about hearing people co-opting their space was a reality for this participant. The hearing membership numbers grew because d/Deaf students were turned off by and uncomfortable with hearing members on and off support of the d/Deaf community. Hearing members would use their voices at student organization events instead of signing, limiting access to current and future members. They did not worry about lights or if tables were accessibly set up or how their talking really bothered d/Deaf members. The participant said that hearing members thought because they knew a lot of d/Deaf people and had d/Deaf friends that they also understood d/Deaf values and cultures. However, the reality is just because you can appreciate and involve yourself with people's culture does not mean you understand or have a right to take over their space and claim it for your own.

These overt and covert forms of audism led to the privileging of hearing people and the excluding and negating of d/Deaf people (Eckert & Rowley, 2013; Garrow et al., 2014; Sue et al., 2007). The organization used to be more racially diverse, but this also changed over time as more hearing White members joined. In addition, hearing members would not acknowledge their hearing privilege, and it was never a topic that could be talked about without hearing people taking extreme offense. Originally designed as a cultural enclave for

d/Deaf students, the organization was slowly becoming a space d/Deaf student no longer recognized. The participant felt hearing members were in complete denial about the power they walked with, how they oppressed d/Deaf members, and took over d/Deaf space by not really seeing or actively valuing Deaf people, space, and values.

***White d/Deaf people co-opting.*** Another participant felt d/Deaf Students' of Color ideas and strategies were co-opted by White d/Deaf students' campus movement to hire a Deaf president. The idea of White people co-opting Black people's ideas is re-presented with the exchange between Hardo and Jeffery at The Privileged team's table, in the fourth counternarrative. Hardo shares his ideas for winning the games only to find out that Jeffery was never interested in him joining The Privileged team at all. One participant, a leader within the Black Student Union at her predominantly Deaf school, also encountered White d/Deaf people during the student protest that used d/Deaf People of Color's cause to strengthen the Deaf president protest initiative, but did not necessarily value what they were trying to do, which was to raise awareness of not only hiring practices, but a larger issue of diversity. In the process of trying to form a coalition between White d/Deaf and d/Deaf People of Color, the d/Deaf Student of Color groups quickly discovered that the White Deaf leader wanted personal recognition, did not care about campus diversity issues, and was more interested in meeting with the upper administration for his own cause. This co-opting of causes is a blend between a microinsult and microinvalidation (Sue et.al., 2007). These common-place and racially dismissive and insensitive acts happened within the d/Deaf community and were committed not solely by hearing people.

Question two addressed the type of racial and audist microaggressions the participants endured during their undergraduate experiences. The major ways in which these

microaggressions arose were (a) Distorted expectations, (b) Invisibility, (c) Trivialization, and (d) Co-opting. Participants were able to identify if a situation was a racist or audist microaggression, but it became more challenging to identify moments when oppressive treatment was the result of the intersection of multi-identities. In Question 3, I addressed the ways in which participants responded or did not respond to the racial and audist microaggressions.

### **Question #3 Black d/Deaf Community Cultural Wealth as Resistance**

In this study, I was primarily interested in what aspects of Black d/Deaf community cultural wealth (BDCCW) Black d/Deaf alumni used to resist racial and audist microaggressions during their undergraduate education. The findings show that sometimes participants were able to resist using a variety of capitals. Such was the case in counternarrative two with Nora in the hearing support group. She said, “I just have to stay focused on doing well and keep pushing forward. I also rely on my interpreters, the Office of Hearing Services, and my teacher to help me advocate for myself.” Although outside the scope of this study, it is important to note that not all participants were able to or knew how to resist the microaggressions they experienced I briefly touch on those situations this section and the rationale participants gave for why they did not resist or were unable to do so. This behavior was re-presented in the same counternarrative when Icantay said, “I take whatever tasks they give me, which is usually putting the Power Point together or editing the paper. I leave the group feeling defeated and I just let it go.”

Black d/Deaf community cultural wealth is comprised of six components, referred to as capitals: (a) aspirational, (b) linguistic, (c) navigational, (d) social, (e) familial, and (f) resistant. These capitals are intertwined, can build on each other, can change depending on

the space, action, and players, and are acquired before, during, and after college. Using the four themes from above: a) Distorted expectations, (b) Invisibility, (c) Trivialization, and (d) Co-opting, in this section I expand on what happened after the microaggression occurred and how participants responded, with or without BDCCW.

**Distorted expectations.** The two examples given for distorted expectations included working with VR counselors and faculty expectations. When it came to working with non-supportive VR counselors, most alumni appeased their situation in the beginning. They were still learning how the system worked and wanted their schooling funded. As Hardo said in the second counternarrative, “By the end [of the VR meeting], I was just happy to be going to college.” Most participants did not believe they had many choices or decided that the majors that would be funded were something they could also enjoy doing. However, similar to Hardo, after a few years in college, one participant decided that loving her major was important. Hardo said, “My VR may not think I can be an art teacher, but I get to decide for myself what I want for my life. I’ll pay for school on my own to be able to be independent.” This participant used her resistant, aspirational, and navigational capital, and decided to change her major to history. Believing that VR counselors were trying to limit her (resistant capital) as a Black d/Deaf woman (Garrow et al., 2014, Yosso, 2005), she used aspirational capital to push back against the limited expectations by keeping her major, no longer meeting with the VR counselor, and paying for her own schooling. She broke down the social barriers and navigated the education system (Garrow et al., 2014), by applying for financial aid and independently taking care of her last year in school.

As was the case in many of the academic scenarios, the participants typically felt powerless to impact issues that happened in the classroom, particularly with faculty. The

participant who struggled with audiocentric expectations reflected deeply on what happened during her years in college, and said she just did not feel confident to confront professors until her last few years in college and it had taken her over five years to graduate.

Overwhelmed by the criticism, she set very low expectations for herself, just wanted to pass the class, and keep moving. After reflecting back on this action as an alumnus, she felt sad that she did not have higher expectations for herself at the time and felt things should not be that way for Black d/Deaf students. Tasha and VOice re-presented her experience, in the fourth counternarrative, as Tasha was a younger version of the participant talking about struggling to meet audiocentric academic expectations while VOice was an older version of the same participant, who found his voice and courage to resist. Unlike in Eilers-Crandall's (2009) study, where her participants gained the skills they needed to persist before attending college, this inverted counternarrative is an example of how BDCCW was gained over time. Positive experiences with understanding faculty and support services accommodated her needs and her confidence grew. She had one professor who allowed her to present her final paper in ASL; as a result, she felt respected and validated as a d/Deaf person. Over time, her navigational and aspirational capital grew, which allowed her to trust herself more, become stronger academically, and grow more determined to graduate regardless of how long it took.

**Invisibility.** As the most identified way in which participants experienced racial and audist microaggressions, invisibility was experienced in the classroom with peer work groups, within the course curriculum, in the process of getting accommodations, and as members of a campus community. Of the participants who experienced issues within hearing peer groups, most just made it through classes as best as they could using aspirational and social capital. Nora, in the fourth counternarrative, really summarizes what many of the



participants did by stating, “I often feel that way [invisible] in class, but I can’t focus on that. I’m in the class to learn, so I read everything assigned and help in whatever way I’m given for the group to get a good grade. It’s about doing well in class. I just have to stay focused on doing well and keep pushing forward.” Many times participants kept their frustrations inside, using them to fuel their aspirational capital to keep moving toward graduation and doing well in the class despite their peers’ low expectations of them. They also relied on their interpreters (social capital) to help them advocate when they were being ignored, which sometimes helped in these situations. For most, persisting required that they dig deep and remember why they came to college in the first place.

When it came to feeling invisible within the curriculum, one participant used resistant capital and leaned on her familial capital for support. She was frustrated that she was not visible within the curriculum, but she did not internalize that invisibility, similar to Hardo in his class with Dr. Knowitall who fought back against being not seen as a real Black Deaf person. Having strong resistant capital, she knew that oppression was real and how it impacted her differently as a person with multi-intersecting identities (Garrow et al., 2014). She blamed the faculty’s lack of cultural competence as the problem, and not who she was as a person. Hardo agreed with this sentiment, as he decided to confront Dr. Knowitall regarding what he felt was a skewed perspective on White and Deaf people. As a form of opposition, the participant also created a counterspace or a cultural enclave (Kuh & Love, 2004) outside of the classroom with her chosen family, Black d/Deaf peers, (familial capital) that allowed her to be herself and reaffirmed that Black d/Deaf culture is real (Garrow et al., 2014; Yosso, 2005). It became a place that they could make their own, pulling together Black d/Deaf cultural understanding and creating and using their own language (Black sign

language). This space was where their resistant capital was fed as they were not obligated to only take from White d/Deaf culture, but could honor, build, and support who they were as Black d/Deaf students.

