ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: DISRUPTING ANTI-BLACKNESS IN K-12 DEAF EDUCATION

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Discussion of anti-Blackness in deaf education is limited and the experiences of Black Deaf students are significantly understudied. While existing research has explored the educational outcomes of deaf students, these studies often fail to incorporate a critical race analysis, resulting in a perpetuation of longstanding racial inequalities rather than efforts to dismantle them. This oversight marginalizes the complex lived experiences of Black Deaf students, whose experiences are influenced by intersections between race, deafness, and other identities.

The purpose of this study was to examine how Black Deaf students navigate and interpret their lived experiences in schooling spaces that are often shaped by systemic anti-Blackness. Given Black Deaf students' intersecting identities, a single conceptual framework cannot fully capture their unique K-12 schooling experiences. To address this gap, I developed Black Deaf Critical Theory as a new framework to examine how power structures and racial inequality in deaf education, influenced by anti-Blackness, Whiteness, and hearingness, manifest through pedagogical practices, curricula, and policies that uphold White supremacy. A narrative inquiry approach was utilized to center the voices of former Black Deaf students by exploring their schooling experiences. Through interviews and a focus group, Black Deaf participants shared schooling experiences that often failed to acknowledge or address their unique needs and challenges. The findings highlight the urgent need for educational practices, policies, and curricula that are explicitly Black Deaf-centered. These approaches must actively challenge and dismantle the entrenched systems of anti-Blackness, Whiteness, and hearingness within deaf education. This study seeks not only to elevate the voices of Black Deaf students but also to advocate for transformative changes in deaf education.

DISRUPTING ANTI-BLACKNESS IN K-12 DEAF EDUCATION

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the Black Deaf, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, Hard of Hearing and Late-Deafen community, whose resilience, strength, and perseverance in the face of systemic oppression inspire me daily. To those who have fought tirelessly for Black liberation—your struggles and triumphs have paved the way for future generations. You have shaped my journey, and this work stands as a tribute to your wisdom, courage, and unwavering commitment to disrupting systemic anti-Blackness. I hope it serves to honor and amplify your contributions and stories.

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To my six participants—Kalon, Koningin, Big Mike, Pete, Ama, and Tory—thank you for sharing your heartfelt stories and trusting me to honor your lived experiences as Black Deaf students in K-12 deaf education. I hope that I represented your stories with care and authenticity because your voices deserve to be heard. I hope your stories will inspire future research, practices, and policies by uplifting and affirming Black Deaf students in K-12 deaf education.

To my loving son, Kamau, thank you for being my source of strength and inspiration. I love you. To Kamau's village, I am deeply grateful for your support in helping me raise my son. Without you, this journey would not have been possible.

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to cry, rant, vent, and scream as I navigated the challenges of completing this study. Thank you for taking me out and helping me stay grounded, reminding me to practice self-care along the way.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Vignette #1: Racial Identity, What is That?

I attended a deaf[1] program that was situated within the public schools in the deep south of Louisiana. Most of my teachers and sign language interpreters were White[2] and utilized a Total Communication approach (a combination of spoken English and Signing Exact English, a manual signed system based on the grammatical rules of English) to communicate with me. In addition, because I was a Deaf student in a public school, my 'peers' were mostly hearing, White. Due to the differences in not only identity, but also language, I struggled socially and academically because I was a Black Deaf student. As young as I could remember, I observed and played alone on the playground because I was not sure how to interact with my peers as a Black Deaf student, and I envied my White friends because they received additional attention from White teachers, which I did not receive. I struggled to develop healthy intersectional identities that included both my deaf identity and racial identity. I recall getting *some* exposure to deaf identity and deaf culture, but they were through White, hearing people's lenses.

Looking back during my formative years in K-12, I always felt ashamed about myself, but I never truly understood why. As one of the few Deaf students in my school, I thought deafness was my *only* source of struggle and pain. I was taught to focus on my deaf identity, not my race. However, my deaf identity was not strongly developed, and I struggled with accepting the fact

[1] As a community member of the deaf community, I want to acknowledge that we have Deaf, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, Hard of Hearing, and Late-Deafened individuals and I want to honor their intersectional identities and different experiences. I also acknowledge that "deaf" or "Deaf" reject the physical, cultural, and linguistic aspects of their identities (Ruiz-Williams et al., 2015). In this dissertation, I am using the terms "deaf" and "Deaf" interchangeably with an understanding that it is an umbrella term to describe the Deaf, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, Hard of Hearing, and Late-Deafened individuals (Pudans-Smith et al., 2019).

[2] I intentionally capitalize "White" to acknowledge how Whiteness persists and operates within institutions and communities (Mack & Palfrey, 2020; Spencer & Ullucci, 2022).

that I was Deaf. When I was a senior in high school who dreamed of becoming a classroom teacher, I was determined to attend a university in Texas. My high school teacher, who was a White Deaf woman, asked me, “What is wrong with Gallaudet?” She then told me, “Gallaudet is a place where you can embrace your deaf identity.” After I graduated from high school, I enrolled into Gallaudet University, which is the only deaf university in the world. I immersed myself in the deaf community and learned about deaf culture. I learned American Sign Language (ASL), which is a language of its own, unlike Total Communication. During this time, I developed a strong deaf identity and no longer felt ashamed about my deafness. I was involved in several White dominated organizations on campus. Yet, I still struggled to identify myself as a Black Deaf person because the combination of the prevalence of White Deaf culture and people’s lack of knowledge of Black culture influenced my sense of identity and belonging within the deaf space.

After graduating from Gallaudet University, I became a classroom teacher, in a school where most of my students were Black. As I navigated in the school system as a “Black" Deaf educator in predominantly White teaching spaces, I internalized Whiteness to maintain the status quo (Liu et al., 2019). I thought I did my job by conforming to the expectations of White teachers and administrators and adapting to their standards. It was not until the age of 25 that I finally identified myself as a Black Deaf person. This journey will be unpacked in the next vignette.

Vignette #2: “Because the Student is Black.”

One year, I had a student that the other teachers warned me about before the first day of class. I was told that this student was a “troubled child with severe language deprivation[3]”. Had I

[3] Language deprivation results from prolonged limited access to a natural language during the critical period of language acquisition (Hall, 2017).

listened to the previous teachers' comments about this student, the student would not have had an opportunity to start fresh in my classroom. However, I chose to focus on the student who was present in my classroom rather than previous commentary. With the right support and strategies, rather than being a "troubled child", this student thrived, and we formed a strong bond.

However, the following school year when the student moved up to a different grade, they were now “misbehaving and out of control.” Several teachers and staff met with me to discuss and observe my teaching practices to understand how they can support the student. However, I got push-back because my classroom strategies did not make sense to them, or the teachers were not able to apply an intersectional lens to their practices. After several disciplinary actions, including suspensions, the student was expelled from the school. When I learned the student was expelled, I was confused and heartbroken, and I couldn’t understand why. I attempted to seek an answer from the school administrators, and I was shunned. I asked a Black teacher why he was expelled. Her answer was, “because the student is Black.” For the first time in my 25 years, I finally understood what “Blackness” meant.

Reflection

The two vignettes reflect my personal and professional experiences in K-12 deaf education, and they inspired me to do this dissertation. After being immersed in the Black Deaf community and learning more about the history of pain, struggle, and barriers that Black Deaf people face, I finally understood why I struggled as a Black Deaf person in the deaf community and deaf education.

Reflecting on my childhood and adulthood, I realized that the history of Black Deaf people has been erased, hidden, and silenced, and a master narrative has controlled our stories (Hairston & Smith, 1983; Moges, 2020b; Stapleton, 2014). In my doctoral studies, I learned

about the power of counternarrative, and I offer a human rights-based narrative (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This narrative is a tool for constructing and challenging the dominant narratives on race and racial reform and revealing how White privilege operates to reinforce and support racial inequities in deaf education. In this dissertation, I provide counternarratives through the lenses of Black Deaf individuals so they can strengthen their voices, resilience, and resistance to anti-Black racism. In this study, I am committed to centering Black and Brown Deaf scholars and activists who have been fighting against racism in deaf education and community for years. My study is built on their advocacy and fight for Black Deaf students who have seen education as a tool for Black liberation.

Statement of Problem

K-12 schools are a site of suffering (Dumas, 2016) for Black Deaf students because most Deaf educators and administrators fail to acknowledge and address the nuanced realities of the Black experience, where systemic violence against Black Deaf students is often normalized (Brown & Brown, 2020). As a result, Black Deaf students are frequently subjected to institutional violence, neglect, and exclusion, making it difficult for them to thrive in schooling spaces where their Blackness should be affirmed. In these schooling spaces, anti-Blackness drives racial violence through teaching practices and policies that marginalize and dehumanize Black Deaf students, reinforcing their exclusion and preventing them from accessing the full potential of their educational experiences.

Anti-Blackness is the systemic and interpersonal disregard for Blackness and those identified as Black (Dumas & ross, 2016). As Dumas (2016) points out, “The scholarship on anti-Blackness insists that the very imagination of all children was never intended to include the

Black, and that the Black becomes antagonistically positioned in relation to diversity visions and goals. It is the Black that is feared, despised, (socially) dead" (p. 17).

Racist educational policies and practices that discriminate against Black Deaf students, influenced by White supremacist beliefs, are deliberately structured to favor White Deaf students (Dumas, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006). These policies and practices are designed to create unequal opportunities and are justified by an unfounded fear that Black Deaf students are perceived as a threat to academic success (Dumas, 2016). In deaf education, Blackness is often viewed as incompatible with the normative standards, relegating Black bodies to an inferior status (ross, 2021). In schooling spaces, anti-Black values and beliefs that can render Black Deaf bodies disposable, resulting in high suspension rates (LaMarr & Egbert, 2020), a higher percentage of high school certificates rather than diplomas (Simms et al., 2008), and low academic performance (Myers et al., 2010). This anti-Black spatial perception perpetuates the exclusion of Black Deaf students from educational spaces. This study reflects how deaf education as a system is designed to reject Black Deaf bodies, languages, cultures, and identities and encompasses anti-Black and White supremacist ideologies that contribute to discrimination against Black Deaf students which impacts them intellectually, academically, socially, and emotionally.

Rationale

While theories of anti-Blackness have become more popular in Black education literature, there has been little discussion of anti-Blackness in deaf education or research focused on Black Deaf students, which is severely limited (McCaskill, 2005; Moges, 2020b; Nicolarakis et al., 2022). Many scholars have researched educational outcomes for deaf students but lacked a racialization lens (García-Fernández, 2014). As a result, efforts to ignore race via race

evasiveness or race-neutrality research replicates rather than challenges historical patterns of inequality in deaf education that are grounded in a history of race consciousness (Leonardo, 2015). This exclusion in the literature signifies that race must be centered in research that seeks to accurately and meaningfully interpret inequity in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

To contribute to the literature, we must turn to the source itself. Black Deaf students are experts on their own lived experiences as Black Deaf individuals, and the best way to learn their stories is by amplifying their voices (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This study examines Black Deaf stories to understand how racial oppression influences practices and policies in deaf education. This study does not seek to discuss whether K-12 schools and schooling are anti-Black, but rather *how* K-12 schools are implicated in the permanence of anti-Blackness. In other words, I am not researching if anti-Blackness exists in deaf education, but rather how Black Deaf students thrive despite its existence. Furthermore, "Black identity is affirmed both as a racial consciousness and political awareness of what it means to be Black in a White-dominated society and the resistances that are required for Black survival" (Dei, 2017, p.67). This quote reflects my rationale for this research because I aim to understand how Black Deaf students navigate White-dominated deaf education and disrupt anti-Black ideologies, policies, and practices.

Research Questions

I aim to understand Black Deaf adults' experiences with nuances of anti-Blackness and its operation as systematic oppression in K-12 deaf education in the United States. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What stories do Black Deaf adults tell us about anti-Blackness in K-12 deaf education?

a. How do Black Deaf adults describe their lived experience in K-12 deaf education?

2. How has K-12 deaf education been designed, over time, to perpetuate anti-Blackness through educational policies and practices?

Conceptual Framework

Using a conceptual framework can be a valuable tool for understanding and examining race and anti-Black racism in the K-12 schooling space. Black Deaf students have intersectional identities and there is no single conceptual framework that can fully capture Black Deaf students' unique experiences in K-12 schooling spaces. To address the gap, I created a new framework called Black Deaf Critical Theory to examine power structures and racial inequality in deaf education. The framework was utilized to understand the influence of anti-Blackness, Whiteness, and audism on Black Deaf students' experiences with pedagogy, curricula, and policies that maintain White supremacy.

Summary of Research Design

The qualitative research design, narrative inquiry, was used to gain a deeper understanding of Black Deaf students' experience in K-12 schooling spaces. In this study, I conducted a series of interviews, a focus group and a questionnaire with a total of six Black Deaf adults who graduated from deaf schools in the United States during the period of 1960-2023. The period was divided into three eras: (1) School Integration, (2) Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and (3) Implementation of the Common Core Standards and Black Lives Matter Movement. I interviewed two participants from each era. The data was analyzed to identify themes which show how anti-Blackness manifests in K-12 schooling spaces.

Definition of Key Terms

Anti-Blackness: Anti-Blackness is a concept that encompasses beliefs, attitudes, actions and practices that oppress and marginalize the full participation of Black people through institutional and societal structures.

Anti-Black Racism: Anti-Black racism is a specific form of racial oppression that specifically targets Black people. It is a covert structural and systemic racism that is perpetuated through practices, policies, and institutions.

Audism: Audism is a form of oppression or discrimination against deaf people based on their hearing status.

Black: Black is used to describe people who identify as part of the African diaspora or who have African ancestry.

Blackness: Blackness refers to the experiences, culture, and identity of being Black. Blackness encompasses aspects of the African diaspora, including historical, social, and cultural dimensions.

Intersectionality: Intersectionality is a concept that recognizes how oppression intersects with each other. Intersectionality emphasizes that people's experiences of oppression are shaped by multiple social identities, and they cannot be considered in isolation when analyzing social power.

Hearingness: Hearingness perpetuates hearing privilege and audism, which establishes dominant cultural practices and norms that marginalize and oppress deaf people.

Racism: Racism is a form of oppression against people of different races based on the belief in racial superiority or inferiority, leading to inequality and social injustice.

Whiteness: Whiteness is a socially constructed identity that centers the interests and

perspectives of White people as the norm, marginalizing and erasing the experiences of non-White people.

White Supremacy: White supremacy is a system or ideology upholds white power and perpetuates the dominance of White people and cultures over non-White people through legal, social, political, and economic means.

Structure of the Dissertation

The structure of this dissertation is as follows: Chapter two discusses conceptual frameworks used in the study, including Critical Race Theory, Black Critical Theory and Deaf Critical Theory and the proposal of a new framework called Black Deaf Critical. Chapter three reviews relevant literature on how anti-Blackness manifests in K-12 deaf education, Chapter four focuses on the research design, data collection, and data analysis, Chapter five focuses on participants' stories on how they experience anti-Blackness and Chapter six focuses on the findings from thematic analysis on how anti-Blackness manifests across the eras. Chapter seven discusses key conclusions, application of conceptual framework, implications, and future research. I end the dissertation with appendices including consent forms, recruitment materials, a participant questionnaire, interview protocols and focus group protocols.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

In this chapter, I begin with an overview of Critical Race Theory and its tenets (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and discuss how this framework is being used to understand and challenge racial oppression in deaf education. Next, I discuss the onto-epistemology of Whiteness (Leonardo, 2002, 2004, 2009) and the centrality of anti-Blackness (Dumas and ross, 2016). I then introduce Black Critical Theory (Dumas and ross, 2016) to discuss the pervasive nature of anti-Blackness and the dehumanization of Black people in various societal institutions and education. Following, I briefly describe deaf epistemology (Holcomb, 2010, 2012) and how it challenges dominant hearing-centric perspectives by centering Deaf ways of knowing and being. I then discuss Deaf Critical Theory (Gertz, 2003) and critique its lack of racial lens. Following, I provide an overview of Latin(x) Deaf Critical Theory (García-Fernández, 2014) and how it is used to conduct intersectional analyses of deaf students of color. I then explain how each framework does not fully capture the lived experiences of Black Deaf students. Finally, I propose a new theoretical framework, Black Deaf Critical Theory as an interpretive and analytical tool to make sense of anti-Black lived experiences with an intersectional lens and then outline the ways Black Deaf Critical Theory will help me to more incisively analyze how anti-Blackness, Whiteness, and hearingness marginalize and exclude Black Deaf students in K-12 deaf education.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an analytical framework that emerged out of critical legal studies in the 1970s to explain racist systems in the U.S. and challenge society's practices and policies that maintain them (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Race and racism are the center of CRT scholarship and analysis,

and CRT provides the critical vocabulary to describe how the United States system upholds and enshrines White supremacy (Ladson-Billings, 2013; West, 1995). CRT scholars maintain that racism does not simply come from individuals' actions but are systemic structures that rely on White supremacy to construct our socio-political and economic realities (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 1991, Delgado, R., & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Understanding how these systems function includes deep knowledge of the historical effects of colonialism, enslavement, capitalism, and democracy. CRT is grounded by six tenets (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015):

- **Permanence of Racism:** CRT scholars recognize that racism is a systemic and pervasive structure, not a random or isolated act (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Racism is endemic, pervasive, widespread, ingrained in United States society, and has become normalized (Bell, 1992; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The United States was built upon racist ideologies to justify racial violence (e.g., the genocide of Indigenous people and chattel slavery) and still exists today, in a mutated and evolved form (e.g., police brutality and hyper surveillance directed toward people of color; Matias et al., 2022).
- **Whiteness as Property:** Harris (1993) explains that Whiteness confers an entitlement to property rights--"the right to White identity" (p. 1726). Whiteness as property offers real tangible and intangible benefits and the right of possession that permeates the White power structure, as reflected in school policies and curricula and the colonization of land. These rights have allowed White people to establish an "exclusive club whose membership [is] closely and grudgingly guarded" (Harris, 1993, p. 1736).
- **Interest Convergence:** The rights of People of Color are only advanced when they converge the interests of White people (Bell, 1980). As a result, People of Color make significant social, political, educational, and economic progress when their interests align

with those in power and benefit both People of Color and White people (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

- **Intersectionality:** Ladson-Billings (2013) stated that when People of Color "move into the complexities of real life" (p. 39), they possess multiple oppressed identities. People of Color experience intersections between subordinated identities related to ability, class gender, and sexual orientation (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).
- **Critique of Liberalism:** Critique of Liberalism pertains to critiques of and challenges, the concept of meritocracy, race evasiveness, race-neutrality, equal opportunity, and incremental change. CRT claims that race-neutral laws and policies maintain racial equality (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).
- **Counter Storytelling:** Solórzano and Yosso (2002) define counter storytelling as a method to challenge, expose, and analyze master narratives about race, racism, and White supremacy. The histories, stories, and experiences of People of Color have been ignored and unheard, and counter stories by People of Color of these experiences can strengthen their traditions of social and/or political resistance, and cultural survival.