Some participants removed themselves from situations or institutions that did not accommodate their academic needs, such as obtaining support services that were critical to their success; while other participants used all six capitals to resist audist microaggressions when trying to obtain accommodations. In the first situation, the participant was trying to get access to a special stethoscope; she used navigational, social, and aspirational capitals to get her needs met. She said she just had to keep fighting (aspirational capital) as that is what one needs to do as the first d/Deaf person in one's program. As the first and only Black d/Deaf person in many educational situations (Yosso, 2005), participants had to educate the hearing people (professors, chairs, deans, etc.) around them on how to accommodate and meet their needs (navigational capital). Using social capital, her interpreter offered her emotional and educational resources regarding her rights as a d/Deaf student and encouraged her to visit the disability resource center to get further assistance (Garrow et al., 2014).

Also using navigational capital, another participant used familial, resistant, and linguistic capital to manage her Europe study abroad trip. Challenging social inequities within the study abroad program, like VOice in the fourth counternarrative, the participant decided to still attend the Europe trip (resistant capital) with her Black d/Deaf friend (chosen family--familial capital) (Garrow et al., 2014; Yosso, 2005) despite the obstacles. She found an alternative path (aspirational capital) and used her linguistic capital. She wore her one hearing aid and read lips so she could understand and interpret for her friend while on group tours. The study abroad program was not designed with d/Deaf students in mind at her

institution, so she had to use navigational capital to maneuver through the experience by talking to her professor about the best ways for their peers to communicate with them and staying close to her professor during tours, so she could get clarification on information if needed. Ultimately, her navigational and aspirational capital allowed her and her friend a unique opportunity to visit with the local d/Deaf community in Europe. The professor allowed them to stay overnight in a city the group was visiting to enjoy a Deaf festival while her hearing peers had to go back to the main city with the group. The participant saw this time as a moment to use her resistant capital and show hearing students how capable Black d/Deaf individuals were when it came to traveling.

A mentor once told me the academy will never love you, and in fact, they will use you until there is nothing left, so I needed to get my love from home and family. This attitude rang true for participants as they used social and familial capital to counter feelings of insignificance and invisibility on their campuses. One participant, who was a student leader, relied on a network of people, including her officers in the Black Student Union as well as the Latino and Asian student union leaders (social capital), to help set up a meeting with the provost and vice president to talk about how the campus could better improve diversity (Jayakumar et al., 2013; Garrow et al., 2014; Yosso, 2005). It was through supporting each other and encouraging faculty advisors that they pushed the administration to stop ignoring them. This experience was re-presented by the student leaders, Brian, Simone, and Darren, who organized the student rally in the first counternarrative to push the administration to see and hear their concerns. The participant and her peers gained navigational capital as they navigated the institutional system, which resulted in an Ombudsmen office being opened to start dealing more directly with diversity concerns. A

lack of recognition from the institutions was managed by another participant's familial capital. Frustrated by the lack of acknowledgement, he relied on his family to be a meter for his success, as he soaked up their praise and encouragement to help him successfully get through college and even after as an alumni.

**Trivialization.** The belittling and minimizing of Black d/Deaf students was identified through the interactions that participants had with faculty and their curriculum as well as administrators. Although there were several incidents within the classroom that participants passively navigated, that behavior was not true for all of the participants. The participant who used a captionist for two weeks was frustrated and decided that a captionist was not conducive to his learning. His experience was re-presented by Tasha in counternarrative three when she said, "It took forever to read the notes on our screens and by the time you read it, the class had already moved on." Tapping into his social capital, he talked with other d/Deaf students in the class and they all agreed that in order to pass the class they needed an interpreter. Stepping out of their comfort zones, they confronted the teacher with their concerns (navigational capital) and an interpreter was requested (Garrow et al., 2014). Using their capitals and taking action further aided the participants in fully transitioning, adjusting, and remaining in college until graduation (Getzel, 2008).

Angry and wanting to drop her liberal arts class because of racist microaggressions within the curriculum, one participant tapped into her social capital by connecting with her Black d/Deaf faculty mentor who encouraged her not to drop the class, but to stay and persist. Re-presented by Hardo and his faculty mentor, Dr. McCaskill, in the third counternarrative, the participant's faculty mentor also served as a positive role model and image of Black d/Deaf academic potential (Jayakumar et al., 2013). He helped her build up

her resistant capital by encouraging her to stay in the class, where she decided to use her last research assignment to focus on Black cultural norms as a way to challenge and educate her professor on Black culture (Garrow et al., 2014; Yosso, 2005). Although she was nervous after turning in the paper, her teacher did approach her to positively comment on how well she did on the paper, and like Hardo, she felt good and proud that she had impacted her professor's racist thoughts around culture and stood up for who she was.

In regard to trivialization from administrators, students simply took down the Black Student Union flyers with the "N" word written on them. However, there was a Black d/Deaf student community outcry around the racist attack at the high school and the lackadaisical response from the administration. Through her social capital (organizing her peers), one participant ignited her resistant capital by organizing meetings for students to attend and process their feelings about the situation. It was in these meetings that some students created action plans to help educate high school students about racism. The participant was not involved in these plans, but reflecting back she realized she was still gaining confidence in herself and did not know what else to do. It was through the help of her mentors, faculty advisors, and the National Black Deaf Advocates' (NBDA) summer leadership training that she gained and learned about all the BDCCW capitals and how to use them. She was also able to take BDCCW into graduate school and her life now as she is active within NBDA still today.

**Co-opting.** The participants experienced their space and ideas being co-opted by hearing and White peers. Aspirational capital, along with resistant, social, and navigational capital, played a center role in participants resisting and persisting through White d/Deaf students co-opting their cause.. The participant never gave up and continued to push the

administration to improve the diversity climate on campus. With hearing peers, one participant used resistant capital as her strength to continuously confront the hearing members in her Deafcentric student organization. She consciously identified audist microaggressions occurring in the group (resistant capital) and had the acquired linguistic capital, which gave her the language to talk about and through the oppression she felt and witnessed (Jayakumar et al., 2013). She took on a high officer position to try to influence the student organization's audiocentric nature, as well as actively recruiting d/Deaf members. Although frustrated, she used her aspirational capital to stay open to alternative paths to overcome the barriers (Garrow et al., 2014). The participant said she had gained resistant and linguistic capital through familial capital. Familial capital includes having the opportunity to watch family, kin, and chosen family resist issues of oppression. While growing up, the participant watched her mom navigate racist microaggressions and in turn she practiced those skills during high school as she was faced with racist and audist microaggressions. This is an example of how the capitals can be gained prior to college, as well as how they build on and support each other, offering Black d/Deaf students the leverage they need to resist and be successful in college.

The Black d/Deaf alumni in this study attend three different institutions of higher education and each participant had a variety of experiences as an undergraduate student, consisting of spaces, actions, and different players that I grouped into five themes including (a) Campus environments, (b) Social identity development, (c) Peer and family support, (d) Classroom and faculty experiences, and (e) Vocational Rehabilitation counselors. Within these experiences, participants endured racial and audist microaggressions that occurred as distorted expectations including low, limiting, and audiocentric expectations; through

invisibility within the classroom and campus community at large; by the trivialization of their needs, culture, and experiences; as well as the co-opting of their space and talents. The alumni shared that there were moments during their undergraduate experience where they were unable to resist or did not know how to resist, such as against faculty because of a lack of confidence, VR counselors for fear of losing funding, and larger systemic campus-wide macroaggressions because they did not know how to resist. However, the participants are all alumni of their respected institutions, and were able to share in greater numbers the ways in which they acquired and used Black d/Deaf community cultural wealth to resist racist and audist microaggressions within the classroom, among their peers, and on their campus at large. They gained BDCCW by observing their family members resist oppression, through being involved and attending leadership trainings, working together and supporting each other, as well as courageously deciding to never give up. The Unexpected Talent Tenth did more than exist within the margins; they thrived. They were successful in persisting to graduation and now stand as role models for all Black students, hearing, and d/Deaf. Campuses are not as inclusive as they need to be, classrooms can be audiocentric, and some faculty and higher education administrators lack the knowledge or cultural competence to work with Black d/Deaf students, but these conditions can change. Indeed, as the data from this study suggest, they must change. Higher education scholars and practitioners can learn from the participants in this study in order to further research on Black d/Deaf college students and improve the way in which services are provided to this population. In the next section, I focus on the overarching problems this study addressed.