In order to expose and confront racism within deaf education contexts, the lens of CRT should be used. CRT helps researchers understand the influence of race on Black Deaf students' experiences with pedagogy, curricula, and policies that maintain White supremacy as well as racial oppression. Additionally, the use of CRT will help shed light on how Whiteness operates in schools in ways that super some students over others.

Whiteness

Leonardo (2009) claims that Whiteness is not determined by biology but is a choice rooted in ideology. As a social construct, Whiteness influences various aspects of society,

including social, political, educational, and economic structures (Leonardo, 2009; Matias et al., 2014; Mills, 1997, Yancy, 2016). Society continues to uphold Whiteness through everyday practices that benefit Whites, such as their avoidance of acknowledging racism, reluctance to identify with racial experiences or groups, and minimization of the impact of racist legacies (Leonardo, 2002).

According to Leonardo (2009), Whiteness is not merely about racial domination, but a process rooted in power structures, involving decisions and policies created by White individuals to maintain dominance over People of Color. Investment in Whiteness serves to preserve existing social, political, and economic structures that benefit White people at the expense of People of Color. White privilege is a driving force that reinforces racial privileges for Whites (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997). Leonardo (2004) describes White privilege as

> the notion that White subjects accrue advantages by virtue of being constructed as whites.... Privilege is granted even without the subject's (re)cognition that life is made a bit easier for [them]. Privilege is also granted despite a subject's attempt to dis-identify with the White race (p. 137).

In other words, White privilege stems from a system that sets Whiteness as the standard or superior while positioning everything else as "other/inferior" (McIntosh, 1988). According to DiAngelo (2018), the system of White privilege has one goal: to "centralize and elevate white people as a group" (p. 30), regardless of ability, gender, class, or sexual orientation. White privilege is a major factor in deaf education, where White Deaf and hearing people have established norms, values, and an epistemology of deafness that they present as universal but that are inherently White. White privilege is pervasive and often goes unnoticed by White deaf educators, who may unintentionally reinforce their views, beliefs, and ways of knowing as the

standard. Consequently, Black Deaf students who behave or think differently from this "norm" are seen as inferior and deficient (Chubbuck, 2004; Hollins & Guzman, 2005).

One of the tenets of CRT, Whiteness as property, provides a framework for analyzing inequities in deaf education, particularly in how White-owned properties have historically excluded Black Deaf students. For instance, researchers and linguists have predominantly used White Deaf individuals with White Deaf parents to establish ASL standards and develop ASL curricula. These practices center White Deaf perspectives (Fernandes & Myers, 2009) and exclude Black Deaf perspectives. Moreover, White Deaf people enjoy and benefit from White properties, such as well documented history, values, language, and heritage which are passed down from generation to generation (García-Fernández (2020), and White hearing women dominant the deaf education teaching force (Andrews & Jordan, 1993; Simms et al., 2008). Whiteness as property highlights the ways racial oppression is perpetuated and normalized in deaf education. Understanding how Whiteness functions in deaf education is necessary to disrupt systemic, racial inequities.

Anti-Blackness

White supremacy and Whiteness are structured by anti-Blackness, an ideology that positions Black people as nonhuman and inferior (ross, 2021). In other words, Whiteness and anti-Blackness are separate entities, but they are entangled ideologies. The relationship between Whiteness and anti-Blackness operates both systemically and interpersonally (Whitehead, 2021). Institutional structures have perpetuated the association of Blackness with slavery and inferiority, while simultaneously equating Whiteness with freedom and superiority (Lipsitz, 2006). Bell (1992) emphasizes the concept that the mistreatment of Black individuals is not just from racism and White supremacy, but the pervasive force of anti-Blackness.

Whiteness and anti-Blackness are prevalent ideologies in deaf education that continue to shape Black Deaf students' unequal and inequitable education. The disparities in educational achievements between Black and White Deaf students stem from systemic racism, where norms in educational settings prioritize White supremacy and perpetuate anti-Blackness (LaSalle et al., 2019). Black Deaf students who rely on the deaf education system for learning may unwittingly perpetuate White supremacist and anti-Black ideologies; it has been shown that Black individuals are often pressured to conform to prevailing norms (Freire, 1970). Addressing anti-Blackness in deaf education requires an intentional practice to dismantle systemic racism embedded within educational structures, including the deconstruction of prevailing ideologies of Whiteness and anti-Blackness.

Black Critical Theory

Dumas and ross (2016) pointed out that CRT did not fully address anti-Blackness and the Black experience. This led to the development of Black Critical Theory or BlackCrit (Dumas & ross, 2016) to focus on the experiences of Black people in a world that is centered on Whiteness and sees inferiority in dark skin and African ancestry. Having a framework to use to investigate the experiences of Black people is the Black, "which refers to the presence of Black bodies, or more precisely, the imagination of the significance of Black bodies in a certain place" (Dumas, 2016, p. 13), is under attack in all spheres of education.

Theorizations of Blackness by several distinguished Black scholars help researchers to better understand how anti-Blackness functions in society (Coles, 2020; Coles & Powell, 2020; Dumas and ross, 2016, ross, 2020; 2021); how Blackness is defined by the afterlife of slavery, exclusion, social death, fungibility, and violence (Dumas and ross, 2016); and how all of this is relevant in our society. As Dumas and ross (2016) assert, "anti-Blackness is endemic and is

central to how all of us make sense of the social, economic, historical, and cultural dimensions of human life" (p. 429). They argue that anti-Blackness is not simply racism against Black people, but the dehumanization of Black bodies through institutional violence (e.g., in schools, prisons, and governmental agencies). Similarly, ross (2020) says anti-Blackness is the inability to recognize Black humanity and the exposure of Black people to violence because they are Black. Dumas and ross (2016) offer framings of anti-Blackness that directly connect to CRT, but with a focus on Blackness. They include: (1) anti-Blackness is endemic; (2) Blackness exists in tension with the neoliberal-multicultural imagination; (3) creating space for Black liberatory fantasy; and (4) resisting a revisionist history that erases Whites from a history of racial dominance.

The best way to describe BlackCrit theory is its emphasis on centering scholarship and research around Black experiences and perspectives. BlackCrit helps understand how deaf education perpetuates anti-Blackness through structures and institutions. BlackCrit also helps center the voices of Black Deaf students, specifically in research that addresses and disrupts anti-Blackness. The BlackCrit is a relatively new theory; to my knowledge, there is no research in deaf education utilizing BlackCrit. However, many Black Deaf scholars examine how systemic racism shapes deaf education through educational policies, curriculum design, language access, and the marginalization of Black Deaf students (Anderson & Bowe, 1972; Andrews & Jordan, 1993; Dunn, 1995; Hairston & Smith, 1983; Moores & Oden, 1977; Moges, 2020b; Simms et al., 2008). These scholars have examined policies and practices to gain a deeper understanding of how racism operates in ways that disempower and devalue Black Deaf bodies, which results in their dehumanization. The studies I examined discussed anti-Blackness (without using this term), not racism. While racism is an appropriate term to describe racial inequities in deaf education, it fails to capture the essence of the prevailing hatred of Black Deaf students. It is crucial to

recognize that this violence is systemic in nature and shaped by anti-Blackness, which normalizes and perpetuates the dehumanization against Black Deaf students as an educational practice (Coles, 2020).

Deaf Epistemology

While critical race scholars seek to understand why racial disparities persist, their theories are deeply rooted in hearing epistemology (García-Fernández, 2014) and thus cannot be directly applied to the experiences of Black Deaf students. Hearingness comprises sustained hearing privilege, including audism[4], and establishes dominant cultural practices and norms (O'Connell, 2023). Furthermore, Bauman (2009) points out that hearing people, including hearing researchers, rarely acknowledge their hearing identity nor do they consider how their hearing identity influences how they perceive deaf-related topics. As a result, their theories on instruction, language and identity development do not apply to the education of deaf children (Holcomb, 2010). Therefore, deaf epistemology is needed to understand the nuances of how hearingness impacts Black Deaf students.

Historically, deaf education has incorporated traditional audistic epistemological beliefs, such as assessing deaf students' reading skills through hearing-centered standardized tests (Gabriel, 2024) and using spoken language acquisition models to evaluate deaf students' language proficiency (Dills & Hall, 2021). This audistic epistemological approach to education has impacted deaf students' academic outcomes and identity development (García-Fernández, 2014). Ferndale (2018) argues that hearing scholars from the deaf education field have researched deaf children through a hearing epistemology lens, which causes a disconnection

[4] Humphries (1975) defines "audism" as a specific oppression of and prejudice towards Deaf people based on their hearing status.

between educational research and practice (Cue et al., 2019; Simms & Thumann, 2007). In other words, when research does not reflect the needs and lived experiences of deaf students, it becomes difficult to implement research-based practices that are truly effective, as they are rooted in a hearing-centric perspective. As Holcomb (2012) states, "Without deaf epistemologies, the field of deaf education is at risk of continuing practices that ignore the identity, life, and learning experiences, and the language and cultural needs of the very community it wants to educate" (p. 125). Deaf epistemology is a way of understanding and knowing deaf communities and their culture. It rejects hearingness and adopts deaf-centric knowledge to improve the lived experiences of deaf people.

As Ladd (2003) asserts, Deaf epistemology provides a framework for understanding the Deaf way of life. Holcomb (2010) expands on this, describing "Deaf ways of being in the world, of conceiving that world and their place within it, both in actuality and in potentiality" (p.19). Similarly, Bauman (2009) further suggests that, based on their lived experiences, Deaf people have a deep understanding of the flaws within the educational system, drawn from their personal experiences, but they are silenced. Therefore, as García-Fernández (2014) emphasizes, it is critical to shift from epistemological audism to Deaf epistemological beliefs and values that support Deaf students.

Literature on Deaf epistemology is largely framed through the lens of Whiteness (García-Fernández, 2014). As a result, dominant narratives often center White Deaf experiences, distorting and silencing the realities of Black Deaf students. Applying Eurocentric Deaf epistemology to study Black Deaf students should not be the norm, as Black Deaf students perceive the world differently from the worldview imposed on them by White Deaf people. Shaped by both oppression and liberation, Black Deaf students' lived experiences collectively

hold the power to challenge dominant narratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Understanding and incorporating Black Deaf epistemology in K-12 deaf education is essential. It equips Black Deaf students with the tools to resist dominant narratives that fail to fully acknowledge the historical realities of the Black Deaf community. To create more inclusive educational spaces, we must recognize and value Black Deaf students' knowledge and intentionally integrate their perspectives into schooling spaces.

Critical Deaf Theories

Drawing on the theory of CRT, Gertz (2003) developed Critical Deaf Theory (DeafCrit) as a framework to examine the prejudice, oppression, and discrimination experienced by Deaf people. Gertz (2003) defines DeafCrit as a way to understand "the audistic subordination and marginalization of Deaf people" (p. 421). Gertz (2003) built her analysis of the Deaf experience on the theory of audism, which Humphries (1975) defines as a specific oppression of and prejudice towards Deaf people based on their hearing status. Lane (1999) further explores how audism is rooted in institutions and impacts the lived experiences of Deaf people. Hearing people and their ideologies dominate society, fostering the belief that being Deaf and the use of signed languages are inherently inferior to hearing and speaking. Using the DeafCrit framework, Gertz (2003) interrogates the hearingness system and how it is designed to marginalize Deaf people by centering hearing and using spoken language. Gertz (2003) also discusses dysconcious audism, explaining how Deaf people internalize hearing-dominant culture and are pressured to function like hearing people. While DeafCrit is one framework often used in research on Deaf individuals, it is not an encompassing framework. There are other branches of CRT available that can be considered when conducting research on Deaf students, but there are limitations when exploring Black Deaf students' experiences.

Critical race scholars have sought to center the specific experiences of People of Color that CRT has failed to address (Dumas & ross, 2016). For instance, Queer Critical Theory (QueerCrit), a branch of CRT, advocates for human rights and social justice activism for People of Color at the intersections of race, sexual orientation, and gender identity (Misawa, 2012; Valdes, 1995). Another CRT branch is Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit), which centers on race, ability, and other forms of multiple oppressed identities that disabled People of Color face in society (Annamma et al., 2013).

Gertz (2003) attempts to use the CRT framework to compare audism with the racism that Deaf People of Color experience in a hearing-dominant society. However, she fails to use race and racism as the foundation of her theory, which contradicts the core principles of CRT (Chapple, 2019; Chapple et al., 2021; García-Fernández, 2014; 2021; Moges, 2020a). DeafCrit is a clear example of racial reproduction that supports race evasiveness (Moges, 2020a). Race evasiveness promotes the notion that eliminating racism and its effects requires adopting a "race evasiveness" approach and ignoring racial differences (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Leonardo, 2015). The notion of race evasiveness fails to acknowledge the permanence of racism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Equating audism with racism is a form of erasure of Deaf People of Color who experience systemic racism, racial violence, and microaggressions. García-Fernández (2014) uses the CRT framework to challenge DeafCrit by centering the experiences of Deaf People of Color.

García-Fernández (2014), a Deaf Latinx scholar, introduced Deaf Latin[x] C**r**itical Theory (Deaf LatCrit), to analyze the experiences of Latinx Deaf students in secondary education. García-Fernández (2014) contends that DeafCrit inadequately addresses the oppression that Latinx Deaf students face at the intersections of race, deafness, and language in

deaf education. Additionally, García-Fernández (2014) argues that CRT scholars with hearing privilege have left audism out of their analyses. To address racism, linguicism, and audism, she presents critical analyses that challenge the hegemonic structures promoting injustice and inequity in deaf education. She combines CRT and deaf epistemology to address the unique experiences that Latinx Deaf students face. Deaf LatCrit has four tenets: (1) intersectionality; (2) ideology; (3) consciousness; and (4) storytelling.

Crenshaw (1989, 1991) developed the concept of intersectionality as a "way to conceptualize how oppressions are socially constructed and affect individuals differently across multiple group categories (Howard & Reynolds, 2013, p. 234). García-Fernández (2014) pushes for intersectional analyses of the lived experiences of deaf students of color because that disrupts the single identity and single oppression focus of deafness and audism. Intersectionality is necessary to gain broader understanding, beyond White-centric deaf identity, of the diverse experiences of Black Deaf individuals. Moreover, Whitmer (2021) argues that due to the White-centric focus of deaf identity, Black Deaf people have to choose between their Black and Deaf identities to prove their loyalty to White people in the deaf community.

While Deaf LatCrit was meant to analyze racism, audism, and linguism through a deaf epistemological lens within the Latinx community, it does not theorize the specificity of anti-Blackness. Therefore, Deaf LatCrit does not fully capture the lived experiences of Black Deaf students. To address the gap, I propose a framework that centers the experiences of Black Deaf students and emphasizes the importance of intersectionality and counter storytelling to disrupt anti-Black racism, audism, and linguistic oppression within deaf education.

A Proposed Model for the Integrated Theoretical Framework: Black Deaf Critical Theory

Little attention has been given by the research community to the connection between racialization and deaf epistemology. While several scholars in educational research have used CRT to analyze racial oppression, racism alone fails to depict the multiple forms of oppression that Black Deaf students face. Additionally, several scholars have examined audism and the oppression of Deaf people using Deaf epistemologies, but their examinations and perspectives are framed through a White lens. Moreover, while several scholars have studied the racialization of Deaf Students of Color, they have not examined the role of Whiteness and White supremacy.

As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, Black Deaf epistemology is necessary in understanding the narratives of Black Deaf students because they are the experts of their lived experiences in education. For centuries, White Deaf and White hearing people have reinforced the notion that Black Deaf individuals' knowledge, experiences, and perspectives are inferior. This marginalization of Black Deaf knowledge has perpetuated the ideology that has structured deaf education around White and hearing norms. García-Fernández (2014) emphasizes that racialized Deaf students have unique perspectives shaped by their intersectional identities—race, deafness, and language—and that these experiences should be recognized as complex and interconnected. Furthermore, García-Fernández (2014) suggests that researchers should not consider Deaf experiences and racialized experiences separately but should examine them in their intertwined complexity.

Discussions of Black Deaf students often fail to contextualize the complexity of their experiences in K-12 deaf education, which further reifies inaccurate, negative assumptions about and perspectives of Black Deaf students. Yosso (2005) points out that researchers continue to seek appropriate frameworks to examine and challenge the impact of race and racism in the United States. To address this gap, I created a framework, "Black Deaf Critical Theory"

(BlackDeaf Crit) to provide a more structured approach to understanding Black Deaf students' educational outcomes. Before introducing BlackDeaf Crit, I want to clarify two key points. First, while Stapleton (2014, 2016) did not explicitly name her theoretical framework, Moges (2020a) incorrectly labeled it as "Black Deaf Critical Theory" in their dissertation. Thus, Stapleton's (2014, 2016) theoretical framework is not the same framework that I propose. Second, I specifically, and intentionally, shorten Black Deaf Critical Theory to BlackDeaf Crit, not Deaf BlackCrit. I avoid placing "Deaf" in front of "BlackCrit" due to a long history of an essentialist, single view of the deaf community and its culture (García-Fernández, 2014; Lawyer, 2018; Ruiz-Williams et al., 2015).

BlackDeaf Crit provides a more detailed, nuanced, and embodied theorization of Black Deaf students' experiences than other "crits," which often fail to fully capture the counter stories of Black Deaf experiences. Rather than existing separately from CRT, BlackDeaf Crit functions as a branch of CRT that is essential for challenging anti-Blackness, Whiteness, hearingness, and other intersecting oppressions as a paradigm. This framework is rooted in Black Deaf epistemologies, which challenge the racist and audist paradigms that reinforce Whiteness and hearing-centric norms. Intersectionality is at the core of this framework, using an intersectional lens to analyze how systems of oppression intersect and marginalize Black Deaf knowledge. By centering both Blackness and deafness, this approach moves away from White-centric Deaf epistemologies that erase Black Deaf experiences.

BlackDeaf Crit centers experiences that have been marginalized and also disrupts and transforms the theoretical and methodological status quo (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Methodologically, the BlackDeaf Crit framework will help researchers to: (1) understand how educators can affirm Black Deaf students through their stories and acknowledge the truths of

their experiences with Blackness and anti-Blackness in educational spaces; and (2) understand the complex dynamics of the White power structure that produces Black Deaf suffering in deaf education.

The BlackDeaf Crit framework will guide scholars to incorporate complexity and hidden narratives into educational research, fostering a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of race and disability/deafness. I outline how BlackDeaf Crit can serve as a framework to analyze, name, and challenge racial oppression that Black Deaf students experience in K-12 schooling spaces. Building upon established theoretical and methodological groundings for the BlackDeaf Crit, I have developed five framing ideas to serve as base theorizations of the role of White supremacy and anti-Blackness in deaf education while providing scholars and educators with strategies to challenge and disrupt White racial dominance and anti-Black racism (see Figure 1).

- **Anti-Blackness is Endemic:** BlackDeaf Crit frames anti-Blackness as permanent and endemic in the United States.
- **Pervasiveness of Whiteness:** BlackDeaf Crit emphasizes that Whiteness is pervasive, and its function is to uphold White supremacy in society.
- **Hearingness as Property:** BlackDeaf Crit recognizes hearingness as property, which contributes to the normalization of hearing superiority and the perpetuation of audism in society.
- **Intersectionality:** BlackDeaf Crit rejects a single-identity analysis, recognizes multiple intersecting identities, and pushes us to look beyond White-centric deaf identity as a sole identity.

- **Counter Storytelling:** BlackDeaf Crit emphasizes counter storytelling as necessary to challenge master narratives about Black Deaf people.

Figure 1: Black Deaf Critical Theory

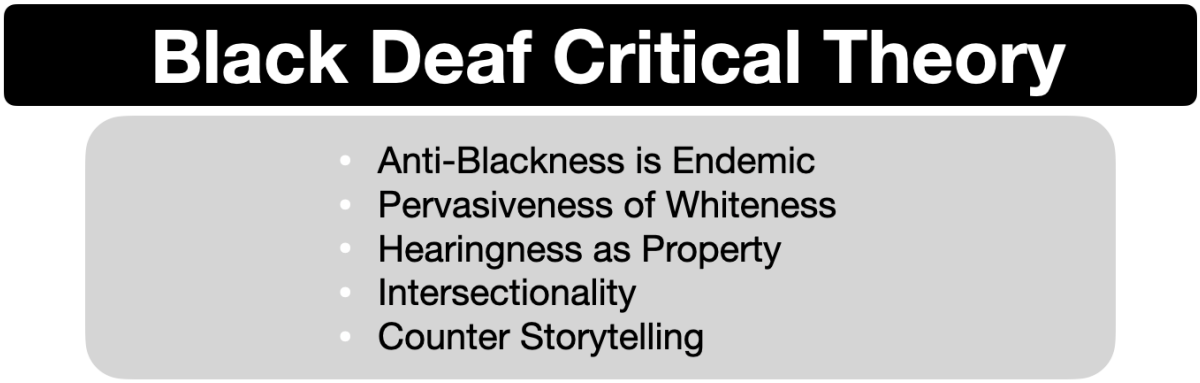


Image Description: The white text inside the black box reads: "Black Deaf Critical Theory." Below the black box, the gray box contains black text that lists: 1) anti-Blackness is endemic 2) pervasiveness of whiteness 3) hearingness as property 4) intersectionality 5) counter storytelling.

Framing Idea #1: Anti-Blackness is Endemic

BlackDeaf Crit frames anti-Blackness as permanent and endemic in the United States. The endemic role of anti-Blackness is rooted in my conceptualization of anti-Blackness as a system and structure that dehumanizes Black Deaf students in schooling spaces. Rooted in White supremacy, Whiteness, and a fear of Blackness, anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism persist and flourish, significantly impacting Black Deaf students. Anti-Blackness manifests spatially, marking Black Deaf students as unwanted, leading to their exclusion from schooling spaces. As a dominant force, anti-Blackness undermines the physical, emotional, and psychospiritual well-being of Black Deaf students. To understand the permeation of anti-Blackness In K-12 deaf education, I examine how anti-Blackness and deficit-based frameworks are operationalized through teaching practices and school policies in ways that dehumanize Black Deaf students.

Framing Idea #2: Pervasiveness of Whiteness

Leonardo (2013) reminds us that "white supremacy is an entire political system" (p. 94). Matias and Mackey (2016) emphasize that Whiteness often "goes undetected, despite the major implications it imposes on the educational equity of students of color" (p. 35). As the foundation of the White supremacist system, Whiteness remains unacknowledged, further contributing to the permanence of anti-Blackness (Dumas & ross, 2016; Leonardo, 2009). Matias and Mackey (2016) argue that the only way to disrupt Whiteness and White supremacy in deaf education is to teach "the manifestations of whiteness that lie underneath the mere recognition that whites hold racial privilege" (p. 35). According to Gillborn (2005), one of the most influential and dangerous aspects of Whiteness is educators' lack of awareness of their own complicity in upholding White supremacy, which perpetuates anti-Black ideology. I utilize BlackDeaf Crit to examine how Whiteness impacts Black Deaf students in schooling spaces. White, hearing, and female educators dominate deaf education despite the fact that 50 percent of students in deaf education are students of color (Simms et al., 2008), with Black Deaf students comprising 14.5% (Gallaudet Research Institution, 2014). Utilizing the BlackDeaf Crit framework will help me to examine why White deaf educators are actively invested in White racial reproduction, which is maintained through low academic expectations (Hairston & Smith, 1983) and an exclusive focus on a singular identity—deafness (García-Fernández, 2014). Additionally, BlackDeaf Crit will provide me with a tool to identify and challenge notions of White supremacy as well as the systems through which White dominance and power are established and maintained in deaf education (Corces-Zimmerman & Guida, 2019).

Framing Idea #3: Hearingness as Property

Annamma et al. (2013) discusses the concept of Whiteness and ability as property. Annamma et al. (2013) further explains how society grants privileges and power by reinforcing Whiteness and ability as the default standards, privileging those who fit within these constructs. While ableism exists in the deaf space, it does not fully capture the nature of hearing superiority, which is described as audism. I propose the framing idea, 'hearingness as property', to discuss how hearing ideology is a social construct treated as a privilege, granting hearing people ownership of societal norms by normalizing a hearing-centric world that prioritizes listening and speaking. Those who possess this privilege benefit from systemic advantages, while Deaf people are deemed inferior due to their deafness. Deaf People of Color face compounded oppression as they navigate the intersections of racism and audism, demonstrating how Whiteness and hearingness are intertwined to uphold structures of power and maintain social hierarchies. Hearingness as property is evident in deaf education, where Whiteness and hearingness shape institutional norms and pedagogical approaches.

Hearingness is normalized and centered in the deaf education, and deaf people internalize audism and hearing perspectives to assimilate into the hearing society (Gertz, 2003). Deaf students' hearing identity often becomes their dominant identity, and their other identities are subordinated and disappear into hearingness and Whiteness so they can be assimilated into society (Lawyer, 2018). Hearing ideologies are rooted in European values and perpetuate the normalcy of hearingness through oral education. Oralism, an ideology and practice those privileges speech-based communication, is encouraged from birth (Kite, 2019). Oral education has an element of Whiteness as deaf educators have used this teaching method to compel Black Deaf students to perform and speak like a poster White Deaf child. These issues lie not only in the educational practices, but also the research upon which these educational practices are based.

Holcomb et al. (2024) assert that research and practice can unintentionally uphold dominant power structures by prioritizing a medical/hearing-centered perspective and evaluating deaf students' language through White, middle-class values that privilege auditory-verbal communication (spoken language) as the ideal. Rather than approaching Deaf students using a 'one size fits all' approach, educators should be able to adjust their lenses to better understand each student. Utilizing BlackDeaf Crit through the lens of deaf epistemology helps us understand how Black Deaf students navigate schooling spaces where educators do not acknowledge their preference for sign language over oral language (Lawyer, 2022).

Framing Idea #4: Intersectionality

BlackDeaf Crit rejects single-identity analyses, recognizes multiple intersecting identities, and pushes us to look beyond White-centric deaf identity as the sole identity. Intersectionality is an essential framework for understanding how Black Deaf people with multiple identities are subject to unique patterns of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Anti-Blackness must be addressed in conjunction with other forms of oppression and marginalization, as some Black Deaf people experience multifold levels of oppression, extending beyond race and deafness (Lawyer, 2018). My study explores the intersections between anti-Black racism, audism, and other forms of oppression and examines how the structural systems that enact such forms of oppression are co-constructed and mutually dependent (Annamma et al., 2013).

Framing Idea #5: Counter Storytelling

Much of the research on Black Deaf students lacks racialized perspectives, which results in a raceless story of their lived experiences (McCaskill, 2005; García-Fernández, 2014, 2020; Stapleton, 2014). Counter storytelling empowers Black Deaf students to challenge incomplete narratives about themselves. BlackDeaf Crit advocates for documenting Black Deaf people's

stories and counternarratives as historical practices that have been instrumental in preserving Black Deaf history and Black Deaf culture. Counter storytelling takes different forms, such as personal stories, other people's stories, and composite stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The Black Deaf community documents its stories through different media, including arts, videos, and social media (Moges, 2020b; Nicolarakis et al., 2022; Stapleton, 2014). The documentation of Black Deaf stories is growing (Nicolarakis et al., 2022), and I will add to the evidence of these stories by privileging and sharing narratives that have gone unheard. Given that anti-Blackness has often led to the erasure of Black Deaf people's perspectives and stories, it is imperative to document anti-Blackness. Therefore, my aim is to document the pervasiveness of anti-Blackness, the White gaze, and White racial domination.

Using the BlackDeaf Crit framework, I will analyze Black Deaf students' experiences and explicitly highlight how they are impacted by racism, racial microaggressions, and oppression rooted in anti-Black ideology (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). As a researcher who believes in the permanence of anti-Blackness, I will seek evidence of these conditions in Black Deaf students' stories (Coles, 2020; Coles & Powell, 2020). Their stories will allow them to critically reflect on being Black and Deaf in predominantly White spaces. Furthermore, sharing their stories from their own perspectives will empower them to contradict and challenge the dominant narrative and privileged discourse about Black Deaf students (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Their stories will also help me to understand the lived experiences, perspectives, and challenges faced by Black Deaf students within the context of deaf education, contributing to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding the role of anti-Blackness.

Chapter Summary

The BlackDeaf Crit framework aims to provide for a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of Black Deaf students in K-12 education and centers on the concepts of anti-Blackness and hearingness, recognizing the intersectionality in shaping Black Deaf students' educational outcomes. BlackDeaf Crit emphasizes the endemic nature of anti-Blackness in the United States, highlighting its presence and pervasiveness in society. It calls for a critical examination of and challenge to Whiteness, naming its operations through White supremacy and pushing for its deconstruction. Additionally, the framework challenges hearing ideology by disrupting the notion of hearing superiority and centering deaf epistemologies. BlackDeaf Crit offers a pathway for researchers and educators to understand the complexities of race and deafness in shaping educational outcomes and to advocate for more equitable practices in deaf education.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

I begin this chapter by providing a connection between the deaf community and deaf education through the critical lens of anti-Blackness. Next, I discuss the role of anti-Blackness in deaf education. I then provide a review of documentation of the ways in which anti-Blackness is manifested in deaf education and how deaf education, as a system, is designed to reject Black Deaf bodies, languages, cultures, and identities.

Deaf Culture and Deaf Community Through Anti-Blackness Lens

White supremacy lies at the core of racial oppression within the deaf community. Anderson and Bowe (1972) asserted that "racism in the deaf community is an issue that has received far too little attention" (p. 619), and Stuart and Gilchrist (2005) emphasized that "deafness does not erase racism" (p. 61). These two powerful statements from scholars capture how deeply racism is entrenched in the deaf community and has been for decades. It has been widely documented that the (White) Deaf community has played a major role in the suffering of Black Deaf communities (Anderson & Bowe, 1972; Andrews & Jordan, 1993; Dunn, 1995; Hairston & Smith, 1983; Moores & Oden, 1977; Moges, 2020b; Simms et al., 2008) Cohen (1993) noted that "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" (p. 54). White Deaf people *believe* Black Deaf people experience audism exclusively, disregarding other forms of oppression, when in fact, they experience multiple oppressions (Moges, 2020b). For instance, there are many beliefs commonly held by White Deaf people that are simply untrue. White Deaf people *believe* Black Deaf people have the same access to services and resources in the community when in fact, they have limited interactions with professionals (Anderson & Bowe, 1972). White Deaf people *believe* Black Deaf and White

Deaf children have similar ASL development milestones when in fact, Black Deaf children do not acquire ASL until an average age of nine while White Deaf children acquire ASL at an average age of three (Myers et al., 2010).

White Deaf people are largely ignorant of the persistence of systemic, institutional, and individual racism, despite overwhelming and accessible evidence to the contrary. Among White people, Mills (2015) characterizes White ignorance as "an absence of belief, a false belief, a set of false beliefs, a pervasively deforming outlook—that [is] not contingent but causally linked to their whiteness" (p. 217). In other words, White ignorance involves the erasure, denial, idealization, and mythologization of facts about race and racism. Many Deaf people believe racism does not exist within the deaf community due to their shared experience with audism. Burke (2014) asserts that attitudes within deaf culture share similar characteristics to those in the dominant culture, and these attitudes have been used to oppress deaf people within the deaf community. Whitmer (2021) adds, "This stigmatization of Blackness within the White Deaf community indicates how entrenched White privilege is--that Deafness is equivalent to Whiteness while Blackness is somehow equitable to cultural uncertainty" (p. 43). To preserve deaf culture, Whiteness is used to co-opt and colonize the culture in the deaf community to serve its own gatekeeping purposes (Fernandes & Myers, 2009).

According to Fernandes and Myers (2009), the core of White Deaf community often demands conformity to its standards and positions itself as the dominant group within a hierarchy of language and culture, asserting that these standards apply to all Deaf people. This suggests the dominance of White Deaf culture within the broader deaf community, with White Deaf people assuming a central and authoritative role in defining and shaping deaf identity and culture. For instance, Deaf people, specifically White Deaf people, use the phrase: DEAF SAME to highlight

that they share common values and challenges as a community. The concept of "DEAF SAME" is used within the deaf community to emphasize shared deaf identity above all other social identities. Furthermore, Black Deaf individuals often faced pressure to prioritize one aspect of their identity—either their race or their hearing status—while disregarding the other (Moges, 2020b; Whitmer, 2021). However, many Black Deaf individuals view both their race and deafness as integral parts of their identity (Corbett, 1999). When White Deaf people ask Black Deaf people to choose, they often do so from a position of privilege, specifically White privilege, using the response to define the place of Black Deaf individuals within the community. White Deaf people exercise race evasiveness by claiming to “not see color” when interacting with Black Deaf people, denying the significance of race and racism to maintain and gain benefits from the White power structure (Annamma et al., 2016). The notion of race evasiveness fails to take into consideration the permanence of racism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

The deaf community has a long history of advocating for educational reforms within deaf education. While many deaf-led organizations advocated for language rights and equal educational opportunities for deaf students, the broader deaf community had little interest in the education for Black Deaf students (Burch, 2002). The (White) deaf community did not address the unequal education received by Black Deaf students. For instance, National Association of the Deaf (NAD) excluded Black Deaf individuals from membership for nearly a century, leading to the establishment of the National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA) in 1981 (Anderson & Bowe, 1972; Edwards, 2012). The NBDA advocates for educational opportunities for Black Deaf people (O’Neill-Dietel, 2022). While the NAD began accepting Black Deaf people in 1965, it remained predominantly White, resulting in a lack of educational advocacy and representation for Black Deaf people within the organization, which negatively impacted Black Deaf students

(Ogunyipe, 2021). The deaf community perpetuates the racial hierarchy, often without needing to consider race, because the community lives within a deaf culture where anti-Blackness has been normalized. This is an example of the erasure, marginalization, and exclusion of Black Deaf bodies and the reproduction and re-inscription of Black Deaf suffering in education.

Understanding the Role of Anti-Blackness in Deaf Education

Anti-Blackness continues to profoundly impact the lives and educational outcomes of Black Deaf students. Racial oppression within deaf education remains a pervasive and consistent issue. Schools are a site of suffering (Dumas, 2016) because deaf educators and administrators are unwilling to understand or disrupt the complexities, specificities, and nuances of the Black condition, where violence against the Black is masked as normal (Brown & Brown, 2020). Dumas (2016) asserts, "The scholarship on anti-Blackness insists that the very imagination of all children was never intended to include the Black, and that the Black becomes antagonistically positioned in relation to diversity visions and goals. It is the Black that is feared, despised, (socially) dead" (p. 17). In deaf education, Blackness is viewed as a problem and as nonhuman. The spatial imaginary of anti-Blackness designates Black Deaf bodies as undesirable, leading to their exclusion from educational spaces.

In the context of human existence, both the education for Black Deaf students and the ending of slavery are very recent events. Slavery ended approximately 160 years ago, and the Louisiana School for the Deaf was the last school to desegregate in 1978, just 47 years ago (McCaskill et al., 2011). The paradigm of anti-Blackness positions Blackness as inherently problematic, failing to recognize the extensive history of Black Deaf people. It also neglects to acknowledge that Black Deaf communities across the United States have been significantly disadvantaged by historical systemic anti-Black racism (Dumas & ross, 2016).

Yancy (2016) argues that Whiteness is an oppressive system which serves as the culprit of exclusion toward Black Deaf students. Essentially, "Whiteness thrives in the midst of anti-Blackness, and often schools are the breeding grounds for this state of racial discontent for countless Black (Deaf) children" (Spencer & Ullucci, 2022, p. xv). The influence of anti-Blackness, and Whiteness within schools perpetuates systemic racism, privileging some students over others. School administrators and educators design policies and practices that marginalize Black Deaf students who deviate from dominant cultural norms, potentially jeopardizing their academic success (Dumas, 2016; Gillborn, 2007). Matias (2013) describes education and schooling spaces as White-dominated, stating, "Since the teaching force, curricula, policies, and teacher education pipeline are White-dominant, the context for repressed forms of violence is maintained. If disrupted, White performative recurrences of anger, avoidance, guild, dismal, and repression stifle racial knowledge" (p. 188). Leonardo (2009) contends that Whiteness has become invisible and normalized in ways that make it seem "innocent or harmless" (p. 79). This is an example of how a racist deaf education system fails to recognize the role of Whiteness in perpetuating racism (Leonardo, 2009).