### Overarching Problems

In this study, I acknowledged four problems that I hoped to address. First, there is a lack of specific demographic information regarding the 30% of d/Deaf students who are graduating from colleges and university across the country. This study honored the intersectionality of d/Deaf People of Color. Within the 30% of d/Deaf graduates, some of those students identify as hard of hearing, Deaf, and culturally Deaf, as Black, African, African American, Multiracial, and culturally Black, as well as poor, introverted, pansexual, Christian, men, and women. The alumni's retrospective views confirm that d/Deaf students who successfully matriculate are not all White, and there is a need to look at how intersecting identities also impact and influence d/Deaf student success and the services they may need to graduate.

The second problem is that being a d/Deaf person has been essentialized to mean White people, and the voices and perspective of the Black d/Deaf community have been left largely invisible (Foster & Kinuthia, 2003). In this study, I challenged dominant hearing and White ideology by giving Black d/Deaf alumni an opportunity to speak for themselves and share their lived experiences. I validated and centered their unique voices as they offered their thoughts and suggestions on why d/Deaf students are not graduating from college, what Black d/Deaf students should know about college prior to attending, and what faculty and staff should know about Black d/Deaf students in order to work with and support them better.

The third problem is that Black d/Deaf college students are enrolling in and attending college in small numbers. The participants shared the experiences that aided them in coming to college; for example, high school interpreters who educated them about specific colleges and summer programs, supportive high school teachers, families that taught them to value



education and set the expectation that college was the natural next step, as well as Vocational Rehabilitation counselors who allowed them the freedom to pick their own majors and helped them navigate funding to get started in school. Moments that deterred them were Vocational Rehabilitation counselors that said they could never succeed in careers about which they were passionate and not having the resources they needed in their K-12 education, such as skilled interpreters. Once in college, faculty mentors, family support, d/Deaf peers, advisors, personal drive, and determination were instrumental in their success. Non-supportive faculty, insensitive hearing peers, perceived unfair assessment of learning, under resourced academic departments, diversity unfriendly campuses, along with a lack of accurate communication from institutions all put a strain on participants' ability to persist to graduation. This study uncovered what encouraged and discouraged the participants as they pursued college graduation.

The final problem is the limited amount of literature on the college experiences, challenges, and successes of Black d/Deaf students (Foster & Kinuthia, 2003). The study expanded current knowledge and offered a different angle to the manner in which scholars have written and researched in the past regarding the Black d/Deaf community (Aramburo, 1989; Callaway & Tucker, 1989; Williamson, 2007). Using multiple theoretical and analytical frameworks as well as the creation of Black d/Deaf community cultural wealth, in this study, I took a critical but strengths-based approach to investigating the ways in which Black d/Deaf students are challenged yet succeeding and how we can replicate that behavior. This approach and the findings of the study add to the literature about Black and d/Deaf college students. In this study, I also complicated being d/Deaf with race and race with being d/Deaf within higher education, which is not often seen. Black d/Deaf alumni's stories added

a missing perspective and insight that is needed if higher education administrators and faculty are to increase Black d/Deaf student persistence.

Using the theoretical frameworks, in Chapter 5, I presented an analytical discussion to make meaning out of the composite stories in order to answer the research questions and address the overarching problems I hoped to address in this study. In Chapter 6, I conclude this study, including a brief overview and limitations that could have influenced the study. In line with a commitment to social justice for d/Deaf People of Color, in Chapter 6, I also focus on implications for future research and practices, and highlight participants' testimonials of their experience within this study as well as what they believe future Black d/Deaf students, faculty, and staff need to know from their perspective.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"When we encounter obstacles to our goals because a door to opportunity is closed or does not open, we must not give up our hopes and dreams. We must be persistent in our search until we find a door of opportunity that opens for us."

(Anderson, 2014, para. 2)

In celebration of Gallaudet University's sesquicentennial anniversary, they selected Dr. Glenn Anderson, the first Black d/Deaf man to receive a PhD from Gallaudet University, as one of 15 visionary leaders who have made a significant contribution to society, the academy, and/or the d/Deaf community (Anderson, 2014). Anderson (2014) spoke the words in the epigraph during his presentation on campus, which seems fitting as I conclude my study on the ways in which Black d/Deaf students have "encountered obstacles to [their] goals" but "were persistent in [their] search [to] find doors of opportunity that open[ed]" (para. 2). The purpose of Chapter 6 is to give a brief study overview as well as address the limitations that arose. Thus far, this study has focused on, and was committed to, socially just research practices by including all the participants' voices and perspectives. In line with these values, Chapter 6 also includes their suggestions for solutions and their testimonials of their experience within the study. Lastly, this chapter focuses on implications for future research and practices, as well as my closing personal remarks.

#### Overview of Study

This study grew out of my own lived experiences working with d/Deaf college students as well as a handful of issues uncovered within the literature. Only 30% of d/Deaf

college students successfully matriculate to graduation (Destler & Buckley, NTID 2011 Annual Report, 2011); however, there seems to be a lack of demographic information on who makes up the successful group of d/Deaf college graduates. Also, being a d/Deaf person has been essentialized to mean White people; thus, the voices of Black d/Deaf people have largely been left out (Foster & Kinuthia, 2003), particularly related to higher education. There has also been a history of underprivileging Black and d/Deaf students within the education system, and Black d/Deaf students have endured double the impact of that oppression, resulting now in small numbers of Black d/Deaf students attending college (McCaskill, 2011). Lastly, there is limited literature on the intersections of race and ability within higher education, particularly about Black d/Deaf students (Foster & Kinuthia, 2003). In hopes of gaining insight into these problems, six Black d/Deaf participants, who I refer to as the Unexpected Talented Tenth, joined me on a journey to co-construct what it meant for them to be undergraduate students, to reflect back on their experiences with racist and audist microaggressions, and to piece together how they resisted these microaggressions in order to persist to graduation.

This dissertation was organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 laid a foundation and overview. In this chapter I addressed the problems and significance, the purpose of the study, the research questions, and a brief methodological overview. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do Black d/Deaf alumni make meaning of their experiences as Black d/Deaf undergraduate students?
2. How did Black d/Deaf alumni experience racist and audist microaggressions while navigating their undergraduate education?

3. How did Black d/Deaf alumni use aspects of Black d/Deaf community cultural wealth (BDCCW) to resist racial and audist microaggressions in order to persist to graduation?

In Chapter 2, I organized the most relevant literature into four areas. The first area included historical snapshots of Black d/Deaf education offering a historical perspective of the construction of Black d/Deaf education and photos from the past. In the second area I examined Black students' college experiences with persistence and resistance as well as providing an overview of racial microaggressions. There have been a variety of studies (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Patton & Simmons, 2008; Strayhorn, Blakewood, et al., 2010; Wood & Essien-Wood, 2012) conducted that offer insight into the "Black college experience," and what aids or hinders students in persisting, such as racial microaggressions (Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2007), but most of those studies do not focus on Black students with (dis)abilities broadly or Black d/Deaf students specifically.

The third area I reviewed centered on d/Deaf students' college experiences with persistence and resistance as well as an overview of audist microaggressions (Eckert & Rowley, 2013; Sue et al., 2008). There is less literature regarding d/Deaf students and persistence and the impact of audist microaggressions, but d/Deaf students, unlike hearing students, must navigate their majority hearing campuses in different ways. The last area I focused on was Black d/Deaf education today, including intersectionality, role models and mentors, and the K-12 educational system. With limited literature available on Black d/Deaf college students, this is the area in which this study contributed the most, building on Williamson's (2007) study of resilience and transition. Reviewing the literature further illuminated the challenges faced by Black d/Deaf college students and the gaps in the

existing scholarship. Despite issues of racism and audism, some Black d/Deaf people, through tremendous determination, will, and drive, are achieving.

Embracing a strengths-based approach, in Chapter 3 I focused on the research design, and how elements of goodness were addressed throughout the study. My assumptions were clearly stated along with the philosophical paradigmatic (constructivism) and epistemological (Deaf epistemology) underpinnings of the study. The theoretical frameworks that shaped this study were critical race theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and critical Deaf theory (Deaf Crit) (Gertz, 2003). Both of the theoretical frameworks influenced and were congruent with the analytical frameworks, the theory of microaggressions (Sue et al., 2008) and Black d/Deaf community cultural wealth (BDCCW). The creation of Black d/Deaf community cultural wealth was influenced by community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), Deaf community cultural wealth (Garrow et al., 2014) and literature on the ways the Black community has used capital to successfully navigate oppression (Jayakumar et al., 2013).

Hermeneutic phenomenology (Laverly, 2003), the methodological framework, guided the participant selection, data collection, and data analysis processes. A purposeful sample (Patton, 2002) of six participants was successfully recruited through the National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA) as well as with the help of Deaf Studies scholars and the d/Deaf community broadly. The diverse group of participants attended college at Gallaudet, California State University Northridge, and National Technical Institute for the Deaf/ Rochester Institution of Technology. The group was comprised of (a) two men and four women, (b) within their mid to late 20s, (c) all born in the U.S. but one, (d) multiple Black identities (Black, African American, African, Multiracial but culturally Black), (e) all culturally Deaf (3 auditorially hard of hearing), (f) everyone used American Sign Language,

and (g) everyone graduated between 2007-2013. Data were collected using three methods- participant surveys, videophone meetings, and three semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2013). The three semi-structured Skyped interviews had three foci: the participants' educational life histories, their experiences with racism and audism within their undergraduate education, and the meaning they had made of these experiences (Seidman, 2013). They were 90 minutes to 2 hours long, conducted up to three days a part, and recorded using Quick Time. Once the data were translated and summary transcriptions written, analysis consisted of four phases: (a) organizing system, (b) identifying meaning units, (c) thematic labeling, (Patterson & Williams, 2002) and (d) creative synthesis (Van Manen, 1990). Using qualitatively appropriate standards of goodness (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002), the five areas of authenticity were used to ensure quality (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003).

In order to protect the participants' privacy, and aligned with CRT and Deaf Crit, the findings were re-presented using composite counternarratives, or a blend of real stories, symbolism, and various data sources, to highlight the lives and happenings within the lives of marginalized people (Patton & Catching, 2009). In Chapter 4 I presented the findings woven together, creating four composite counternarratives written like a play set in a majority Black d/Deaf community called Vineyard. Addie D, Tasha, and Hardo, the three main characters attended Eyeth University. Their stories were the inverted compilations of the participants' college experiences, including issues with racism and audism and how they resisted them.

The Black d/Deaf alumni in this study had a variety of experiences as undergraduate students that consisted of different spaces, actions, and players, which added richness to the composites. Thus, expanding on Chapter 4, in Chapter 5 I presented an analytical discussion that weaved the inverted counternarratives with the participants' real lives, as well as

literature, to answer the three research questions and address the overarching problems I hoped to tackle in this study. I created five themes to answer Question 1 based on how the participants' experienced college, including: (a) Campus environments, (b) Social identity development, (c) Peer and family support, (d) Classroom and faculty experiences, and (e) Vocational Rehabilitation counselors. In Question 2, I asked how the participants had experienced racial and audist microaggressions. Those experiences occurred as distorted expectations including low, limiting, and audiocentric expectations; through invisibility within the classroom and campus community at large; by the trivialization of their needs, culture, and experiences; as well as by the co-opting of their space and talents.

To answer the last question, I examined participants' resistance of racial and audist microaggressions, specifically using Black Deaf community cultural wealth. The findings show that there were moments within the participants' undergraduate experiences when they were unable to resist or did not know how to resist. High stake interactions with specific audiences accounted for difficulties resisting, such as against faculty because of a lack of confidence or VR counselors for fear of losing funding. Larger systemic, campus-wide macroaggressions were reluctantly tolerated because participants did not know how to resist. Nonetheless, the participants are all alumni of their respected institutions, and were able to share in greater numbers the ways in which they acquired and used Black Deaf community cultural wealth to resist racist and audist microaggressions within the classroom, among their peers, and on their campus at large. They gained BDCCW by observing their family members resist oppression, through being involved and attending leadership trainings, working together and supporting each other, as well as courageously deciding to never give up.



Some of the Unexpected Talented Tenth did more than exist within the margins. They thrived successfully, persisting to graduation. Others looked back over their college experiences with some frustration and regret, proud that they persisted, but irritated at the experience they received with hopes that current Black d/Deaf students and d/Deaf students more broadly were having better experiences. Campuses are not as inclusive as they need to be, classrooms can be audiocentric, and some faculty and higher education administrators lack the knowledge or cultural competence to work with Black d/Deaf students, but these conditions can change. I have learned from the participants in this study that Black d/Deaf students can persist when they possess the capital they need to navigate educational systems that were not designed with them in mind.

### **Potential Limitations**

There were a few potential limitations within this study. First, although the composite counternarratives are aligned with the theoretical frameworks and were used to achieve tactical authenticity (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003) by protecting the privacy of the participants, having the findings written this way does not give full access to the individual participants' experiences, perspectives, or voices. Thus, one might challenge some of the depth of the study; however, I shared significant detail about the collective group because I did not identify individual participants.

For example, participants were more comfortable with me sharing the details of specific stories and their institution's name when they knew a pseudonym would not individually identify them. Re-presenting the findings in composites was also consistent with hermeneutic phenomenology, which focuses on the uniqueness of the individual's

experience while balancing the possibilities that collectively individuals could have shared meaning around a phenomenon (Patterson & Williams, 2002). As co-constructors of this process, the participants were also consulted about how to present the findings. They collectively decided this strategy was an advantageous way to present their lives; they all had access to read the composite after it was written, and the option to share feedback.

Although measures were taken to maintain the integrity and accuracy of the interviews, such as emailing the interview questions to the participants before interviews and conducting member checks, a second limitation is posed by the process of translating questions and data from language to language. The final limitation was me, as a research tool. Based on Deaf epistemology and my experiences within the d/Deaf community, I felt it was important that I built trust and rapport with my participants by conducting my own signed interviews and not serving as a bystander. This process allowed me to ask my own questions and for participants to have direct access to communication; however, I am not a native American Sign Language user. I had to spend more time asking follow up questions for clarity, and my proficiency in the language could have played a role in how the questions were asked and potentially how participants responded.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Hermeneutic phenomenology analysis is conducted through the hermeneutic circle, or the process of exploring the parts of the interviews in relations to the whole phenomenon (Patterson & Williams, 2002). In this journey to understanding, it is important to realize there is no definite end as our understanding is constantly changing (Patterson & Williams, 2002). We must continue to ask questions around persistence, search for the best practices

with d/Deaf students, explore intersectionality, and challenge an inequitable education system. With that spirit in mind, this study has many starting points. I have identified several different implications for future research. First, half the participants attempted or had completed their masters degrees and throughout their interviews they shared some of those experiences. They talked about different challenges and successes they were able to achieve within graduate school. This discussion was outside the scope of this study, but research that explores the entire educational pipeline, K- PhD, is needed because Deaf education should not be fragmented since the students within that system are not fragmented. What they experience in the K-12 system impacts their postsecondary education, which impacts if they feel confident and are truly prepared for graduate school. There are currently only 13 Black d/Deaf people who have earned PhDs in this country (Ogunyipe, n.d.); there is much room for improvement and research in this area.

Second, this study specifically focused on the intersections of race and being d/Deaf, but the next step would be to study the role other intersecting social identities have on Black d/Deaf college students' persistence. It was challenging to find men for this study, and many of the participants talked about several of their Black d/Deaf male friends and acquaintances starting with them but not completing. The participants also shared other social identities such as socioeconomic status and sexual orientation that were not central in this study, but can and should be for future research. I believe capturing the intersectional experience is highly determined by the quality of the questions answered and time spent with a participant navigating through the multiple layers to gain clarity and insight. These experiences are important and can offer insight needed to better serve all d/Deaf students.

Third, while looking at how other social identities impact persistence, it is also critical to examine the other end of the academically successful spectrum. Black d/Deaf students who have not matriculated to graduation must be engaged and invited into a conversation to talk about what happened and what could have been done. This study illustrated that some participants gained BDCCW before and during college so further exploration is warranted of whether the students who dropped out did not have enough capital to aid them in being successful or if there are other unknown reasons for their early departure.