Anti-Black practices in deaf education can be traced back to the era of slavery, with Black Deaf students still systematically denied access to quality education today. Anti-Blackness is pervasive and central within K-12 schooling (Dumas, 2016; Dumas & ross, 2016), and school policies and practices that reinforce White supremacy harm Black Deaf students. Bell (2010) discusses the concept of "stock stories", which are narratives that maintain anti-Blackness, and how these stock stories and stereotypes of an underachieving Black Deaf student are often normalized and expected. Lopez and Jean-Marie (2021) argue, "this lack of success for Black students must be understood within systems of oppression instead of pathologizing of Black

bodies and marginalization of communities" (p. 52). This depiction forms an educational trend where anti-Blackness manifests in schools, encompassing teacher attitudes, teaching approaches, the absence of Black Deaf history, and the portrayal of Black intelligence as deficient (Spencer & Ullucci, 2022).

According to ross (2021), gaining a comprehensive understanding of the racialized experiences of Black Deaf students in schools requires an understanding of how Black Deaf individuals, including students, are situated in the larger society, and how their identity as Black individuals reflects a unique ontological position. The inability to recognize Black Deaf bodies maintains White supremacy. It is important for deaf educators and administrators to challenge this phenomenon and examine how anti-Blackness and White supremacy operate (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021). Dumas (2016) suggests that:

> It is important for educators to acknowledge that anti-Blackness infects educators' work in schools and serves as a form of (everyday) violence against Black children and their families. This acknowledgment is different from a broad stance against intolerance or racism, or an admission of the existence of White privilege. Teachers, administrators, and district leaders should create opportunities to engage in honest and very specific conversations about Black bodies, blackness, and Black historical memories in and of the school and local community (p. 17).

In K-12 education, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) challenge educators to build race consciousness to better understand aspects of structures and systems that maintain racial inequality in deaf education. If deaf educators are serious about disrupting racism, there must be an explicit focus on anti-Blackness (Spencer & Ullucci, 2022) that is fully embedded in teaching practices (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021). Deaf educators and administrators must come to

understand the conceptualization of anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism and how these are manifested in everyday schooling practices and how they impact their Black Deaf students (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021).

To give a broader picture of how deaf education is implicated in the permanence of anti-Blackness through policies and practices, I identified 10 themes from the literature review, which I will describe below. It is important to note that literature on Black Deaf students is very limited, and the themes shared represent just a fraction of the ways White supremacy and anti-Blackness are manifested in deaf education.

Early Deaf Education and School Segregation

In 1817, the Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb Persons, now known as the American School for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut, was the first permanent school for Deaf people in the United States (Edwards, 2012; Van Cleve & Crouch, 1989). The school was founded by two White men, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, and Laurent Clerc. At that time, Gallaudet was deeply invested in White nationalism and the exclusion of Black bodies (Sayers, 2017). Gallaudet used Black people as property, profited from slave-labor plantations in Alabama, and used those profits to build a new and larger campus to accommodate a larger student population in Connecticut.

In contrast, Black Deaf individuals in the South did not receive a formal education until 1869, when the North Carolina School for the Colored Deaf and Blind became the first state school to open for Black Deaf students (Burch, 2002; McCaskill et al., 2011). Despite this, other states took much longer to open schools for the Black Deaf; West Virginia School for Colored Deaf and Blind did not open until 1926, and Louisiana State School for the Colored Deaf and Blind (also known as Southern State School for the Negro Deaf) opened in 1938 (Burch, 2002;

McCaskill et al., 2011). Many Black Deaf students attended classes in segregated buildings or campuses which were either close by or next to the White deaf schools (Hairston & Smith, 1983). These buildings or campuses were often inadequate for educating students. Black deaf schools had dilapidated furniture as well as inadequate books and writing materials (Hairston & Smith, 1983). The segregated Georgia School for the Deaf Colored Department lacked heat or electricity until 1913 (Burch, 2002). The Mississippi School for the Deaf refused to move to a segregated school, but renovated facilities for White Deaf students five times between 1860 and 1960 (Burch, 2002). The classrooms in Virginia State School for Colored Deaf and Blind Children were bare, lacking basic materials and furniture. Black Deaf students at the Mississippi School for the Deaf Colored Department were forced to work at White deaf schools to support school funding, while White Deaf students had no such duties. Racially segregated schools remained until the Brown vs. School Board of Education ruling.

Process of Desegregation

Before the Brown v. Board of Education ruling, segregated schools were spaces for Black learning and liberation (Walker, 1996). These segregated schools affirmed Black student identity, fostered academic excellence, and cultivated generations of Black leaders and intellectuals (Spencer & Ullucci, 2022; Stapleton, 2014). Black hearing teachers were recruited from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) to teach Black Deaf students in segregated schools/departments (Stapleton, 2014). Additionally, the segregation of Black Deaf students promoted the formation of Black American Sign Language (BASL; McCaskill et al., 2011). After the landmark Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court case, which outlawed racial segregation in schools, efforts to desegregate educational institutions faced significant resistance and implementation challenges, leading to continued struggles for racial equality in

deaf education. Dumas and ross (2016) point out that desegregation had numerous negative effects on Black communities, such as increasing instability, disrupting the well-being of Black children, and hindering the formation of positive racial identities. Woodson (2021) added that desegregated settings “devastated the Black educational infrastructure” (p. 17). Integration led to the dismissal and forced resignation of Black teachers at Black Deaf schools (Dunn, 2005), while BASL was disregarded and devalued (Bayley et al., 2017). Despite desegregation, many schools continued to separate Black Deaf students in dormitories and cafeterias (Hairston & Smith, 1983). Despite the challenges and setbacks faced during desegregation, segregated schools for Black Deaf students played a crucial role in fostering spaces for learning, identity affirmation, and intellectual development.

Discriminatory School Policies

Black students are overrepresented in school disciplinary actions (Dumas & ross, 2016), due to "adultification", a phenomenon in which Black students are treated and viewed as adults rather than children (Spencer & Ullucci, 2022). Adultification is “a form of dehumanization, robbing Black children of the very essence of what makes childhood distinct from all other developmental periods: innocence. Adultification contributes to a false narrative that Black youths’ transgressions are intentional and malicious, instead of the result of immature decision-making—a key characteristic of childhood” (Epstein et al., 2017, p. 6). Between 2015 and 2019, Black Deaf students at one residential school received the highest suspension rate of all deaf student groups, with the majority of these being males (LaMarr & Egbert, 2020). Due to adultification, Black boys are often perceived as older, more prone to guilt compared to their White counterparts, and more likely to be subjected to justified police violence (Epstein et al., 2017). Teachers' subjective decisions to refer students for disciplinary action, combined with

zero-tolerance policies, often leads to Black students being pushed out of the classroom and potentially into the criminal justice system (Gilliam et al., 2016).

Intersectional Erasure: Black First vs. Deaf First

To my knowledge, there are three studies that ask Black Deaf people if they identify as Black first or Deaf first. Valli et al. (1992) interviewed twenty-six Black Deaf participants, but only comments from twelve participants were published, revealing mixed results. Out of twelve participants in Valli et al. (1992)'s study, six identified as Black first, three identified as Deaf first, two as both, and the last participant stated it depended on where they were. In Black spaces, they identified themselves as Black first, while in deaf spaces, they identified as Deaf first. In another study by Aramburo (1989), 60 Black Deaf students who attended a residential school were asked to select their primary identity. Nearly 87% of participants identified as Black first. The 13% of participants who identified as Deaf first were educated in predominantly White residential schools at an early age and had deaf parents who were actively involved in the deaf community. In contrast, the participants who identified as Black first were aware of Black culture but not fully involved in the deaf community. In another study, Foster and Kinuthia (2003) examined how deaf college students described their identities. Through their semi-structured interviews, the findings were mixed. Some participants identified themselves as deaf first because of their communication preferences. One participant explained, "I use my eyes and hands to communicate. I don't know what Black means" (Foster & Kinuthia, 2003, p. 279). Some participants identified their Blackness first. One participant stated, "I mean, because of society, when a person looks at you, they look at your skin color first" (Foster & Kinuthia, 2003, p. 279). Furthermore, similar to Valli et al.'s (1992) study, some participants noted that their identity shifted depending on location, such as being labeled Deaf first in a deaf space. These

studies show that Black Deaf people are conscious of both their Black and Deaf identities and how they perceive themselves in the deaf community. However, these studies are problematic because the researchers forced Black Deaf participants to choose one of their identities as their primary identity.

Academic Track

Studies indicate that Black Deaf students are often subject to lower academic expectations and receive inferior quality instruction compared to their White Deaf peers (Holt & Allen, 1989; Myers et al., 2010). For example, there is an overrepresentation of Black Deaf students placed in vocational training programs (Anderson & Bowe, 1972; Hairston & Smith, 1983) as well as programs for intellectually challenged students (Cohen, 1993; Moores & Oden, 1977). Black Deaf students placed in appropriate educational settings often attend schools that are in urban areas and are underfunded (Moores & Oden, 1977). Schools have plenty of White Deaf role models for white deaf students (García-Fernández, 2014). While some Black Deaf students report that they get support from White deaf educators, many White deaf educators lack sensitivity for and understanding of Black Deaf culture, which can create barriers for Black Deaf students (Cohen et al., 1990; Dunn, 1990; Marbury, 2007; McCaskill, 2005).

Postsecondary Outcomes for Black Deaf Students

Many Black Deaf students graduate from high school at a second to fourth grade reading level (Hairston & Smith, 1983; Myers et al., 2010), whereas White Deaf students graduate at an eighth grade reading level, on average (Myers et al., 2010). As a result of low reading achievement, many Black Deaf students are given certificates of completion rather than high school diplomas upon completing secondary education (Simms et al., 2008). Additionally, Black Deaf students are often tracked into vocational training (Stuart & Gilchrist, 2005; Hairston &

Smith, 1983), while White Deaf students are directed toward academics and are encouraged to attend college (Hairston & Smith, 1983). The low number of high school diplomas awarded to Black Deaf students hinders their college enrollment. Gilchrist and Emerson (1990) reported that only 2% of Black Deaf students graduated from college in 1987. Further, only 4.9% of Black Deaf students enrolled in two-year and four-year colleges between 1995 and 1996. In a separate study, Williamson (2007) found that the enrollment rate for White Deaf students was 85%. Garberoglio et al. (2019) found that 19.1% of Black Deaf students earned an associate degree, while 12% graduated with a bachelor's degree. The low number of college graduates and a high number of high school certificates of completion among Black Deaf individuals negatively impacts their employment prospects (Garberoglio et al., 2019; Simms et al., 2008). After they graduate from high school, Black Deaf students may remain on vocational rehabilitation caseloads for up to five years without being placed in job positions (Dunn, 2005). The National Deaf Center (NDC) found that 38.2% of Black Deaf people are employed, compared to 54.3% of White Deaf people, with janitor being the top occupations for employed Black Deaf. These findings highlight the persistence of racial opportunity gaps in secondary and postsecondary education and beyond.

Black Deaf Teachers: Where Are They?

Research shows that school diversity, including racial diversity among teachers, can significantly benefit students. However, even today, Black Deaf teachers are severely underrepresented in the workforce (Andrews & Jordan, 1993; Anderson & Dunn, 2016). To begin, Deaf teachers in the realm of deaf education are limited as White hearing women remain dominant in the deaf education teaching force (Andrews & Jordan, 1993; Simms et al., 2008). Andrews and Jordan (1993) found there were 15.6% Deaf educators in 1993, and Simms et al.

(2008) found there were 22.1% Deaf educators in 2004. Despite this slight increase, there were 7.1% Black Deaf teachers in 1993, which significantly decreased to only 0.8% in 2004 (Simms et al., 2008). Deaf education needs more racially diverse deaf educators because students of color need role models and educational spaces dedicated to anti-racism and inclusiveness. This approach has a significant, positive impact on their sense of belonging (Cohen, 1997; Parasnis, 2012). Parasnis (2012) argues that deaf educators must also receive training in diversity and multiculturalism, as well as engage in self-reflection about sociocultural diversity to become effective teachers for Black Deaf students.

School Curriculum

Brown and Brown (2020) state that "school curriculum has taken a particular role in advancing anti-Black racism" (p.72) and is anchored in White supremacy. School curriculums are designed to reproduce anti-Black racial ideologies through sources such as textbooks, children's books, films, and maps to maintain the legacy of dehumanization (Coles, 2020; Love 2019). Ighodaro and Wiggan (2013) define the intentional manipulation of academic programming, characterized by omission and whitewashing, as "curriculum violence." The consistent omission of Blackness in school curriculum harms Black Deaf students by not giving voice to their lived experience.

White Deaf people have controlled the development of curriculum on deaf culture, deaf history, and ASL, often ignoring the experiences and perspectives of Black Deaf individuals (Fernandes & Myers, 2009; Hairston & Smith, 1983; Moges, 2020b). Furthermore, the curriculum for Black Deaf students was marginalized (Stapleton, 2015), and Black Deaf students primarily experienced curriculums that described them in "majoritarian language," from the privileged perspective of White Deaf people, highlighting their ignorance of Black Deaf history

(Moges, 2020b). Negative beliefs about Black (Deaf) intelligence are deeply embedded in the curriculum, teaching practices, and resources, which reinforces anti-Blackness. Anderson and Bowe (1972) explain Black Deaf students were not taught "about themselves, the problems of their people, or the contributions of their ancestors. They [were] exposed to texts oriented toward a belief in white supremacy" (p. 619). Recently, however, many educators have created an avenue for Black Deaf people to claim deaf history. Black Deaf people have increasingly been added to existing narrative narratives, but that does not alter the dominant, White representations of deaf history.

Resources for Black Families/Caregivers

More than 90 percent of deaf children are born to hearing parents (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2004) and most do not know or use ASL to communicate with their deaf children (Marbury, 2007). The majority of White parents of deaf children have resources and support as they work through the shock, grief, guilt, and acceptance stages of adjusting to having a child with a disability and being involved in their children's education (Anderson, 1992). In contrast, Black families often feel stigmatized by having a "disabled" child (Anderson, 1992), do not trust medical professionals, administrators, and educators; therefore, experiencing significant challenges in supporting their children in the educational system (Borum, 2019; McCaskill, 2005; Myers et al., 2010). Black families experience anti-Blackness on both a personal and structural level on a daily basis (Anderson, 1992), and many are trying to survive in an anti-Black society while burdened with the responsibilities of supporting their children.

Unaddressed hearing loss at birth significantly impedes a child's language development (Dammeyer et al., 2019). As a result, advocacy efforts have increased accessibility to newborn hearing screening, ensuring that newborns are tested at birth to identify hearing loss and

participate in early intervention when hearing loss is detected (Deng et al., 2020). When newborns are diagnosed with hearing loss, families are expected to follow up with audiologists. However, Gaffney et al. (2014) reported that Black families were less likely to follow up with audiologists, leading to delays in early intervention for Black children. Bailey et al. (2021) report that Black and Latinx families who live in lower socioeconomic areas have inadequate access to healthcare. Black families seeking professional help and services often do not have positive outcomes and are afraid they will be criticized for their decisions or parenting styles due to systemic oppression and stereotypes (Borum, 2019).

To have a strong language and literacy foundation, deaf children must have access to a language—ideally, ASL—at home (Kannapell, 1992). A study by Myers et al. (2010) found that 86% of White and only 18% of Black parents or caregivers of deaf children reported that they learned ASL. Most Black families are bilingual, using both Standard and Black English, and they often struggle to acquire sign language (Borum, 2019). Further, White Deaf children have an early educational advantage over Black Deaf children because they attend pre-school at higher rates (Anderson & Bowe, 1972). Black families report that they are often unaware of services for deaf children, struggle to locate services, and tend to travel several miles from their communities for services (Hairston & Smith, 1983; Moores & Oden, 1977). These findings suggest that race may play a role in the disparities in language acquisition.

To be clear, not all Black families experience barriers, with some families having positive experiences. For instance, a study by Smith (1999) focused on four Black families' reading approaches with their children. Their approaches included story books featuring Black children and enlisting a Black Deaf reading mentor along with a Black hearing professional who worked with the families. Smith's findings show that their children's language and reading skills

increased. In another study, Foo (2002) focused on Black families with deaf children and their experiences with early intervention. Foo (2002) found that the early intervention professionals incorporated multiple social experiences, communication strategies, and cultural intervention strategies to support Black Deaf students' development. Both studies clearly show the success and well-being of Black Deaf children when energy is invested in addressing families' barriers, particularly by cultivating affirming spaces for deaf children's overall healthy development.

Code-Switching

Code-switching is the practice of switching between two or more languages (Muysken, 2000). Research consistently shows that Black Deaf people adapt their signing styles based on their social environment. Aramburo's study (1989) found evidence of code-switching between Black Deaf signers and White Deaf signers. For example, Black Deaf signers used more English-like signing when conversing with White Deaf people. When both signers were Black Deaf, they used more exaggerated facial expressions and body movements. Additionally, Black Deaf signers dropped BASL and used a different signing lexicon (vocabulary) when they signed with each other than when they signed with White Deaf persons depending on the social context (Bayley et al., 2017, McCaskill et al., 2011, Woodard, 1976)

Standard American Sign Language

In the deaf community in the United States, ASL is considered the superior language; ASL has been designed, constructed, and controlled by White Deaf people (Fernandes & Myers, 2009; García-Fernández, 2020; 2021). To assimilate, Black Deaf students often abandon BASL and use "academic ASL is [which] white-based" (Hill, 2022, p. 3). Fernandes and Myers stated that when (White) scholars "establish the linguistic parameters of a language, [...] they unintentionally perpetuate an already established academic history of the White Deaf elite who

served as the first models of ASL and informants on Deaf culture" (2009, p. 4). The instruction given to White Deaf students is entrenched in White supremacist values due to the expectation that White ASL represents the "gold standard", towards which all Deaf students are encouraged to strive. Understanding the concept of Whiteness is crucial in recognizing both the overt and covert ways in which White ASL functions as the acknowledged and unacknowledged linguistic standard within educational spaces. This practice of exclusion from the curriculum has reified the notion of Whiteness as property and the right to possession and enjoyment by White Deaf students (Annamma, 2015; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

Chapter Summary

As indicated in the literature review, there remains limited data on the experiences of Black Deaf students. To my knowledge, there is no research utilizing a theory of anti-Blackness in deaf education; however, I was able to identify themes across the literature that show the manifestation of anti-Blackness through school segregation, integration, discriminatory school policies, intersectional erasure, academic track, postsecondary outcomes, teacher workforce, school curriculum, resources for families, code-switching, and sign language.

In the previous chapter, I have articulated the need for research and analysis that center anti-Blackness, Whiteness, and hearingness. There is no single theoretical framework that can fully capture Black Deaf students' unique experiences in K-12 schooling spaces. Therefore, I proposed a framework, BlackDeaf Crit, to provide a more thorough analysis of the lived experiences of how Black Deaf students navigate in an anti-Black schooling space and how they are affected socially, emotionally, and academically. Thus, the need for this dissertation.

Chapter 4: Methods

This chapter outlines the methods I used to investigate the following research questions:

1. What stories do Black Deaf adults tell us about anti-Blackness in K-12 deaf education?
    a. How do Black Deaf adults describe their lived experience in K-12 deaf education?
2. How has K-12 deaf education been designed, over time, to perpetuate anti-Blackness through educational policies and practices?

I begin this chapter by explaining the rationale for using qualitative methods and the study's methodology, which is narrative inquiry. Next, I describe the research sample, how I recruited participants, and how they were selected. I then describe how the data was collected and analyzed. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of risks and benefits, the trustworthiness of the study, study limitations, and my positionality.

Rationale for Qualitative Methods

Qualitative research, specifically narrative inquiry, allows the researcher to capture the lived experiences of their participants. For that reason, narrative inquiry was chosen as the ideal methodological approach for understanding how Black Deaf adults describe their experience with anti-Blackness in K-12 deaf education and how they navigate anti-Black K-12 schooling spaces. Phenomena such as experiences, perspectives, and behaviors can be difficult to accurately capture quantitatively, whereas qualitative methods allowed my participants to deeply explain their experiences K-12 deaf education (Braun & Clarke, 2014). When looking at the ability to allow participants to provide a deeper explanation, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) further expand that the goal of qualitative research is to analyze "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p.15). My research question requires a methodology that allows me to analyze how Black Deaf adults

interpret their experiences.

Spates & Gichiru, (2015) state that qualitative research has two main purposes: to gain a deep understanding of human experiences and the world around us; and to use this understanding to promote social change and empowerment. These purposes highlight the potential for qualitative research to provide valuable insights into complex issues and contribute to positive outcomes. With that in mind, narrative inquiry focuses on the "social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 42– 43). This method centers people's meanings and lived experiences through their stories. Narrative inquiry focuses on the significance of context–where, when, and to whom a story is told. Through narrative inquiry, I used my participants' stories as a form of counter narrative to challenge assumptions and gain a deeper understanding about Black Deaf individuals' experiences as well as highlight the racial oppressions they experienced in schooling spaces (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

To be clear, narrative inquiry is not simply about telling each participant's story; it is also about co-constructing knowledge across these stories. In sharing their narratives, participants offer multiple perspectives and create a shared space to disrupt anti-Black ideology in deaf education (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). I used Black Deaf participants' narratives as data and examined how they constructed their stories and conveyed specific understandings of their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To capture the lived experiences of Black Deaf adults, I collected data through questionnaires, individual interviews, and focus group interviews.

Participants

Keeping the research questions at the forefront of the sampling process is important, as "Research questions are particularly important for identifying target populations and pools of

potential interviewees" (Vogt et al., 2012, p. 143). As the research question focuses on Black Deaf students, thus my sampling process began with that criteria. To gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences, a limited sample size was necessary to conduct an in-depth investigation.

To be considered for inclusion in this study, participants had to identify as of African descent. They did not need to be born in the United States, as long as they graduated from K-12 deaf schools in the United States between 1960-2023. I decided to focus specifically on the population from deaf schools, because Black Deaf adults who graduated from public schools experience *both* language and communication barriers, while those who graduated from deaf schools typically do not experience both barriers (Cerney, 2007; Martin & Bat-Chava, 2003). Therefore, individuals who attended public schools for the full duration of their K-12 experience were excluded from this study. However, individuals who attended mainstream school for a few years, then transferred to a deaf school were allowed to participate in this study as this phenomenon is common for Deaf students.

The rationale for focusing on Black deaf school graduates between the years 1960 to 2023 is because the landscape of deaf education has evolved since Brown vs. Board of Education. In addition, several important educational reforms were implemented during those years. The landscape pertaining to racial integration and educational reforms in education can be divided into three eras: (1) *School Integration*, (2) *the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*, and (3) *the Implementation of the Common Core Standards (CCSS) and Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM)*.

The first era from 1960 to 1989, School *Integration* focuses on participants who experienced desegregation immediately after the Brown vs. Board of Education decision. The

second era from 1990 to 2009, Implementation *of IDEA,* focuses on participants who experienced educational reforms that provided students with disabilities with educational opportunities equal to their nondisabled peers. The third era from 2010 to 2023, *Implementation of CCSS and BLM*, focuses on participants who experienced educational reforms that emphasized academic rigor and witnessed an increase in diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. To examine how Black Deaf students experienced anti-Blackness during the racial integration and educational reforms, I included two participants in each era to gain a deeper understanding on how deaf education has been designed over time to perpetuate anti-Blackness through educational policies and practices.

With the aforementioned criteria in place, the participants in this study were six Black Deaf adults who: (1) were students in K-12 deaf education from the 1960s to 2020s, (2) use sign language (ASL, BASL, Tactile ASL, etc.) as a primary mode of communication, and (3) graduated from K-12 deaf schools in the United States. Table 1 shows the identity profiles of the participants and the year they graduated. To honor participants' anonymity, I only included the era in which they attended and the year they graduated from high school. With the aforementioned criteria in place, the participants in this study were six Black Deaf adults who: (1) were students in K-12 deaf education from the 1960s to 2020s, (2) use sign language (ASL, BASL, Tactile ASL, etc.) as a primary mode of communication, and (3) graduated from K-12 deaf schools in the United States. Table 1 shows the identity profiles of the participants and the year they graduated. To honor participants' anonymity, I only included the era in which they attended and the year they graduated from high school.

Era	Pseudonym	Year Graduated
Era #1: School Integration	Kalon	1972
	Koningin	1989
Era #2: Implementation of the IDEA	Pete	1996
	Big Mike	2002
Era #3: Implementation of the CCSS and BLM	Ama	2012
	Tory	2020

Table 1. Participant Classifications

Recruitment

I recruited Black Deaf adults using a flyer (see Appendix A) on various social media platforms. To ensure the flyer was accessible to a wider pool of potential participants, the flyer included an image description for DeafBlind or Deaf people with low vision, as well as a link to an ASL translated video for limited English users. I received a number of responses from Black Deaf adults who were interested in participating in this study. To ensure diverse perspectives, I purposefully selected participants to ensure diversity in terms of gender, sexual orientation, disability, location where they attended deaf schools, and the number of years they attended deaf schools.

Once participants were identified, I obtained informed consent from each participant through an email prior to beginning the study. In the informed consent, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality measures, and their rights as

participants (see Appendix B). I also provided the participants with a written version of the interview questions a few weeks prior to the interviews to allow for deeper reflection. Prior to the interviews, the participants all had the opportunity to ask questions or seek clarification to ensure that they understood the purpose of the research.

Participant Consent and Confidentiality

Before completing the questionnaire, I explained the purpose of the study and provided each participant with a consent form. I reviewed each step of the form to ensure that they understood the consent procedure and welcomed questions from participants about the study. I proceeded with the questionnaire after each participant understood the procedure and signed the consent form.

Throughout the study, I took multiple steps to protect participants' confidentiality. Firstly, I am the only person with access to the data, and no identifying participant information will be included in any future publications (including the dissertation), or presentations based on the study. Secondly, all study data (video recordings, transcripts, and any notes) I gathered during or after the interviews and focus group are stored on my password-protected laptop. Thirdly, participants in this study were asked to sign a confidentiality agreement to protect each other's identity.

Risks and Benefits for Participants

I took precautions to protect participants and their data to minimize risk. Participants were identified by pseudonyms, and all potentially identifying information (such as the names of the schools they graduated from) were omitted from the data. Individual interviews and focus group questions may have addressed topics that caused participants anxiety or uneasiness or brought up difficult or painful memories. This discomfort may have occurred, for example, when

participants were asked to discuss their experiences with anti-Blackness, racism, and other forms of oppression. Participants may have also felt uncomfortable with the knowledge that the interviews were being recorded. Therefore, I emphasized to participants that they did not have to answer any questions that they did not want to. Furthermore, participants were informed that they could ask questions throughout the study or withdraw from the study at any point without penalty.

While there were minimal risks in this study, there are also some potential benefits. Participants may have benefited from the opportunity to share their stories and knowing their stories were used to better understand and improve practice and research in deaf education for Black students in the future. Participants were compensated with a $50 Amazon e-gift card for their time and expertise.

Data Collection

Questionnaire

Each participant completed a questionnaire before the first interview (see Appendix C). The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather information about each participant's educational and personal background, which helped guide the interview process (Bloomberg, 2022). The questionnaire had fourteen questions and took all participants no more than 10 minutes to complete. The questionnaire was also used to identify: (1) background information on participants; (2) their knowledge of concepts used in this study; and (3) any accommodations they needed for the interviews.

Individual Interviews

I utilized a semi-structured interview format to retain flexibility in exploring the narratives the participants provided. As Galletta (2012) shares,

> As with qualitative research in general, the semi-structured interview protocol is designed to be cumulative and iterative. It creates the space for a continuum of structure. What the participant narrates and how that narrative unfolds inform the remaining segments of the interview. The questions you prepare should progressively lead the participant into a full consideration of your variables of interest (p. 72).

Drawing on Seidman's (2013) three-interview series protocol, I conducted three Zoom interviews with each participant, lasting 60 to 90 minutes each. During these interviews, I found that the semi-structured format allowed my participants to convey perspectives significant to them that were not addressed by the interview questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013).

The first interview focused on how participants identified themselves and their backgrounds, such as language use at home and school, family history, and the type of deaf school(s) they attended (see Appendix D). The second interview focused on details of participants' K-12 schooling experiences. The questions included relationships with teachers and students, curriculum materials, and teacher bias (see Appendix D). Additionally, I followed up on any issues that arose in the first interview that required further clarification or explanation. The third interview focused on school policies, participants' reflections on their experiences, and what advice they had for educators who work with Black Deaf students (see Appendix D). In all three interviews, I asked them to elaborate to provide more nuanced and specific examples, as well as allowed them to provide additional information.

Focus Group

The focus group is a form of facilitated group discussion designed to gather opinions on a specific topic in a comfortable, non-threatening environment (Kitzinger, 1995). Focus groups

encourage participants to engage in dialogue, exchange ideas and experiences, and introduce topics that may not surface in individual interviews. Bloomberg (2022) suggests one-on-one interviews be conducted before the focus groups because researchers will be able to stimulate discussion around important issues that emerged from the interviews.

In this study, I conducted one focus group to gather detailed and nuanced insights about participants' schooling experiences. The focus group helped me to understand the shared experiences and perspectives of the participants which were not captured through individual interviews. At the start of the focus group, participants were informed of the purpose, and allowed to introduce themselves using self-selected pseudonyms. As the Black Deaf community is very small, the Black Deaf participants were required to sign an agreement that they would maintain the confidentiality of the focus group (see Appendix E). I asked several questions to encourage dialogue about their experiences with discrimination, treatment by teachers and peers, and identity development in an affirming space (see Appendix F). The participants were able to compare and build on each other's experiences. This process was invaluable because it allowed me to capture diverse perspectives and provided information about participants' collective challenges and experiences.

The interviews from individual interviews and focus group were conducted on Zoom, using sign language, and recorded. All of the video files of each interview were sent to a professional interpreting agency to be transcribed into English. Two nationally certified hearing ASL interpreters of color used speech-to-text transcription. After the interpreters completed the transcriptions, I reviewed the transcripts and video files for accuracy.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using deductive, inductive, and pattern coding, and thematic analysis, as recommended by Braun et al. (2016). I used NVivo qualitative data analysis software to organize and code data. The data analysis was organized around each research question.

What stories do Black Deaf adults tell us about anti-Blackness in K-12 deaf education?

- ***How do Black Deaf adults describe their lived experience in K-12 deaf education?***

In the first cycle of coding, I used descriptive coding to analyze the data. As described by Esposito & Evans-Winters (2022), "descriptive codes, for the most part, summarize or describe in one word or short phrases what the data excerpt contains" (p. 121). I used the following deductive codes developed from my research questions, literature review, and conceptual framework: (1) school segregation, (2) school policies, (3) intersectional erasure, (4) postsecondary outcomes, (5) teacher workforce, (6) resources for families (7) academic track (8) code-switching, (9) school curriculum, (10) language (11) anti-Blackness, (12) Whiteness, and (13) audism. I also developed inductive codes to capture data that were significant to the participants or the first research question that are not captured by the deductive codes: (1) extracurricular activities (2) physical violence (3) mental health (4) tokenism (5) isolation (6) identity (7) teacher's bias and (8) affirmation.

In the second cycle of coding, I used pattern coding to identify commonalities and differences between participants' experiences and to develop themes that helped to answer the first research question. To do so, I used a constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2014) in which I identified which codes appear most frequently across the data and compared new data with existing codes. I then examined relationships among major themes and subthemes and used memo to document connections (Strauss, 1987). Next, I looked for evidence of anti-Blackness across the coded data and identified ways participants talked about and experienced anti-

Blackness in K-12 deaf education in similar and different ways, which I developed into themes. Major themes included 1) academic marginalization 2) social marginalization 3) discriminatory school policies and practices, and 4) erasure of Black identity.

How has K-12 deaf education been designed, over time, to perpetuate anti-Blackness through educational policies and practices?

To address this research question, I used thematic analysis, which identifies themes within data (Braun et al. (2016). Braun et al. (2016) recommend six steps in conducting thematic analysis: (1) becoming familiar with the data, (2) coding the data, (3) theming the data, (4) reviewing the themes, (5) naming and defining the themes, and (6) reporting the findings. I became familiar with the data through the processes of reading, checking the accuracy of, and coding the data, as described above, I then proceeded with phrases three through six:

- **Phase 3:** *Theming the Data*: In this phase, I compared coded data against the previously developed themes to identify patterns (Braun et al., 2016). I was looking for patterns in the data that evidence how K-12 deaf education has perpetuated anti-Blackness, through policies and practices, over time. In doing so, I looked for similarities and differences across participants' data and within and across the three eras. I then sorted coded data into potential themes related to the second research question, using a chart table and webbing. More specifically, I categorized coded data to identify overarching themes that relate to anti-Blackness.
- **Phase 4:** *Reviewing the Themes*: In this phase, I reviewed each theme in isolation to ensure that it had one coherent concept rather than multiple concepts. I then compared themes to ensure they were each distinct from each other.

- **Phase 5:** *Naming and Defining the Themes*: In this phase, I examined the emerging themes to understand how they related to and addressed the research questions (Braun et al., 2016). I then defined four major themes along with their subthemes. The first major theme, *academic marginalization*, includes the subthemes of being Black in predominantly White academic-track classes, teachers' racial bias, and the erasure of Black Deaf history. The second theme, *social marginalization*, encompasses the exploitation of Black Deaf athletes and racial disparities in school-based organizations. The third theme, *discriminatory school policies and practices*, highlights unfair disciplinary procedures and mistreatment by school administrators. Lastly, the fourth theme, *erasure of Black identity*, includes the subthemes of late identification and code-switching.
- **Phase 6:** *Reporting the Findings*: I report the results of the thematic analysis, as well as analyses for the first research question, in Chapters 5 and 6 of this dissertation and provide quotes from the participants as evidence of my study findings.

Researcher Positionality

Positionality "reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study" (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 71). As a Black Deaf researcher with both oppressed and privileged identities, I continuously engaged in reflexivity throughout the research process because I know positionality is not fixed or static. Merton (1972) describes 'inside researchers as members of specific groups who share experiences with the group being studied. As a Black Deaf woman who uses sign language as a primary means of communication, I am considered an insider researcher. Also, I have an additional unique perspective as a researcher in that I was once a student in deaf education and have worked as an educator in K-12

deaf education. Additionally, I have access to the Black Deaf community, as well as in-depth and experiential knowledge of many of the complex experiences that Black Deaf individuals face. This closeness to the population being studied means my positionality not only shapes my research, but also impacts how I interpret, comprehend, and ultimately validate the lived experiences of my participants. Given my positionality, I am uniquely positioned to research and understand the experiences of my participants and, as described above, I used Maxwell's (2012) recommendations to ensure I do not impose my perceptions on participants' narratives.

Validity

To ensure the validity or trustworthiness of this study, I used a checklist provided by Maxwell (2012). As a researcher, I must address potential alternatives and threats that might affect the credibility and validity of the findings (Maxwell, 2012). Below, I outline how I ensured the validity of the study.

1. **Rich Data:** I gathered rich data gathered through multiple interviews and a focus group which revealed participants' perspectives, thoughts, and feelings. Using rich data helped me ensure I understood and authentically represented their perceptions and experiences.
2. **Respondent Validation:** To avoid the possibility of misinterpreting the participants' stories, I conducted member checks. I provided each participant with the transcripts from their interviews and the focus group, which they reviewed for accuracy and clarity.
3. **Searching for Discrepant Evidence:** I examined and accounted for data or perspectives that contradicted my assumptions to avoid potential researcher biases.
4. **Data Triangulation:** The responses from multiple participants from different eras, in the questionnaires, individual interviews, and a focus group, provided a plethora of data for

comparison, and enabled me to identify common themes across participants from each era.

Member-Checking

In this study, I also conducted member-checking by presenting the participants with their interview transcripts; I allowed them to correct errors and decide whether to keep or remove data to verify the accuracy of the transcripts (Varpio et al., 2017). After receiving the transcriptions from certified ASL interpreters, I reviewed them for accuracy before sending them to participants for their review. Providing them transcripts before analyzing the data was crucial in eliminating the possibility that I might misrepresent their stories (Candela, 2019). Five participants responded and approved their transcripts.

McKim (2023) emphasizes the importance of participants reviewing the findings to ensure their perspectives are accurately represented. Participants' expertise should be utilized not only in data collection but also in data analysis. Since the findings shape how participants are portrayed and presented to readers, it is crucial to involve them in reviewing the findings and allow them to take on an active role in the process in evaluating the findings. Once a draft of the findings was completed, I sent it to participants for a final accuracy check to confirm that their schooling experiences were represented accurately. This approach allowed them to see how their stories were integrated with others' experiences, ensuring their narratives were conveyed authentically, and provided them with the opportunity to correct any misrepresentations.