Fourth, each of the participants was able to share varying levels of depth about their undergraduate experiences. This variability could have been the result of a variety of reasons, but I wonder what role other aspects of student development theory such as Black identity development or d/Deaf identity development may have on Black d/Deaf students learning, tapping into, and using BDCCW. One participant, who was the most reflective, commented that she did not develop enough confidence in herself to confront issues of racism and audism until the end of her college career, and it had taken her seven years to get her undergraduate degree. This participant was an older undergraduate student and had time to develop as a person within seven years compared to a student who completed college in four, five, or six years. Do other cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and psychosocial skills need to develop before Black d/Deaf students can more fully use their BDCCW?

Fifth, the participants had very different K-12 experiences, as the practice of mainstream schooling is not standard. A few participants talked about arriving at college and not getting the educational “tools” they needed in the K-12 system to be successful in college. There was frustration that went with not having the necessary skills to be

academically successful. Since we know there is a small number of Black d/Deaf students attending college (McCaskill, 2011) today, I wonder what impact mainstream education has on college going practices and the transition for Black d/Deaf students. This possible crack in the educational pipeline is one on which research can help shed light and offer possible solutions or recommendations for new practices. Lastly, a few participants talked about how they watched their parents or family members resist racist microaggressions, so they felt empowered or more emotionally shielded from racism, which was seen in the fact that they came up with less examples, but said they knew they had experienced it. In some ways, these incidents did not have the same lasting impact as audism incidents, which was evident by a participant saying, “Audism walls just seemed bigger.” The next step could be to explore the ways in which Black d/Deaf students learn to resist audism if they come from hearing families, and if these are skills we can teach Black hearing families how to pass on to their children? The dearth of research in this area makes this subject matter rich for investigation. These were six possible directions future research could explore that would positively contribute to continued understanding of Black d/Deaf students.

### **Practical Recommendations**

“What will prove most helpful to institutions attempting to understand [Black d/Deaf] success is to adopt a flexible stance that accommodates multiple perspectives. Otherwise, academia will rely erroneously on traditional methods that are not applicable to; it will

rely instead on the old axiom:

*When all you have is a hammer, then every problem begins to look like a nail.”*

(Bonner, 2010, p. 80)

I believe assuring that Black d/Deaf students are treated in socially just ways requires higher education practitioners and faculty to commit to social justice praxis. Having social justice praxis is the ability to reflect on one's actions and the world, to act on issues of inequity, and to work in collaboration with those who are most oppressed to ensure their liberation (Freire, 1993). Audist and racist microaggressions are not nails that can be randomly banged on or ignored. They are systemic subtle daily aggressions that can easily be justified away (Sue et al., 2007); thus, they require a more sophisticated tool than a hammer, and we have more tools at our disposal if used (Bonner, 2010). The discourse around being equitable and inclusive must go beyond just committee meetings, cultural celebration months, and mission statements (the hammers currently used on campuses). These things can supplement a campus that lives and breathes inclusiveness, but cannot make up for a campus that does not practice the values of inclusiveness, particularly when it really matters (problems are more than nails).

As the study suggests, inclusive mission statements do not shift the experience Black d/Deaf students are having in class with their hearing study group members nor do cultural celebrations, after a campus racial or audist incident, mitigate the way in which Black d/Deaf students still feel trivialized or invisible. Aligned with the theoretical frameworks (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Gertz, 2003; e.g., having a commitment to social justice for d/Deaf People of Color), and catalytic authenticity (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003), in this section, I elucidate practical recommendations for social justice praxis that offer a “flexible stance that accommodates multiple perspectives” (Bonner, 2010, p. 80), particularly focusing on academics, campus life, and institutional policy. Continuing to value and center the unique perspectives of the participants, included at the end of each section in italics are their

thoughts on what they believe practitioners and faculty should know in order to improve Black d/Deaf college students' experiences.

### **Academics**

As I reflected back on my conversations with the participants, I was aware of the many audist and racial microaggressions they experienced in the classroom with faculty, curricula, and peers. It was in the academic arena that participants experienced the most difficulty and had the most examples of being unable to or not knowing how to resist audist and racial microaggressions. Faculty can play a significant role in elevating distorted expectations, invisibility, and trivialization within the classroom through their teaching, classroom facilitation, and intentional student engagement. It is important to acknowledge that depending on the institutional type, teaching is one of the least important aspects of a faculty members' job. They are often not trained or rewarded for their efforts in the classroom, so my recommendations for praxis include finding ways to work within this system while also challenging the integrity of the system. Realizing that all institutions do not have large populations of d/Deaf students or more specifically Black d/Deaf students, these recommendations for praxis are influenced by the spirit of universal design (Steinfeld & Jordana, 2012), and ultimately benefit all students.

First, participants talked about how they wished faculty would take the time to get to know them, understand how they learn, and what they needed to be successful. I realize courses can range from eight up to hundreds of students, but knowing one's student audience can help a faculty member bring cultural examples and perspectives into the classroom to which students can relate. There is some value in PhD students working and studying an area to become an expert. Nevertheless, I believe there is a flaw in this system, as it can

mislead future and current faculty into believing that students do not bring expert knowledge into a classroom, or underestimate how students' lived experiences can illuminate and extend course objectives if they are tapped into. Faculty cannot possibly be experts in everything, such as the best way for each student to understand the material or the way students' lived experiences aid or hinder them from understanding the material. Using index cards to collect personal information (e.g., cultural traditions, hometown, and interesting fact from their childhood) or technology such as *Poll Everywhere*, a free online polling software, to assess how the class is going, can help faculty get to know students and better meet their academic needs. In addition, faculty must do their own work in becoming more culturally competent by reading books, seeking out services on campus, or talking directly to students. They set the tone for classroom behavior and norms; thus, ignoring d/Deaf students in class and not working with ASL interpreters is problematic and discriminatory.

Second, I encourage faculty to take responsibility for educating themselves about intersectional pedagogy, or teaching practices that include the experiences, stories, and knowledge of diverse, intersected social identities. Even if teaching is one third of the expectations of the position, it is still an expectation and students are paying for a teacher to come to class well prepared. Coming to class prepared means more than just reading the material; it also means being thoughtful about classroom engagement, practicing universal design techniques to make class accessible (Steinfeld & Jordana, 2012), and incorporating diverse ideas and perspectives. However, with that being said, I realize it is important to be realistic about time as well as the fact that most faculty are not trained teachers. Thus, the first practical step I would recommend would be for faculty to take one class they taught last year and reflect on their pedagogical approach, the purpose of the class, how learning was



assessed, and the ways in which nondominant ideas and visual aids were used and talked about within the course.

As a next step, I would propose that faculty create an Intersectionality Chart (Appendix D) that lists social identity groups (e.g., race, ability, and class) horizontally along the top, and each class session (e.g., class #1 and class #2), vertically down the side. This chart can be used as a visual aid to determine what aspects of diversity the faculty have or plan to use throughout the semester. Looking at each week, the faculty member can put a check under the social identity groups that were incorporated into the readings, examples, videos, etc. For example, perhaps a reading focused on the learning outcome from a women's perspective, or a video included GLBT or social class. This chart also allows a faculty member to see intersections of identity. For example, perhaps the reading was written from a Black feminist perspective or the topic of discussion focused on class and religion. It would be ideal to complete this chart before classes begin, so that accessibility can be considered ahead of time and extra material can be gathered if the curriculum is lacking in certain areas. If planning ahead is not possible, this could be a helpful tool to assess the class as the semester moves along and to consciously find ways to make curricula more intersectional.

If faculty realize their course(s) have little to no diversity or the ways in which marginalized groups are represented perpetuates negative stereotypes, then they can focus on eliminating detrimental material and implement one to two new tools that address diverse ways of thinking about the curriculum including captioned videos, pictures, theories, and more. The goal is not to take an additive approach, which means simply having a class day that only focuses on Black people or people with [dis]abilities, but really incorporating

diverse and intersected ideas and examples throughout the course (i.e., This is where the chart can be helpful). Being intentional about this use of diversity can help expose students to different people, thoughts, and ideas as well as help reshape what is “normal.”

In addition, one does not need to diversify the curriculum in isolation. Each person is a product of his or her environment, which has labeled Whiteness, able-bodiedness, maleness, hearing ability, and other dominant identities as normal, but that does not mean information about subordinated identities does not exist. It is a collective responsibility to find the counternarratives and incorporate them into course curricula. For example, Skyping community members or scholars from other campuses into class to address areas in which the faculty has limited knowledge or working with institution librarians who specialize in the faculty’s discipline to help locate more inclusive material may be necessary.

Campuses that have teaching and learning centers or faculty development programs must help faculty think through how to create intersectional curricula. Some institutions have workshops on service-learning, using technology, or working with international students, but more is needed. Conversations are needed not just about working with Students of Color, GLBT, and students with disabilities in the classroom, but how to incorporate the multiple social identities into the curriculum. The traditional ways of thinking about classroom dynamics must be transformed to a more holistic approach. Being inclusive does not only mean not calling on the one Black student in class to represent their whole race or simply having an interpreter or notetaker in class for d/Deaf students. In line with mindful pedagogy, the final practical recommendation is about informal and formal classroom group work. The participants navigated audist microaggressions that occurred through invisibility within hearing student work groups. These groups were typically experiences where the

participants just appeased the situation and were unable to fully resist the microaggressions. Faculty cannot assume that students know how to equitably work in academic groups. These are skills that must be intentionally taught and assessed.

Practical recommendations for such assignments are to talk through what the expectations and learning outcomes are for informal and formal group work. For informal groups work, the faculty member should walk around the room checking in on groups to make sure students are on task, and that all students have an opportunity to participate. For formal group work, faculty can facilitate a dialogue on what it means to work in groups including allowing the students to reflect on the type of group member they tend to be, how a successful group works, how a dysfunctional group works, and the faculty member's expectation of how the group should work. The faculty should create the groups, making sure they are as diverse as possible. Although group assignments are often done outside of the classroom, the faculty should take some time within the class to allow the students to set group expectations, talk through their strengths and weaknesses as a member, and organize meeting times.

It is important to hold the group responsible for the end product and the process of getting there. One way to accomplish these outcomes is by requiring each group to complete a plan of action form in which the project idea and everyone's role is written down and ultimately approved by the faculty member before the project starts. To assess group work, each member should be given a grade for the context (the end product) and a professionalism grade (the process of working together). The professionalism grade could include what they learned from the experience, what they contributed, what they did well at, what they should work on as a group member for the future, and how they felt about their group

experiences. Also a part of the professionalism grade is the quality of the feedback they give to each other. Each person should share one positive and one constructive feedback statement with each group member. Having this level of accountability can communicate the importance of everyone contributing in group work and that the process and product are both essential in the learning process. The following are the participants' thoughts and suggestions for faculty:

*They [faculty] need to try when they are planning out courses to think about being more inclusive. They can add something to be able to focus on positive aspects of other cultures. For example, in chemistry classes they can add famous Black d/Deaf people. It is important to add other cultures into classes beside just Blacks such as Latinos, Asians, and other cultures too. It makes students feel more motivated because they can identify with the material.*

*They [faculty] should be prepared to give the greatest amount of access and opportunity as possible to d/Deaf students. They should think about that in their curriculum and not assume that everyone is equal and comes from the same background; I would prefer that a teacher approaches the d/Deaf student and asks questions... Just say, "Hey I know you're deaf. I'm curious about your learning style and how we can make the class work for you." Have a dialogue and then follow up with the students later to reassure them. Just check in and make sure things are going well... maybe show an example of an assignment.*

*I wish departments and faculty were educated on and recognized intersectionality ...Black Deaf, Deaf blind whatever the overlaps of identity and didn't use it against Black d/Deaf students, but to help them.*

*I wish teachers would become more aware and learn from their d/Deaf students. Take the time to learn about Deaf culture and history. You know, make it an exchange. An exchange of information; learn from each other.*

*Don't ignore Black d/Deaf people, but value them because they are important too! You never know if they could become successful students. Don't discriminate against them because they are black. Everyone should be treated the same regardless if they are Black, White, Mexican. Everyone should be treated fairly.*

### **Institution Practitioners**

Institution practitioners refer to student affairs professionals (SAP; e.g., professionals in the Division of Student Affairs) and higher education administrators (HEA; e.g., Vice President of Student Affairs, President, and Provost). Higher education administrators typically create institutional policies while student affairs professionals are often charged with implementing and enforcing those policies. Institution practitioners have different levels of contact with students, but both can have significant impact on if and how Black d/Deaf students experience racial and audist microaggressions. Instead of the classroom, institution practitioners' social justice praxis often lies within the co-curricular. There are many first steps institution practitioners can explore.

The first step in social justice praxis is reflection, so institutional practitioners should contemplate the following questions: Do we have d/Deaf students attending my institution? If not, why? If so, how many students? What are the demographics of these students (e.g., race, gender, and sexual orientation)? What accommodations do they have access to? If a practitioner is not sure, the second step is to take action. They need to be proactive and find the answers to these questions. Second, practitioners need to acquire an understanding of Deaf Identity Development theory (Glickman, 1996), while maintaining awareness that intersecting identities such as race can influence how d/Deaf students see themselves and experience their racial and d/Deaf community. Similar to faculty, it is important that institution practitioners have a pulse on who their students are beyond what is taught in mainstream student affairs books and literature. As this study suggests, there are groups of students such as Black d/Deaf students who are not represented in mainstream literature (Williamson, 2007), thus institution practitioners have to seek this knowledge out in other disciplines, community organizations, or from the students themselves.

This suggestion leads to the third recommendation, which focuses on student affairs preparation programs and professional development. Participants were challenged by institutional practitioners when they trivialized racist incidents. Institutional practitioners must be sensitive to diverse d/Deaf student needs as well as the ways in which they respond to racist and audist incidents and microaggressions on campus. It is important that student affairs preparation programs go beyond just talking about diverse student populations and include more self-reflection and bias-related incident response training. Equity, diversity, and inclusion is a competency area within the Student Affairs Practitioners' Professional Competency handbook (ACPA/NASPA, 2010). Unfortunately, the ability to “demonstrate

effectiveness in **responding** to acts of hatred or intolerance” as a practitioner is not expected at a basic level, but rather at an advanced level (ACPA/NASPA, 2010, p. 11). The placement of this competency is understandable, on some levels, as social justice praxis is a journey and not a destination, but the ability to be respond in a culturally sensitive way should be a skill masters students have an opportunity to work on before their first professional job. For example, going through bias-related case studies and allowing individuals or teams to not only read the case, but act it out, respond to each other, offer feedback, and talk through potential unintended consequences is critical to being able to become advanced within this competency.

However, for institution practitioners who took a different path to their position (e.g., advance degrees in English, Communication, or Law), it is important that institutions host professional development trainings that focus on bias-related response with personal reflection and practice. Reflection is critical to understanding one’s own bias and practice is important to increasing the chance that an institutional practitioner will have the tools and skills necessary to handle real racist and audist incidents. How an incident is handled contributes to how students are able to recover and heal from these moments.

Fifth, it is important to expand diversity and equity trainings beyond race, class, and gender and incorporate audism and hearing privilege, as these are typically forms of oppression with which most hearing people are not familiar. Trainers should start with educating staff and faculty through retreats, diversity teach-ins, and campus workshops. They should then move to incorporating audism into Orientation Leader, Greek Life and Resident Advisor training, to just name a few. Sixth, HEA and faculty mentors must support and promote the existence of Deaf and ethnic studies courses and programming on campus.

College is often the first-time students are exposed to social identity material, and their d/Deaf self-identity can greatly benefit from these opportunities (Gertz, 2003). These are also spaces where Black d/Deaf students can gain BDCCW. Participants talked about taking Deaf and Black Studies classes. Through these experiences, they learned more about Deaf and Black history and culture, ASL skills, and the oppression of Black d/Deaf people, all which helped build their aspirational, linguistic, and resistant capital. Because this study suggests that BDCCW is gained before and during college, institution practitioners must begin to think about how their programming, mentoring, and student involvement activities develop or continue to help Black d/Deaf students gain BDCCW.

Lastly, creating inclusive campus cultures, policies, and opportunities are changes that happen over time and cannot begin after Black d/Deaf or any diverse groups of students arrive. Current student spaces must be made more inclusive and considerate of intersecting identities. For example, practitioners should provide resources for d/Deaf women in the Women's Center, purchase books on minoritized d/Deaf people for the Multicultural Center library, highlight famous d/Deaf people within ethnic month celebrations, and invite a d/Deaf queer speaker for the National Coming Out Week. The purpose of such activities is to make the current spaces more d/Deaf friendly and intersectional, which ultimately benefits and exposes hearing and d/Deaf students to new diverse opportunities. Being mindful of all students' multiple intersecting identities when hiring faculty and staff, planning orientations, designing programs, and constructing new buildings are critical because the decisions and equitable seeds we plant today affect students in the future. The following are the participants' thoughts.