Chapter Summary

This study utilized a qualitative approach to explore the experiences of Black Deaf participants in anti-Black schooling spaces. Through a detailed analysis of individual interviews

and a focus group, key findings highlight Black Deaf participants' experiences with anti-Black racism in K-12 deaf education and its systemic, emotional, social, and academic impacts. The next chapter presents profiles of six Black Deaf adults who graduated from deaf schools between 1960 and 2023.

Chapter 5: Participants' Profiles and Counter Storytelling of Anti-Black Racism

This chapter presents profiles of six Black Deaf adults who graduated from deaf schools between 1960 and 2023. These profiles include narratives that explore their experiences with anti-Black racism in K-12 deaf education. These narratives are revealed to highlight the systemic barriers they faced, as well as the emotional, social, and academic impacts on their lives. To remain authentic to the participants' voices, I include sensitive language that provides crucial context to their challenges and resilience in navigating anti-Black racism within schooling spaces. These quotes must be approached with an understanding and recognition of the realities they experienced in schools.

Kalon's Story

Kalon (she/her) identifies as an African American who was born hearing then became deaf at the age of five due to an ear infection. She primarily uses ASL and BASL and incorporates Black English in daily conversations. Kalon has both hearing and Deaf family members who use a mix of ASL, basic signs, "home" signs, and gestures to communicate. As a child, her family lived in a racially segregated neighborhood in a small town in the South, and Kalon recalls frequent discussions about racism, with her family cautioning her to be careful when she was out in public.

Early in her educational journey, Kalon attended a public school from first grade to seventh grade without ASL interpreters and was the only Deaf student. She primarily used spoken English. She later transferred to a segregated, Black deaf school that later integrated, and graduated in 1972. During the interviews, Kalon referred to her segregated deaf school as the "Black deaf school" and the integrated school as the "White deaf school." She described the Black deaf school as being located in a rural area, approximately 15 minutes away from the

White deaf school. Kalon never had the chance to interact with White Deaf students until integration, and she was among the first group of Black Deaf students to be accepted into the integrated school. At the Black deaf school, Kalon stated the teachers and staff were predominantly Black hearing individuals, while the school administrators were White. At the White deaf school, she stated that the teachers included Black hearing teachers, White hearing teachers, and White Deaf teachers, but she never had a Black Deaf teacher.

As a student, Kalon described herself as highly curious and motivated to learn. She considered herself a bookworm and used reading as an escape into a world of knowledge. She also described herself as popular and well-liked. Kalon first recounted her experiences at the hearing school before transferring to the segregated deaf school. She recalled relying on spoken English in the classroom but often struggled to access auditory information. She described an incident where a teacher harshly reprimanded her for mispronouncing words:

> Teacher would reprimand me and lash my hand for mispronouncing words. It was the final straw. I was mad. I went home and told my mother the teacher hit my hand because I was mispronouncing words. The teacher realized they made a mistake because there was another classmate who sat next to me who would mispronounce words, but she was hearing, and I was Deaf. The teacher realized she was hitting the wrong student and had already hit me and apologized but it was too late because I was already pissed off and embarrassed.

What Kalon described reflects a historical oppressive practice that prioritized the oralism method over sign language. During that time, many deaf educators opposed the use of sign language, and they believed that deaf students should acquire spoken language to assimilate into hearing society (Jankowski, 2022). These practices were not

only rooted in audism but also in racism, as Kalon faced barriers to accessing sign language, which it was important for her to thrive in the schooling space. Kalon shared with her mother her experience of being reprimanded in her classroom and expressed her desire to attend a different school. Around the same time, Kalon and her family learned about a segregated deaf school through a member of the Black Deaf community. Kalon successfully convinced her mother to enroll her and her Deaf siblings in the Black deaf school.

Kalon recounted her experience transitioning from a hearing school to a segregated deaf school. The school was limited in their educational offerings, and because she was academically advanced, the segregated school was unable to meet her advanced educational needs. Rather than placing her in a grade-appropriate class for advanced students, the school assigned her to a classroom with older students. She explained:

> At the Black deaf school, we [Kalon and her siblings] were placed together with some of the older students, and they were regular classes, and it wasn't academically challenging. Those were more like vocational training purposes. There was no real discussion about college or nothing like that, not at the Black deaf school. Nothing. If I had stayed there and continued and finished and graduated, I would have had an eighth-grade education. I would have gotten a certification. That's it. After integrating at the White deaf school, I entered the 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grades, and I graduated with a high school diploma.

What Kalon described above is the lack of academic rigor for Black Deaf students before integration, which reflected a belief that Black Deaf students were unworthy of educational opportunities and incapable of succeeding in schooling spaces (Dumas &

ross, 2016). Kalon attended the segregated school for a few years before being integrated into the White deaf school where she noted the clear differences in educational philosophy between the two deaf schools. The White deaf school emphasized language access and college preparation, while the Black Deaf school focused on vocational training. She stated, “The Black Deaf school, there was nothing. The philosophy was, I felt like it wasn't spoken, but there was a kind of undertext there. They trained us for future work, just for a world of work, basically, it was vocational training.” Kalon’s experience aligns with literature that shows that Black Deaf students are frequently tracked into vocational training programs (Stuart & Gilchrist, 2005; Hairston & Smith, 1983), while White Deaf students are supported in pursuing college education (Hairston & Smith, 1983).

To gain admission to the integrated White deaf school, Black Deaf students had to take a psychological exam, and compete for limited spots. Using this data, the integrated White deaf school determined which ten Black Deaf students to accept into the school. Kalon’s story about the psychological exam is an example of White specific entitlement to preserve educational power by using exams as a tool to maintain racial divisions and determine if Black students were properly qualified for school admission (Harris, 1993; McCardle, 2020). The psychological exam experience was described:

> She asked me, pointing to a pen. And she said, “What's this?” And I looked at her, and I couldn't believe that the woman was asking me. I looked at her, and I said, in my mind, I'm like, “Are you being serious right now? Do you think I'm that dumb? Can’t I say this is a pen?” So, I responded, and I said, “Pen.” And her facial expression showed a little bit of shock that I had said, “Pen.” And she asked me something else, and I answered, and

she was again, a little bit shocked. She said, “Oh my gosh!” And I was thinking to myself, “Seriously?” They asked me all these different questions, and I answered, and she was impressed and amazed. She said, “Wow!” I was kind of confused why that was happening, and it didn't really hit me until much later. I realized, oh, it was to determine our level of intelligence, to see where we would be placed at the White deaf school, because that year was 1967. I remember feeling like, “Wow, they really think that we're dumb, and that's not a good feeling.

In addition to facing significant challenges in her educational journey, Kalon also faced a lack of support from the integrated White deaf school for families of Black students, which added another layer of difficulty as she pursued her goals to attend college. Kalon’s experience demonstrated that Black families face significant challenges navigating the educational system due to a lack of support and collaboration, which often leads to feelings of increased isolation (Delpit, 1995). She shared her frustration in helping her mother navigate the college application process:

> At the Black deaf school, I don't even remember the school explaining anything to my mom. I was the one who had to tell my mom to sign different papers and forms. She was clueless. I had to tell my mom to call the school to get more information. My mom was struggling. It was hard for her as a single mom, and [the Black deaf school] was also far from home, so maybe 300 miles away, so she had a really hard time. But she did what she could do best even though there were struggles. It was frustrating. I felt like I was being oppressed. And at the White deaf school, I told her about the potential to go to [university], and I asked her to sign all these forms. She didn’t get it. I wanted to go to

college. I learned about college from White Deaf friends. And I never knew or had even heard of [university] before.

In summary, her experiences highlight the manifestations of anti-Blackness In schooling spaces, from the lack of academic rigor in the segregated school, to racial bias in the integrated school, to the lack of support for her family within the school system. Despite these challenges, Kalon considers herself a successful and educated woman within the deaf community.

Koningin's Story

Koningin (she/her) is a third-generation Black Deaf woman whose family primarily uses BASL to communicate. She uses both ASL and BASL. Both of her parents graduated from segregated deaf schools. She was immersed in the Black Deaf community from an early age, where she acquired BASL. She spoke highly of her father, who was deeply invested in her well-being and education. Koningin explained that her father taught her how to navigate predominantly White communities and schools.

Koningin attended a public school from pre-kindergarten through sixth grade, then transferred to a deaf school for two years before moving to another state to attend a racially integrated deaf school, where she graduated in 1989. She described this last school as a small school that prioritized sign language as the primary mode of instruction for deaf students. The majority of teachers and students were White, and she never had a Black Deaf teacher. As a student, Koningin saw herself as a good student, leader, athlete, and a hardworking, funny individual. She was a strong advocate for herself and for other students with diverse needs, actively participating in school organizations and sports.

Koningin mainly explained the social and emotional toll of navigating alone as one of very, very few Black Deaf students in a predominantly White deaf school. She characterized her White peers as “elite from White Deaf families,” while the other Black Deaf students were not on the same academic level as she was. She struggled to form meaningful connections with her peers, and she shared:

> I would try to connect with them and be vulnerable. Sometimes they were racist. I felt like they were racist in the closet. Sometimes they wouldn't talk with me because of my skin color, or they would only talk to me at school, but not outside of school. It was so strange. I was a leader, and I would sometimes host events or do activities, and I could see them taking advantage of that. I felt like they would only come up to me if there was gossip and they just wanted to share, but that didn't really interest me.

Koningin’s experience reflects the unique isolation that Black students on advanced academic tracks often experience, navigating predominantly White spaces as one of the few Black students (Fries-Britt, 1998). In addition to struggling to form connections with her White peers, she faced painful bullying. She recounted an incident following a volleyball game when a group of students bullied her on the school bus:

> It was on the way to school after a volleyball game. It was a co-ed trip. We were on the school bus at the time. It was in August, so it was hot, and we had the windows down. For some reason, this boy started picking on me. I had no idea why. They had taken my volleyball shoes and started throwing them around. All the girls were kind of watching and the girls didn't say anything. There wasn't really women's empowerment at that time. They were just bystanders and watching everything happen while the boys threw my shoes around. At one moment, my shoes made their way outside of the bus through a

window onto the highway. I got really sad because those were new shoes that my parents bought for me. I hope they weren't damaged. I told the coach. The bus pulled over and I explained what happened. The coach yelled at the boys and got the shoes. I was so lucky that they didn't get damaged by a car. After that, the immature boys got angry. So, they started calling me “nigger.” I mean they didn't have a good reason to say it. They were messing with me, messing with my shoes. I didn't give them permission to mess with me. They were really immature, and so they decided to use that word against me. I have no idea why. I mean, you couldn't think of a better word.

Koningin’s experience highlights how schools can be sites of victimization for Black Deaf students, including racial slurs and hate speech (Wachs et al., 2021). She not only experienced bullying, but she also faced objectification of her body, which further diminished her identity as a Black Deaf girl and deepened her sense of isolation. She recounted:

> Students called me horse teeth and would bully me. I would just stay quiet […] They would say, oh, you have a big ass. They would make fun of me. It was mostly the boys. The girls didn’t really make fun of me. Like I said, they were closeted racists.

In addition to facing bullying, Koningin recalled an incident in which she received inadequate support from staff in addressing these issues. She described a confrontation in the cafeteria:

> The staff knew that I was getting bullied. They knew bullying was happening. I recall a situation in the cafeteria. I remember that I was trying to tell a kid to stop picking on someone else, and say, leave them alone. And he gave me the middle finger, and I almost kicked him. And this tall guy told me to fuck off and was almost jumped on me. He was

> trying to be physical with me, kind of cornered me, and I tried to get ready to defend myself, and the staff pulled us apart. The school suspended him for two days and they suspended me for one day. I was like, "What? Why are you suspending me?" We both got in trouble. He got more because he started it. He was the bully. I was just trying to defend myself, but I got suspended anyway.

Koningin's account reflects the hyper sexualization and objectification of Black girls, which is often rooted in racial and gender-based biases (Blake & Epstein, 2019). Additionally, such bullying impacts their sense of belonging in educational spaces and perpetuates racial and gendered oppression (Alvis et al., 2023). Despite feeling exploited for her ideas for school wide events and struggling to find a sense of belonging at school, Koningin was surprised and honored when she was awarded "Basketball Player of the Year" and crowned homecoming queen. These awards were important to her, yet they did not fully alleviate her feelings of isolation or the struggle to assert her Black Deaf identity in predominantly White schooling spaces.

In summary, Koningin's story highlights the social and emotional toll of being one of the very few Black Deaf students in a predominantly White deaf school. Her experiences highlight the layered challenges of navigating anti-Black schooling spaces, including enduring bullying, racial slurs, body objectification, and inadequate school support. During the interview, Koningin passionately emphasized the importance of advocating for Black Deaf students. She called for the creation of schooling environments where their lived experiences are affirmed through supportive teachers, inclusive school policies, and culturally responsive curriculum.

Pete's Story

Pete (he/him) identifies as a Black Deaf man from a hearing family and primarily uses ASL in his daily communication. His parents, who were involved in sports during high school

and competed against a deaf school, were familiar with deaf community resources when Pete became deaf at the age of one. His family used Signed Exact English (SEE)[5] to communicate with him, and they did not introduce him to Black Deaf culture. However, Pete and his family were immersed in Black culture through activities such as attending a Black church.

Pete attended a deaf school until second grade, after which his family moved to another state, where he continued his education in a deaf school in a different state. In high school, he attended both a deaf school and a public school, graduating from the deaf school in 1996. Pete described the school demographic as predominantly White, with the majority of Students of Color coming from the Caribbean. He also noted that he never had a Black Deaf teacher. As a student, Pete described himself as one of the top performers academically and socially adept, easily navigating social settings. He was actively involved in sports and was among the top athletes at his school, though his achievements went unrecognized after high school.

Pete reflected on his experience of maintaining the status quo because it was an expectation imposed on him by the school. He explained that he had to adhere to the behavior of a "successful Black Deaf child," which he had no choice but to comply to succeed. He observed that his White peers faced fewer expectations and experienced greater freedom. He commented, "[I] should be curious and inquisitive and there shouldn't be any tension. I had that tension, while other students didn't, and they were able to progress easily." Pete further elaborated on the oppressive expectations placed on him:

> The experience of oppression is common, but related to a form of expectations I followed the expectations that they set on what they saw as a Black Deaf person was. I was a great athlete. I was from a well-off Black family; I could clean up really well at church. I was

[5] Signed Exact English (SEE) is a sign language that mirrors the structure and grammar of Standard English, signing words in the same order they are spoken or written (Stryker et. al, 2015).

> one of those good ones. I was “special" because of that. I knew my place back then, but looking back, there was discrimination and oppression because of my Blackness.

Pete attempted to seek support from his Black Deaf peers but encountered resistance. He mentioned that he was one of the few U.S.-born Black students at his school, while most of the Black Deaf students came from other countries. When Pete tried to relate to them, he learned that they often distanced themselves from and were reluctant to associate with Black Americans. They claimed identities tied to their national origins, such as Jamaica or Dominican, and internalized stereotypes of Black Americans as lazy, troublemakers, or academic underachievers. He stated, “There is a stigma associated with being Black American as being lazy, not doing well, a troublemaker, being a person who frequently misses classes, or dropping out.” This quote shows that Pete faced a division within the Black Deaf school community, where assumptions about Black Americans influenced their social and academic relationships, and it highlights the complexity of identity among Black Deaf students from diverse backgrounds (Adida & Robinson, 2023).

In addition to facing resistance from his Black Deaf peers, Pete also experienced religious divisions. He explained that his deaf school was religious based, with many White hearing teachers and staff recruited from churches. Pete described how the school seemed to prioritize the needs of White and Latinx students due to shared religious backgrounds:

> I wasn't getting much help compared to the Latinx students and other students seemed to get a lot more. And, social workers were involved, but they didn’t support the Black students including myself […] the sisters would take students to the church once a week, but we [Black Deaf students] did not go. We already had our own churches. There was more of a division between us and them.

This quote reflects how Black Deaf students who did not follow specific religions experienced exclusion or marginalization. The marginalization shows the lack of inclusivity, where certain beliefs were prioritized, and the practices of Black Deaf students' diverse religions were not acknowledged. If Black Deaf students conformed to the school's focus on specific religious beliefs, they would likely be more included. This experience suggests how religious beliefs can hold power over Black Deaf students, further reinforcing their exclusion when their practices differ from the dominant belief in school.

In summary, Pete's experiences illustrate the challenges he faced in navigating a school environment shaped by cultural and religious divides. He felt immense pressure to conform to Whiteness and White standards, leaving him with no choice but to assimilate in order to succeed. These dynamics created significant barriers that hindered his ability to connect and thrive.

Big Mike's Story

Big Mike (he/his) was born Deaf to a hearing family, with no known cause for his deafness. His family, originally from the Caribbean, communicates with him using Pidgin Signed English (PSE)[6] and simultaneous communication (SimCom)[7]. In the deaf community, he primarily uses ASL.

He began his education in a mainstream school before transferring to a deaf school, where he graduated in 2002. The deaf school initially followed a Total Communication approach, where teachers and students used a mix of sign language and spoken English, but later

[6] Pidgin Signed English (PSE) refers to a combination of American Sign Language (ASL) and Signed Exact English (SEE) used for communication (Bernstein et. al, 1985).

[7] Simultaneous Communication (SimCom) refers to the use of both spoken language and sign language at the same time (Bernstein et. al, 1985).

transitioned to an ASL-English bilingual model. Big Mike stated that the school was predominantly White, and he never had a Black Deaf teacher, though he did have a few Black Deaf staff members who provided some guidance throughout his schooling. As a student, Big Mike described himself as well-liked and known as the class clown, though he was acutely aware of his position as a Black Deaf student in a largely White school. He was active in sports and elected to various school-based organizations. Academically, he saw himself as an average student who, in the absence of teacher support, relied on his own resourcefulness to navigate school and manage challenges independently.

Big Mike described the school culture as toxic, with a specific group of students he referred to as the "White elite Deaf people" holding significant power and influence over the school's norms, beliefs, and attitudes. These White elite Deaf students often marginalized Deaf students from hearing families and Deaf Students of Color. He added that he was considered "lucky" because he grew up at that school, but still had to conform to their standards:

> It is a cut-throat culture for students of color. The students would get hyper-surveillance and they would be picked on by the White Deaf students […] I'm on the same level with those White students. It's because I grew up going to that school […] [other Black Deaf students who transferred late] had a harder time being accepted, but I was accepted […] And I would see the division between elite Deaf of Deaf families and those who came from a hearing family, so it felt like a division.