*More students should really be encouraged to be a part of mentoring programs and more intentionally shown what support services are available to them on campus.*

*In the beginning of the school year, there needs to be more opportunities for d/Deaf Students of Color to come together to socialize or do something together.*

These recommendations specifically focused on faculty and institution practitioners, but this is not an exhaustive list of the work that must be done to better support Black d/Deaf students. Because of the context of this study, the participants mostly gave examples of audist and racist microaggressions within the college context. However, this does not mean these microaggressions are not built into policies, occurring within families, playing out at job sites, and perpetuated by mainstream society. Social justice praxis takes time. There are no short cuts, but these recommendations are the beginning steps to creating a more liberating campus and classroom experience for Black d/Deaf students.

### **The Unexpected Talented Tenth Reflection**

Because this study was constructed with the participants, and given their involvement throughout, I would be remiss if I did not include some of the final reflections they shared with me. They were given a few prompts at the end of the interview process to respond to the following questions: (a) What would you warn future Black d/Deaf students about? (b) What tips would you share with future Black d/Deaf students on how to succeed in college? (c) Did you learn anything about yourself in the process of being involved with this study? and (d) What might you do next as a result of your participation within this study? In line with maintaining goodness or high quality research (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Jones et al.,

2006), these questions also satisfied educative and tactical authenticity. I included clips from the participants' responses.

### **Warning to Future Black d/Deaf Students**

All the participants acknowledged that there were real challenges for them as Black d/Deaf undergraduate students. Most are the first generation in their family to go to college and said there was just a lot of information they did not have access to or just did not know to ask. Their warnings generally recognized that this time in a young Black d/Deaf person's life could be tough, but that they could ultimately persist and get through it with patience, assertiveness, focus, and determination. Here are some of their words of warning:

- Stay away from drugs and drinking. There will be time when you may get the opportunity to sell drugs for quick money... it's easy to get caught up, so be careful.
- Some people will be into the party life style, but you can't follow them. There is nothing wrong with partying just don't do it too much. It will throw your life off.
- You will always experience discrimination...every day. You will need to prepare for that. You will need to learn how to deal with it because it's a reality; let it go and move on. You must be patient and protect yourself. You have to fight for yourself.
- Don't get distracted from your education, from your goals, from your desires, and your personal life.
- If you are stressed, stop and find ways to de-stress. Go out with friends... connect with your RA.
- You will experience some negative situations or times, but don't get depressed because you can use your motivation and determination to succeed.

- There will be people who want you to fail, but don't give them the satisfaction; just keep going and don't give up.
- Make your own decisions because others will try to influence you. Sometimes deaf people just take everything in and accept everything without considering if it's right for them as a black deaf person.
- Question everything and never be afraid to stand up.
- When you go to college, never be ashamed of where you come from or your background. Without that background you wouldn't be who you are today.
- You are not only black or deaf, but both and you must be aware of this. You have to tell people because they will try to put you in boxes and say you are one or the other and you just have to tell them, no, that's not how it works. You don't have to accept the boxes they put you in. You get to choose that.

### **Advice on Succeeding**

Often the literature and scholars approach d/Deaf education and more specifically Black d/Deaf education from a deficit model, but that model yields very little return (Williams, 2007). Thus, in addition to what Black d/Deaf student should be warned about, the participants also had words for how they can be successful. Here are some of their words of advice on what they did or what lessons they learned about being a successful undergraduate student:

- Communication and access can be hard, but just keep going, just try and it will be fine.
- Do not stress too much about the small things. There is no need for high blood pressure. Just take one day at a time and stay organized.

- Go out and have fun! Don't isolate yourself in the dorms all day. If you do that you will not learn about the world around you. There is a lot more out there than your dorm life.
- You must be motivated, open minded, and accepting of diversity.
- Time management is the number one thing.
- It is really important for you to know where you come from, not just like your family but like your history because, so many people don't realize we have a lineage. It helps you be proud of who you are.
- You must be assertive. Speak up for yourself.
- Ask questions if you don't understand. Ask for help with anything- school, education, job...from teachers, staff, campus advisors... ask anything!
- Make sure you know what you are getting your degree in and what you can do with it because that will help you get a job.
- If you feel left out, try to make friends, but choose your friends wisely.
- Grab every opportunity you can get and be serious about your education; don't waste time and money partying.
- Even though you may be frustrated, don't give up, and find your support systems. Find one or two people you feel comfortable expressing yourself to because if you hold it in then you will become more frustrated. Become involved like in the Black Student Union and do something for your community.
- There will be ups and downs on the journey, but find your goals and let it be your light.

- Find someone who feels like they are like you. It's important to have at least one friend who is Deaf and the same race as you. They can relate to your race and d/Deaf identity and this will help you build confidence.
- Although this is really hard, always see yourself in a positive light.

### **Participant Self-Learning**

When I asked the participants about their experiences in the study, I was not sure what they would share. I was not sure if they would be honest if they had had a negative encounter or had not learned anything at all about themselves. I was pleasantly surprised as I had a range of responses including a participant saying he had not learned much about himself at all. I appreciated their honesty, and took that as a small indication that our conversations about power dynamics between us and the importance of this process being collaborative were at least somewhat achieved.

As this participant reflected back over our conversations, she was renewed with her passion for Black Studies, and realized she has not always followed her own advice.

*This was a good process because it reminds me of my passions. You know, talking with you has set a new fire, you know, a new fire in me. I feel passionate again for Black studies. It really made me miss my Pan African studies and I can remember how excited I was about those classes and learning. And, you know, if I wanted to get back to that, what do I need to do? It just got me thinking. You know, you're getting a Ph.D. and it's like, wow, you know? Maybe it is possible. We need more leaders. We need more role models so kids can see, oh, wow, if you can do it, I can do it.*

*I also just talked about how it's really important for Black, deaf students to remember where they came from and their lineage, and, you know, sometimes I forget that, I forget*

*that myself. And this interview was a really good reminder of like oh, wow, I ... I don't always follow my own advice. If I forget that, then where does it leave me and other generations who also forget? I also realize I need to aim higher like you. I need to, you know, totally obtain more power so I can really try to change things, or at least kind of think about that, like right now. What small part do I want to help change? Racism, audism, you know, they really hurt people.*

After reflecting, this participant realized that there were skills she had as an undergraduate that she had since forgotten, and needed to get back.

*I need to be more assertive again. Over time I've just kind of given that up. I need to be more positive again because over all I haven't been great at that lately. I need to keep more contact with my friends from the past. I need to keep shooting for my goals...getting a job. Before Gallaudet, I really felt like I could do it... but now I feel really frustrated and have lost sight of my goals. I need to refocus on that.*

This participant talked about what it felt like to reflect back and what that reflection had encouraged her to do for the future.

*I had plenty of negative opportunities where I could have given up, but I didn't. I just continued on because I knew I wanted to graduate. I realized how determined and motivated I was, and I didn't let negative things stop me from graduating. Now, I want to encourage future Black d/Deaf students to go to college. It's important that they advance their education. It's very critical that they get a degree. I need to offer my experiences, so they can see we're the same and that they can do it too. I think it's important that Black deaf people who have successfully graduated go back to high schools and encourage those students.*

This participant walked away realizing how much of an impact she had on other people's lives but did not realize she had never considered that she was her own role model.

*I have always influenced others. It is importance to look for people that have similar experiences as you. I made a huge impact and didn't realize it because I was just being myself. Many people looked up to me, but I didn't look up to myself. I need to look up to myself and others. Regardless of my experiences, good or bad, they shaped who I have become.*

After the interviews, one participant was really grateful for finally having the opportunity to tell his story and be recognized for his achievements.

*I'm very lucky and happy that I got to do these interviews. I thought I would never in my life have this kind of interview. That's just what I thought. Finally someone... a PhD student...is going to put something out there. There are many stories out there that just never get told. You are doing the work and that makes me feel really happy.*

### **Closing Reflection and Conclusion**

“When things go wrong as they sometimes will,

When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,  
When the funds are low and the debts are high,  
And you want to smile, but have to sigh,  
When care is pressing you down a bit,  
Rest, if you must, but don't you quit.