Big Mike elaborated that the school focused on a specific population—White Deaf students from Deaf families—who then received special treatment. These students were highly respected, their voices were heard by the school, and some of their family members worked at the school, which gave them a further advantage. Big Mike further explained that the school's

culture emphasized a single identity—deafness—while neglecting other aspects of his identity, such as his Blackness:

> They didn't really encourage you to embrace your Blackness and your Black heritage. The school prioritized "DEAF," which was number one. But any other identities, they kind of pushed to the side.

This quote reveals the "DEAF SAME" ideology as the deaf identity that should be primary and first, which ignores the intersectional identities (Burke, 2014; Ruiz-Williams et al., 2015). This single-identity focus forced Big Mike to suppress his Black identity in order to fit in. Although he never had a Black Deaf teacher, a Black Deaf school counselor played a key role in supporting his Black Deaf identity. The counselor consistently reminded him not to forget about his Blackness, sharing resources such as information about Black Deaf organizations and storytelling about their Black Deaf history. The counselor was also actively involved in planning his post-secondary transition. Despite this support, Big Mike still had to conceal his Blackness by focusing on how the school wanted him to function solely as a Deaf person. Big Mike also recalled feeling overlooked despite his academic efforts. He expressed frustration that his hard work was often dismissed, and he was regularly made to feel second-class in terms of academic recognition:

> In terms of citizenship awards and honor roll, no matter how hard I worked, I still felt like a second class to them. No matter what, I even tried so hard. I didn't feel respected. I would try my best. Some of my friends believed that I should get the award. They would say "Why did they get the award, not you?" I know it has to do with favoritism. Often, I felt I did all these things, and I should receive something. Sometimes if I made a mistake, I'm like, that is the reason because I got second on a roll, I didn't get first. As a Black

> student, I worked my ass off, and it's not often that I got rewarded in terms of grading. I enjoyed discussion, I shared, I participated, but I always felt they viewed me as second class in terms of awards.

Big Mike's experience suggests that Black Deaf students had to work harder than their White Deaf peers, yet their achievements were often overlooked or unrecognized. When asked to discuss other experiences outside of academic, Big Mike shared some traumatic stories. Big Mike recounted one of his most traumatic experiences at school when he was subjected to physical violence by his school counselor, who pushed him down the stairs:

> The counselor told me to get up right after I fell. I asked the counselor "Why did you push me?" He said, "Get up!" And I tried to report it, but [counselor and students] covered it up and they were saying I made it up. The students did not confirm because the counselor was their favorite. I didn't tell my mom.

Big Mike further shared that he reported the incident to a different school counselor, but no action was taken. Additionally, the students who witnessed the physical violence may have feared punishment or retaliation due to the school climate that Big Mike had previously described.

In summary, Big Mike's experiences reveal a deeply ingrained culture of exclusion, favoritism, and nepotism within the schooling spaces he navigated. This environment placed an immense burden on him to suppress his Blackness to fit into the predominantly White deaf school. The school actively encouraged Big Mike to focus solely on "DEAF POWER," promoting the notion that prioritizing his Deaf identity over his racial identity. This forced prioritization not only diminished his sense of self but also

highlighted the school's inability—or unwillingness—to address the intersectional challenges, further perpetuating systemic oppression within the schooling spaces.

Ama's Story

Ama (she/her) identifies as a Black Deaf woman. She was born Deaf and comes from a racially mixed family with both hearing and Deaf members. She uses a combination of ASL, Pidgin Signed English (PSE), and Black slang to communicate with her family, and primarily ASL and Black English when interacting with friends. Ama explained that while her family did their best to educate her about Blackness, they often approached it from a hearing-centric perspective, which influenced her identity as a Black Deaf woman. Her limited exposure to Black Deaf culture and history impacted her as a student, shaping how she navigated both racial and Deaf spaces and influencing her understanding of herself within systems that marginalized her intersecting identities.

She initially attended a public school before transferring to a deaf school, from which she graduated in 2012. Ama described her deaf school demographic as predominantly White, including students, teachers, and administrators. She also noted that she never had a Black Deaf teacher. Although her deaf school supported an ASL-English bilingual philosophy and aimed to be inclusive, Ama explained that it often failed to capture the nuances of students' diverse cultural backgrounds. As a student, Ama described herself as energetic, active, and highly social; she mentioned that she frequently enjoyed having conversations with her friends. She considered herself a leader who advocated for both herself and her peers. Ama was involved in school-based organizations and sports.

Ama recalled that she had a behavior specialist assigned to her to work on her "behavioral issues" which she described as more focused on her facial expressions. She

described a merit system in which students earned points for positive behavior, which meant students could then engage in enjoyable activities with their peers. Ama explained that she struggled to accumulate points due to staff members' negative interpretation of her facial expressions, as well as discrimination related to her hair:

> It was a very strict system, so it was hard to accumulate points. I got to the point where I kept messing up to the point that I wouldn't be allowed to go out. I kept losing points and it was because I was making facial expressions, and they would deduct points. What the fuck? If they were a Black person, they would have been fine with my facial expressions, and I wouldn't have lost points. I would have been able to go on a field trip. They were so focused on my facial expressions because I was Black. I couldn't wipe the expressions off my face. I was expressive and if I disagreed, it would show on my face. Did they affirm my identity? They really did not […] The system did not work for the Black students, because we were obviously always late, late, late because we had to do our hair, and it was kind of impossible with the time constraints.

Ama and other Black girls in her school often faced adultification bias, being stereotyped with "bad attitudes" and perceived as loud, aggressive, or threatening (Blake & Epstein, 2019). To navigate these stereotypes, Ama felt pressured to conform to Whiteness. She recounted:

> If I wanted to dress a certain way like I'm in a gang or on the street or trying to be ratchet or even wearing makeup. People would suggest that I not wear makeup. I couldn't wear large earrings. I had to wear smaller earrings. I used to have long nails and then people would come at me. So, I stopped having long nails. And the same thing with my hair. I would braid my hair with color. I would have to dress more like a White person. And

with shoes, I did like Jordans, but I had to change to VANS. If I saw a picture of myself in high school, I'd say that person is White.

This quote reflects the forced assimilation into Whiteness and the suppression of Black cultural expression in school spaces by erasing Black identity and policing appearance. It suggests that anything associated with Blackness was deemed unacceptable or inappropriate. Ama also expressed her experience of tokenism, being frequently chosen to represent diversity in school activities, but these selections felt performative. She explained that she was used as a symbol rather than as a valued member of the school community:

> I felt like it was very strong on tokenism. My goodness, there were a lot of tokenisms. Sometimes there would be meetings and workshops or pictures and they had to have a Black person or had to have a Latinx person. It was always me, always. It did not really do anything for us. They just wanted to look good by using us. They tried to say they value diversity, but I went through hell with them.

Ama further explained she was among the top students, and the school capitalized on her academic success, partly because her family worked at the school. However, this focus on Ama's achievements overshadowed the needs of other Black Deaf students with varying language and academic challenges. She shared:

> They had a lot of Black students, yes, but they suffered with language delays, were not involved in sports, no family working at the school, or they weren't adopted. The school took advantage, and it just became exhausting. I wanted peace of quiet, but people would talk about me, and they would cross the line. I didn't really like that. Then from peers, they would get jealous, and they would say "Oh, it's because you're Black." And they started to use my Black card without my permission. It was really tiring.

She elaborated that, while she was at an advantage due to her family status, she often felt tokenized. Building on her earlier quote about tokenism, she explained that the school frequently used her to represent diversity at her school. This tokenization created tension with her peers, as she was chosen to represent the school over White students. This tension led some of her White peers to question her intentions, feeling that she was unfairly stealing the spotlight from them.

Ama discussed her discomfort when asked to speak on Black Deaf topics, particularly during Black History Month. She recounted feeling conflicted about her Black identity when deaf history was the primary focus in school:

> It was definitely tough to navigate. I felt like when I was in that school, people were always looking at me and telling me stories about ASL and about being Deaf and proud. It was mostly focusing on Deaf history, and I have sometimes felt conflicted with my Black identity. I was not comfortable. And then during Black History Month, I actually hated it, because all eyes would be on me in the class and they expected me to say something and I'd notice people would keep looking at me, and I didn't want to. I didn't have anything to say but they expected me to say something because I was Black. So that continued, you know, I would always get placed to talk about different stories or invited to talk about Black things. I would be on the front lines, and they would pull me for different things like that. And I felt like the spotlight was always on me.

Based on Ama's experience, we see examples of how teachers attempt to practice inclusivity by focusing on Black Deaf students' lived experiences. However, singling out Black Deaf students can lead them to feel othered. Additionally, many Black Deaf students do not share the same experiences, which can place them in positions where they feel disconnected or isolated.

Similar to Koningin's experience with objectification, Ama also faced discrimination from her volleyball coach, who imposed unrealistic standards for Black Deaf athletes. The coach emphasized thinness and scrutinized Black Deaf athletes, making them feel targeted for simply being themselves. Ama explained:

> The volleyball coach [set a standard] and the standard was pretty bad. He wanted us to be thin and look down on us. I was thick, and the expectations were too high. I felt like I was very much looked down upon. I was hyper surveilled. I don't smoke weed or drink, but the coach started to target me and say, like, "Hey, what are you doing?" There was one Black girl who missed practice because of a hair appointment. So, the coach set up a stereotype for us. Often the coach would say, no hair appointments during practice. I was like, "Okay, I get that." But we practiced all day and all night. So where do I have the time? During weekends, it was pretty hard, because games were on weekends. Of course, I might miss a practice or two because I had to do my hair.

The coach created a White-centric athletic structure where Eurocentric beauty standards were enforced through body types and appearances. Her experience reveals a deeper stereotype that portrayed Black Deaf athletes as irresponsible or lacking commitment to their athletic skills when they should be encouraged to practice self-care inside and outside of school.

In summary, Ama navigated the challenges of facing adultification, tokenism, and pressure to conform to White standards, while striving to remain true to herself. The imposed behavioral expectations reflect how her Blackness was misinterpreted through an anti-Black lens. Her experience highlights the additional pressures faced by Black Deaf students in predominantly White spaces (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Tory's Story

Tory (she/her), a Black Deaf queer individual, graduated from a deaf school in 2020. With a hearing family that knew some basic ASL, her family primarily communicated with her using paper and pen. Tory's first language is ASL, and she attended a deaf school from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. The school she attended utilized an ASL and English bilingual philosophy, yet it lacked any diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives at the time that she graduated. A few Black Deaf students attended her school, but the staff and administration were predominantly White. While Tory had a few Black teachers, most of her teachers were White.

During her school years, Tory described herself as a quiet, sweet, and friendly student who later grew more assertive in high school after taking on leadership roles. She was elected as an officer for a school-based organization and participated in sports. Despite her involvement and leadership, Tory was subject to bullying by some of her White peers. Reflecting on her experiences, she recounted one incident in her sophomore-year English class:

> I remember my sophomore year in my English class. There was one White student that sat next to me. The teacher was teaching, and that White student kept picking on me. The White student kept targeting and bullying me. I was in the front of the class and the only Black student there. I was often targeted by that White student. I was fed up, and the teacher saw it and spoke up for me. And at that time, I didn't self-advocate, I was very passive, and I just remember that moment where I wasn't strong. I didn't have that confidence to say something. And I'm glad the teacher helped and stopped that behavior and took the student out, but that needs to happen more.

Tory explained that her struggle to stand up for herself stemmed from a lack of Black Deaf mentors or role models who could guide her in self-advocacy. Additionally, language barriers presented significant challenges, especially with written English since her primary

language was ASL. Tory described her experience with standard English as a reflection of how language is designed to perpetuate the ideology that Whiteness is the accepted norm, suggesting that Black Deaf students must be "fixed" to achieve success in the classroom (Baker-Bell, 2020). Tory shared her experience with writing assignments, noting that her English teacher's heavy corrections discouraged her:

> Sometimes my grammar and language usage were incorrect. Teacher would correct my paper and she made a lot of corrections—like my paper was bleeding red. I felt blamed for not knowing English well enough. I wasn't exposed to enough written English. I felt like I was being criticized, instead of providing support and encouragement to improve.

In summary, Tory's experiences show the challenges faced by Black Deaf students in predominantly White schooling spaces that lack DEI initiatives. These challenges were compounded by anti-Black biases, including racial bullying, the absence of Black Deaf role models, and discouraging feedback on her written English, which reinforced the notion that Whiteness is the standard for success.

Chapter Summary

Each profile demonstrates how anti-Blackness and Whiteness, though separate ideologies, work together to perpetuate racial oppression and violence in educational spaces. The narratives of Black Deaf participants reveal experiences of low expectations, anti-Black bias, discrimination, and pressure to conform to White standards. Ama and Koningin share their experiences of objectification, a common reality for Black girls, while Ama, Pete and Big Mike describe the caution they exercised in maintaining the status quo to gain approval from White students and staff. Koningin experienced bullying, with little to no support from the staff, while Kalon faced doubts about whether

she was "intelligent enough" to be admitted into the integrated school. Tory described her experience with low academic expectations, where she had to accommodate her approach in order to meet her teachers' expectations. These profiles highlight the multifaceted ways in which anti-Blackness and Whiteness intersect to shape the schooling experiences of Black Deaf participants, offering a deeper understanding of how systemic oppression manifests in their lives. The next chapter delves into a thematic analysis of how anti-Blackness has evolved over time to maintain racial oppression against Black Deaf students.

Chapter 6: Key Themes and Findings: Anti-Black K-12 Schooling Experiences

Through a detailed analysis of participants' counter-storytelling, I provide an exploration of their experiences with anti-Black racism and highlight the systemic barriers they faced. These challenges significantly impacted their sense of identity, academic achievements, and social relationships within anti-Black schooling spaces. Four major themes along with the corresponding subthemes were identified, providing a deeper understanding of how anti-Black racism shaped participants' schooling experiences. The first theme, *Academic Marginalization*, focuses on participants' experiences as Black students in predominantly White academic-track classes, the impact of teachers' racial biases, and the erasure of Black Deaf history. The second theme, *Social Marginalization*, examines the exploitation of Black Deaf athletes and the challenges of participating in predominantly White school-based organizations. The third theme, *Discriminatory School Policies and Practices*, highlights how Black Deaf students endured unfair disciplinary procedures and mistreatment by school administrators. The fourth theme, *Erasure of Black Identity*, explores participants' delayed recognition and embracing of their Black identity, as well as the pressures of code-switching to conform to Whiteness.

Themes	**Subthemes**
Academic Marginalization	Being Black in Predominantly White Academic Track Classes
	Teachers' Racial Bias
	Erasure of Black Deaf History
	Racial Disparities in School-Based Organizations

Social Marginalization	Exploitation of Black Deaf Athletes
Discriminatory School Policies and Practices	Unfair Disciplinary Procedures
	School Administrators Mistreatment
Erasure of Black Identity	Late Identification
	Code-Switching

The chapter concludes with participants' reflections on Black Deaf joy and its essential role in fostering resilience and helping them thrive despite their navigation of anti-Black environments.

Academic Marginalization

The first major theme, *Academic Marginalization*, highlights Black Deaf participants' experiences of academic exclusion through social and emotional isolation, low expectations in academic tracks, and a White-centric history and curriculum. This marginalization demonstrates how anti-Black racism within school spaces can limit the educational success and opportunities for Black Deaf students. Findings from interviews and focus groups reveal that all Black Deaf participants were placed in diploma-track classes. However, they faced significant isolation, pressure to conform to White-centered standards set by their teachers, disengagement from their White peers, and a lack of access to, or encouragement to, seek academic support.

The theme is broken into three subthemes which highlight the various ways that the Black Deaf participants were marginalized in academic spaces, limiting their opportunities and success. The first subtheme highlights the experience of being the only one or one of a few Black

Deaf students in academic-track classes, while their Black peers were placed in vocational or certification tracks. The second subtheme focuses on the Black Deaf participants' experiences with low expectations or academic neglect from their teachers, which they had to navigate as one of the few Black Deaf students in their classrooms. The third subtheme reveals that these Black Deaf participants were educated about Deaf history, but received little to no education regarding Black Deaf history. This lack of representation impacted their sense of pride and confidence as Black Deaf students in predominantly White schooling spaces.

Being Black in Predominantly White Academic Track Classes

Academic track classes are designed for "high-achieving" students who meet academic expectations (typically based on White-based standardized tests) and are on track to graduate with high school diplomas (Loveless, 2002). Black Deaf students are frequently tracked into vocational training, while White Deaf students are steered toward academics and encouraged to pursue college (Hairston & Smith, 1983; Stuart & Gilchrist, 2005). Research has shown that being Black in predominantly White academic track classes can lead to feelings of isolation, tokenism, and heightened pressure, all of which can create barriers to academic success (Loveless, 2002).

All participants reported being placed in diploma track classes, such as regular, honors, and advanced placement courses. Nearly all of them stated that they were the only Black student or one of a few Black Deaf students in their academic track classes, with the majority of their Black Deaf peers enrolled in certification track classes. Many participants shared feelings of loneliness, isolation, and invisibility within their classrooms. Koningin reflected on the emotional toll, saying, “Being the only Black Deaf student felt isolating, sad, and frustrating. That is what caused me to have PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder].” She further shared how

traumatic it was because she felt pressure to act a certain way and suppress her authentic self. Koningin also explained that she had to protect herself from experiencing racial microaggressions, such as being questioned about her place in the classroom and facing racial stereotypes when her White peers made comments about Black Deaf individuals in their community. She also described how her White peers were often invited to other friends' homes, while she was excluded. Additionally, Black Deaf students did not interact with her because they were placed in different academic tracks. This experience reveals that she faced exclusion from both educational spaces and her community.

Similarly, Tory reflected on her struggles with belonging in predominantly White classes. She explained that her school affirmed her Deaf identity by interacting with Deaf teachers, Deaf peers, and opportunities for direct communication through ASL. While her teachers were supportive, she found it difficult to connect with her peers. Tory further shared that, as a Black student, she often felt out of place in her classroom because her White peers came from elite families closely connected within the school community. She tried to bond with them over their shared experiences of oppression as Deaf individuals but ultimately felt isolated:

> I felt lost. I did not have any sense of belongings. Yes, there are [White Deaf peers] but our experiences are so different. I appreciate them but I still felt there were barriers. I made some connections with them, but I was the only Black kid amongst the White and Latinx students in my class.