Life is queer with its twists and turns,  
As everyone of us sometimes learns,

Don't give up though the pace seems slow-  
You may succeed with another blow.

Often the goal is nearer than

It seems to a faint and faltering [wo]man;  
 Often the struggler has given up,  
 When [s]he might have captured the victor's cup.

Success is failure turned inside out-

The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,  
 And you never can tell how close you are,  
 It may be near when it seems so far,  
 So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit-  
 It's when things seem worst that you mustn't quit.

(Author Unknown)

Hermeneutic phenomenology allowed my positionality and voice to run throughout this study, so I feel it is only fitting to come full circle and conclude in the manner in which I began with Edward R. Murrow's, *This I Believe* Essay (Help, Inc., 1965). The guidelines are simple, to speak from the "I" about the moments when my beliefs were formed, tested, or changed. I entitled this essay: *Thriving In Community*

This epigraph is clips from the poem *Don't Quit*, which I learned as an undergraduate student, and still know by heart. It has served me in many capacities, including this dissertation process. I am grateful for having to have learned it some many years before. It hung on my tan metal cabinet half folded over with one magnet to keep it up. It did not matter that I could not see all the words, because I knew they were there. In moments of distress, I looked at it or recited it when I thought there was no possible way I could navigate the queer twists and turns of this study or when the pace seemed unbearably slow while translating and transcribing interviews in my second language. I held onto it when things went wrong and sighing turned into crying, but it was through failure that had been turned inside out that I realized: When I am hardest hit there is always more in me.



It is, in fact, true that when things seem worse that I must not quit because the victor's cup was often right there, and better than I had imagined. It was through this study that I not only learned from my participants, but reflected on my own journey, privileges, and persistence through my education. I began this study believing that I had been called to conduct it by something much bigger than myself. At the time, I thought it was because Black d/Deaf alumni needed an opportunity to share about their undergraduate experiences, to have affirmation for their achievements, to have their counternarratives included in the literature as a declaration that they matter and are experts in their own lived experience, but this reasoning is only half the story.

Now I believe and understand that hearing a calling and responding are two different things. One requires little to no action, while the other requires a type of persistence I never knew I had. I did not realize being called and responding to this topic would mean I too would be stretched emotionally, mentally, spiritually and physically. I did not fathom I would come to the other side of all of this feeling more empowered by my participants and knowing that I too answered the call W.E.B. Doi asked of his people so long ago. The Unexpected Talented Tenth is not separate from me, it is me, and the participants and I did not just survive, but against the odds, we thrived.

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## APPENDIX A

### PARTICIPANT SURVEY

#### Demographic Information

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. How do you identify racially?
  - a. Black: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. African American: \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Caribbean American: \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Multiracial: \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. Biracial: \_\_\_\_\_
  - f. Other (please write in): \_\_\_\_\_
3. I am...(mark with an X): Deaf \_\_\_\_\_ hard of hearing \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please write in): \_\_\_\_\_
4. Gender (mark with an X): Woman \_\_\_\_\_ Man \_\_\_\_\_ Transgendered \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please write in): \_\_\_\_\_
5. Were you born in the U.S.? Yes or No
6. Where do you currently live? City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_

#### School Information

7. What undergraduate institution did you graduate from? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What YEAR did you graduate? \_\_\_\_\_
9. What was your MAJOR: \_\_\_\_\_
10. Where did you live while at school? (mark with an X)
  - a. On Campus: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Off Campus: \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. At Home: \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Other: \_\_\_\_\_ Please explain: \_\_\_\_\_
11. What type of high school did you attend? (mark with an X)
  - a. Mainstream \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Residential \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Other (please write in): \_\_\_\_\_
12. What types of activities were you involved in as an undergrad (for example student organizations, research with faculty, community service, Greek Life, religious groups, etc.)? (Please list) \_\_\_\_\_

#### Interview Information

13. Do you know what racism means? Yes or No
14. Do you know what audism means? Yes or No
15. What mode of communication do you prefer to use for interviews? (mark with an X)
  - a. American Sign Language \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Signed Exact English \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Speaking \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Speaking and Signing \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. Other: \_\_\_\_\_ Please explain \_\_\_\_\_
16. Please mark which of these times you are available for a 30 minutes Videophone chat
17. What videophone system would you like to use?
  - a. Videophone: Your number: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Skype: Your username: \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Oovoo: Your username: \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Other: \_\_\_\_\_ Your username: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### RACIST MICROAGGRESSIONS STORY MAP

Alum	Context	Microaggression	Oppression	Feelings	Reactions	Impact	Capital
K	Academic Environment	The institution didn't recognize me or acknowledge my achievements. Why? Because I'm black. I went to Africa for an internship, got a government job, and they don't write about me in their newsletters, just other White students.	RACISM	Undervalued	He relied on his family and does feel successful. He wants to go back to Africa.	He didn't feel support by the institution and doesn't credit them for his success.	Familial
M	PEERS	I also had some problems with Gallaudet leadership. BSU posted fliers for an event and someone wrote "N" word on them.	RACISM	Confused about why someone would do that.	We took them all down and reported it to the campus activities center, but they couldn't figure out who had done it.	Feeling invisible and not respected by the campus.	Social Navigational
M	Curriculum	An older White female faculty member in class said that Black culture was not a real culture, but a subculture in America.	RACISM	She was very angry and wanted to drop the class. She talked to her faculty mentor who advised her not to drop because then the teacher would win.	She stayed in the class. She talked to the teacher after class about their concerns, and wrote a paper about Black culture to prove her wrong.	Because of support from her faculty mentor she resisted and educated the teacher on Black culture	Resistant Social
M	PEERS	Some of the White student leaders who were over the student protest tried to use our group and ideas to help their cause, but didn't necessarily value what we were trying to do which was improve diversity on campus.	RACISM	Frustrated, but determined to improve campus diversity.	We didn't let that stop our conversations to improve diversity on campus, and we met with the VP and Provost about our concern.	We just wanted the issue of diversity to be included in the larger conversation about the president. They were able to get an Ombudsmen Office open to address diversity issues.	Social Resistant Navigational

## APPENDIX C

### AUDIST MICROAGGRESSIONS STORY MAP

Alum	Context	Microaggression	Oppression	Feelings	Reactions	Impact	Capital
P	Support Services	She went in to visit her new VR counselor. She officially changed her major. VR refused to pay because she selected a major for passion and not an appropriate career. He didn't believe she could get a job with a history degree.	AUDISM	frustrated and angry	Stayed in the major and paid for her last years of school through financial aid	Believes VR limits Deaf students and aren't helpful to their success	Navigational Resistant
C	Faculty Interactions	The teacher requested a captionist, but the students wanted an interpreter, so it was easier to participate in the class. Teacher preferred a captionist.	AUDISM	He was frustrated, reading the captionist notes and he had to be very patient. He and others didn't think this was fair.	He talked with other deaf students in the class and they agreed that to pass the class they needed an interpreter. They talked to the teacher about their concerns.	An interpreter was requested for the class. The teacher never asked the students what they wanted and they had to advocate for themselves.	Social Navigational
P	Accommodation	On her France trip, she couldn't get an interpreter as no department wanted to pay for it. Ultimately, she didn't get an interpreter	AUDISM	Irritated, but determined	She used her hearing aid, read lips and interpreted for another Deaf friend who went with her the whole time. She and her friend stayed close to the teacher if clarification was needed	They got to go to France, but couldn't explore freely like the hearing students. At night they went off on their own. They did get the opportunity to go to a Deaf festival.	Familial Linguistical Navigational
K	Classmate interactions	There were about 7 people in the group (all hearing). He continuously tried to tell the group to slow down so he could contribute, but no one listened.	AUDISM	He didn't feel like a leader in this group like he did in Deaf class groups.	He finally just gave up and took the project pieces that were left, which were fixing the references and designing the charts and graphs	He didn't contribute much to the project nor did he get much from it.	Appeased the situation

## APPENDIX D

### INTERSECTIONALITY CHART

Spring 2014	Race	Ethnicity	Class	Gender/ Sex	Sexual Orientation	Religion/ Spirituality	Social Class	Age	Ability	Nations of Origin/ Citizenship	Other
Class 1											
Class 2											
Class 3											
Class 4											
Class 5											
Class 6											
Class 7											
Class 8											
Class 9											
Class 10	Spring Break										
Class 11											
Class 12											
Class 13											
Class 14											
Class 15											
Class 16	Finals Week										