Tory and Koningin experienced isolation and alienation in these classes, where they were constantly reminded of their Black Deaf identities. As one of the few Black Deaf students in their academic tracks, they felt unable to rely on their White peers for academic support. This isolation was part of a broader systemic issue, where they navigated academic environments that

were not designed to affirm their Black experiences.

Several participants expressed the pressure to excel academically to challenge the negative stereotypes associated with being a Black Deaf student. Ama, for example, shared her experience of the intense pressure to disprove racial stereotypes and the fear of failure, which drove her to consistently remain at the top. She stated:

> I was the only Black person in class, and I was at the top of the class. I was the only Black person in the class. So, I had to do better, if I failed in something they would say, oh it's because you're Black and that I must be in the wrong class. I didn't want them to think that. No way. I was competitive and motivated to be at the top of the class all the time.

Ama experienced heightened pressure to excel in her class. She faced constant fears of racial bias and stereotypes, which she felt compelled to challenge on a daily basis. The pressure to remain at the top was not a choice, but a necessity to counteract anti-Blackness and prove that she deserved her place in the classroom.

Big Mike, who was placed in regular classes, described his experiences with teachers who did not challenge him academically. He mentioned "I had regular classes. I thought I could take advanced placement classes, but I decided not to go for it." He elaborated on his rationale for not pursuing more challenging classes. He mentioned, "they did not really push me. I did my work. It was easy. I would sometimes sleep through classes and still get good grades. The truth is I was bored." Big Mike's experience shows the lack of rigorous academic opportunities for Black Deaf students, which can lead to disengagement and lack of motivation (Pitre, 2014). His decision not to take advanced classes reflects a lack of encouragement from his teachers. Despite completing coursework with minimal effort, he felt neither challenged nor supported in a way

that inspired him to invest further in his education. This lack of encouragement reveals a disconnect between Big Mike and his teachers, where opportunities to help him reach his full academic potential were not actively supported.

The academic marginalization in predominantly White academic tracks highlights how isolation and exclusion within classrooms impacted these Black Deaf participants across different eras. Academic tracks were designed to place students on different educational pathways and offer tailored, rigorous coursework to meet their academic needs. However, the design of these tracks was created with a unilateral focus. In addition, Black Deaf students are often subject to lower academic expectations and receive inferior quality instruction compared to their White Deaf peers (Holt & Allen, 1989; Myers et al., 2010). Therefore, the Black Deaf participants reported feeling isolated in academic track classes, where the majority of their peers and teachers were White. Additionally, they expressed heightened pressure to excel academically in order to prove their belonging in the academic track, which resulted in various negative outcomes. They felt this urge to challenge racial stereotypes, despite being systematically marginalized from opportunities to thrive.

Teachers' Racial Bias

White hearing women dominate the deaf education workforce (Andrews & Jordan, 1993; Simms et al., 2008), while Black Deaf teachers are significantly underrepresented (Anderson & Dunn, 2016; Andrews & Jordan, 1993). This representation means that by default, schools provide White Deaf role models for White Deaf students (García-Fernández, 2014). However, many White Deaf teachers lack cultural sensitivity, creating barriers for Black Deaf students (Cohen et al., 1990; Dunn, 1990; Marbury, 2007; McCaskill, 2005). From the findings, Black Deaf participants' experiences reveal how teachers' racial stereotypes negatively affected the

participants' academic experiences, leading to lower expectations and less support for them.

All participants reported having either no, or just one or two, Black Deaf teachers throughout the entirety of their educational years. Many participants reported feeling that their teachers did not provide them with the same level of attention as their White peers, often imposing racial stereotypes that left them feeling excluded in the classroom. The lack of support from their White teachers left them feeling either invisible or under constant pressure to meet the White-standard expectations. Koningin described her experience with her White teachers, stating that some teachers supported her and her Black peers while other teachers did not:

> It was a flip flop. I felt like White teachers were all about talk, but they never walked the talk. They never followed up with action. They kind of kept with one type of teaching style and never accommodated and adjusted for different students. It was a very traditional teaching style, and it was sometimes difficult to understand because all the different children are coming from different perspectives and background experiences.

Koningin further explained that one of her White teachers was very accommodating and supportive of her and other students. She provided an example where this teacher held White Deaf students accountable for their bullying behavior. She also noted that the teacher paid extra attention to all students, ensuring they understood the purpose of the content. However, in a different class with another White teacher, she observed that some of her Black peers struggled to comprehend the material due to varying academic levels. Unlike her previous teacher, this one did not provide accommodations. Koningin advocated for her peers by asking the teacher to repeat information and be mindful of the students' different academic levels. Although the teacher acknowledged her concerns, they did not adjust their teaching style. As a result,

Koningin took on the responsibility of supporting her peers to ensure they understood the class expectations.

Big Mike explained he was an average student who simply accepted the norms and expectations of him because he felt the teachers did not care about him and his academic skills:

> They didn't care. I would just not think about it. I just did the minimum. I tried my best, but I wasn't really encouraged. They just didn't care. I know some teachers would be encouraging. It would be like, come on, get with it. They wanted me to show my work, and sure I would try my best. I would just bullshit, and I would just get an A. It's like, yeah, whatever.

This quote closely reflects Big Mike's experience in the academic track in the previous section, where he did not have any motivation to take advanced placement classes despite knowing he was capable. His lack of motivation stemmed from the lack of encouragement from his White teachers, with Big Mike sharing that he often felt that regardless of the effort he put in, his work went unrecognized.

In contrast to Big Mike, Pete recalled how teachers often doubted his abilities and were surprised by his academic achievements. He described:

> [The teachers] continue to doubt my skills. They would be shocked at my academic skills because I won awards. They were shocked that I was in a mainstream school, and I was on the Dean's list there. When I read a book, they didn't expect me to know certain things when I would send in my assignments or papers.

Pete's teacher was surprised that he excelled academically, which reveals the low expectations often placed on Black Deaf students. This example of low expectations reflects how

anti-Black racism and audism can manifest through teachers' expectations, further reinforcing the idea that his academic achievement is an exception rather than the norm.

As mentioned in the previous section, Ama felt the need to prove herself as one of the top students in her class. She explained that she had to actively fight for respect from her teachers. She asserted, “respect didn’t come so easy, no…they wouldn’t just give it to me. I had to negotiate and argue with them to get the things I wanted. It was hard.” This quote shows Ama’s frustration because she had to advocate for the same treatment and opportunities as her White peers.

Teachers' neglect and racial bias have contributed to Black Deaf participants' experiences of academic marginalization across different eras. This marginalization made Black Deaf participants feel that their presence was neither honored nor recognized. Many of these participants shared that their teachers often held lower academic expectations for them and provided less support compared to their White Deaf counterparts, further isolating them in the classroom. Almost all participants reported that they never had a Black Deaf teacher, as there is a dearth of Black Deaf educators due to systemic barriers in hiring practices. The intersection between anti-Black racism and audism in deaf education not only affected Black Deaf students but also limited the presence of Black Deaf teachers who could have supported them in schooling spaces. As a result, they either had to constantly push themselves to prove their White teachers wrong or felt discouraged and gave up. This experience indicates that these Black Deaf students did not feel safe or valued in their academic track classes.

Erasure of Black Deaf History

The development of Deaf history has largely been shaped by White Deaf perspectives (Fernandes & Myers, 2009; García-Fernández, 2020), often neglecting the experiences and

contributions of Black Deaf individuals (Moges, 2020b). As a result, Black Deaf students are often seen as having no history or educational experience prior to slavery or the founding of the North Carolina School for the Colored Deaf and Blind. This myth is reinforced through pedagogy and curriculum, disconnecting them from their rich history.

All of the participants stated that they did not learn about Black Deaf history until they entered college. Most shared that the only Black Deaf figure they learned about was Andrew Foster, often referred to as the "first" person to graduate from Gallaudet University. Pete shared, "Nope, I did not learn anything about Black Deaf history. Wait, Andrew Foster, that was about it." Ama added, "You know the same old Foster. He was the only one […] I learned nothing about the Black Deaf history until I entered [university]". This lack of exposure suggests a form of erasure of other Black Deaf historical figures who have contributed to the deaf community which reinforce the exclusion of Black Deaf experience in schooling spaces.

Koningin comes from a Black Deaf family where her culture and history have been passed down through generations. She explained that her parents often shared their experiences with segregated deaf schools and racism within the deaf community. Her parents often brought her to Black Deaf events where she was exposed to their rich knowledge and history. Koningin expressed frustration over the lack of Black Deaf history in school, she said "I learned more about the history from my family, not the school. I remember Black History Month and slavery, but nothing else." This quote reveals that her family deeply values Black Deaf culture and history and gave her a rich understanding of the Black Deaf community's pain and resilience. However, her frustration highlights the gaps and erasure of Black Deaf history in schooling spaces, leaving her and other Black Deaf students without a true understanding of the contributions the Black Deaf community has made. Most Black Deaf students learn about deaf

history, but often through a White lens. Tory reflected on her experience learning White-centric deaf history:

> I learned the Deaf history through a White lens. We learn mostly through White teachers, through White lens. For Black Deaf history, it was more a biography and more superficial, and wasn't going into depth and providing more information about the history.

This quote is similar to those focusing on Andrew Foster, reflecting a pattern seen in standard curriculums where Black students primarily learn about commonly recognized Black figures like Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks. The contrast in depth of historical discussions is an example of whitewashed deaf history, which limits Black Deaf students' access to a richer, more inclusive historical narrative.

Many of the participants stated that the curriculum focused on deaf identity, to the exclusion of Black Deaf identity and Black identity, more generally. In other words, their schooling did not acknowledge or confirm their Black identity and set up a dichotomy between being deaf and being Black. Big Mike explained the curriculum was overwhelmingly White:

> [The curriculum is a] sea of Whiteness, deaf history, American history, any and all White and with a sprinkle of Black history. In school, we learned about DPN [Deaf President Now] and heavily on DEAF POWER. All of that was pretty White, and I started asking more questions about these gaps in history, and they really wouldn't share more […] Oh! Deaf President Now, and seeing that as a repeat of history and wondering, like, why aren't we talking about Black Deaf history? Like, why are we using the same information over and over again? The curriculum is painted White, everything from A to Z.

This quote demonstrates how history is controlled in a way that benefits White Deaf students while maintaining systemic exclusion and erasure of Black Deaf contributions. Furthermore, the curriculum heavily focuses on deaf identity without an intersectional lens. When Big Mike challenged his teachers about these gaps, they were unable to provide answers, highlighting the disconnect between the history being taught and the lived experiences of Black Deaf people.

Kalon reflected what she learned at both segregated and integrated schools, she mentioned that she did not learn anything related to the Black Deaf history:

> There wasn't anything at the Black deaf school. There wasn't anything regarding Black Deaf anything at that school. I don't remember learning anything regarding anything Black […]. At the White deaf school, that was a bit of a change. I did learn a lot about deaf history at the White deaf school, but I did not learn anything about Black Deaf people.

Interestingly, the segregated Deaf school was a site of Black Deaf excellence and an affirmation of Black identity through language and culture. Additionally, teachers were recruited from HBCUs, meaning Black Deaf students had Black Deaf teachers. Kalon confirmed that she had a majority of Black teachers but did not learn about Black Deaf history in the segregated Deaf school. This information reveals a disconnect between Blackness and Deafness, where both cultures did not fully intersect in the curriculum.

In conclusion, all Black Deaf participants experienced academic marginalization across different eras. While they shared that they were placed in academic tracks alongside White Deaf students, marginalization persisted through isolation, low expectations from teachers, and a White-centric curriculum that failed to reflect their experiences and identities. In the previous

chapter, Kalon, who was the only participant who attended the segregated deaf school, recounted the psychological exam she was required to take as a requirement for attending the integrated deaf school. She also shared how the school, despite being integrated, failed to provide encouragement to pursue college, reflecting the ongoing marginalization within a supposedly "racial progressive" schooling space.

After the landmark decision of Brown vs. Board of Education, Black Deaf participants were allowed to attend racially mixed schools. This decision was supposed to fulfill the promise to provide equitable education for all students regardless of race. However, the Black Deaf participants reported that they experienced academic marginalization that stemmed from social isolation, which impacted their access to a truly equitable education. Black Deaf participants reported feeling that their presence was neither honored nor recognized. They shared that they often felt invisible in the classroom due to teachers' neglect and/or anti-Black bias. Moreover, teachers' anti-Black bias in the academic track classes further contributed to their sense of disconnection and marginalization. The curriculum specifically focused on deaf history had a significant impact on Black Deaf participants' identity development and their sense of pride in Black Deaf history. The lack of exposure to Black Deaf history can have a negative impact on their understanding of their rich history which prevents them from important aspects of their identity and their experiences from being erased within the schooling spaces.

Social Marginalization

The second major theme is *Social Marginalization*, which highlights Black Deaf participants' experiences of social exclusion within school-based organizations and sports programs. While academics form one critical aspect of schooling, another equally important aspect is the opportunity for students to thrive outside the classroom. These extracurricular

spaces are meant to empower students to develop skills, build relationships, and cultivate a sense of belonging, yet Black Deaf participants often found themselves excluded in these settings.

The theme is broken down into two subthemes identified during the findings. The first subtheme explores Black Deaf participants' experiences within predominantly White school-based organizations, where they lacked the necessary support to participate in Black school-based organizations. The second subtheme focuses on the exploitation of Black Deaf athletes, whose athletic skills were used to enhance the school's reputation.

Racial Disparities in School-Based Organizations and Clubs

School-based organizations are a form of extracurricular activity that provide Deaf students with opportunities for personal growth and leadership development outside of academics. Participation in activities such as athletic programs or student government helps Deaf students build life skills that benefit them beyond high school (Schoffstall et al., 2016). School-based organizations and clubs are designed to foster leadership, develop social skills, and provide opportunities for students to engage in school communities.

However, the findings show that most Black Deaf participants had negative experiences with school-based organizations and clubs. Almost all participants reported that their school organizations were predominantly White. Half of the participants reported having a club specifically for Black Deaf students, though these clubs were newly established and lacked substantial participation. Tory, for example, was involved in a newly formed Black Deaf organization, which had few members. She also engaged heavily with a predominantly White organization, encouraged by a supportive White advisor. She explained:

> Before high school, I had been involved in some organizations, but I felt like I wasn't growing yet. I was timid. I didn't have a lot of confidence. I was afraid to be in the

> leadership positions. I didn't think there was a reason to be involved until I met the [predominantly White organization] advisor. She was White and really believed in me. She said I had a lot of potential and encouraged me to be involved in [predominantly White organization].

According to Tory, she had a positive experience in the White-dominated organization. Interestingly, her White advisor encouraged her to join that organization rather than the newly established Black Deaf organization at her school. This encouragement indicates that the advisor had a narrow focus on a specific, well-known organization affiliated with the community. The advisor did not consider Tory's multilayered identities, particularly her Blackness, where she could have connected with other Black Deaf students to foster meaningful relationships and empowerment through leadership.

It should be noted that there were organizations available at the time of all participants' high school experience, such as NBDA and Youth Empowerment Summit (YES), a leadership and advocacy program for Black Deaf youth. However, many participants did not learn about these organization until after graduating high school. It is hypothesized that schools might have required some more time and more support to develop Black Deaf organizations, especially considering that the NBDA is relatively new. Big Mike shared the challenge when he joined the newly established Black Deaf organization. He recalled a disappointing experience when his teachers and peers failed to support an event he had organized:

> I remember that there were two organizations, [predominantly White organization] and [Black Deaf organization] The [Black Deaf organization] was very new and we wanted to host an Easter party. We planned everything. Unfortunately, nobody showed up. No one showed up. Not even one person showed up. I tried to get students to show up and they

> wouldn’t come. They said it was boring. After that, the [Black Deaf organization] got shut down. I saw it firsthand. They said the [Black Deaf] organization was boring. What was the difference between [predominantly White organization] and Black Deaf organization]? So, [Black Deaf organization] got shut down.

The predominantly White organization at Big Mike’s school is the same one that Tory joined, and it is a well-known organization with strong ties to the broader community. This story reveals that the predominantly White organization mentioned benefitted from well-established connections, rich resources, and a strong support system, whereas the Black Deaf organization received little attention due to its recent establishment.

What Big Mike described reflects the entitlement of White privilege, where the predominantly White organization overshadowed the Black Deaf organization rather than fostering an inclusive and affirming space for Black Deaf students. Instead of reinforcing this racial disparity, the school should have actively worked toward creating a more equitable schooling space that supports and uplifts Black Deaf students.

As mentioned earlier, Koningin was introduced to Black Deaf culture through her family, but not at her school. She had no idea that the NBDA existed until she entered college:

> I didn't know about NBDA until later when I went to [university]. I wish I knew about NBDA during my middle school or high school time. I would have been involved. I would have learned about my Black culture. I took Deaf culture at my deaf school, but the curriculum didn't include any Black Deaf history. Deaf culture is great, but where is the curriculum that incorporates Black Deaf history?

NBDA was established in 1981, and Koningin graduated eight years later. During this time, NBDA hosted annual conferences, several of which were held in the Midwest, near

Koningin's school. However, the fact that she had little to no access to NBDA shows that the organization was not widely promoted or integrated into the schools she attended. This lack of inclusion serves as an example of the hidden and erased presence of Black Deaf organizations within schooling spaces.

Ama and Tory were aware of the NBDA, but chose to participate in other organizations instead. Ama explained that she joined a well-known organization rather than a Black Deaf organization to please her racially mixed family. Similarly, Tory shared that she joined the same well-known organization instead of a Black Deaf organization because she was recruited by a White advisor. Big Mike was the only participant who joined the NBDA during his K-12 years. He described his involvement as deeply rewarding, though he wished the school had been more engaged with the NBDA:

> I went to the NBDA conference and got more information through the community there. I was just floored. I learned about the history of NBDA, who first established the NBDA, and met those people, and I was just floored. And I just realized no one shared that with me. I never got that information. And I'm like, come on, school, like that information should be shared.

When Big Mike used the phrase, "I was just floored," it reveals a sense of shock, indicating that he realized for the first time in his life that he had a community. He didn't come to this realization until he entered that sacred space where he connected with other Black Deaf individuals. The fact that he discovered this so late in life left him wishing he had had the same opportunity at his school.

The purpose of the Black Deaf organization is to create an affirming space for Black Deaf students to connect with each other, develop advocacy skills, and center Black Deaf

experiences and challenges in order to build a supportive community where they feel safe and empowered. While some participants never had the opportunity to engage with a Black Deaf organization, others were aware of such organizations but were not heavily involved. Some predominantly White school-based organizations were affiliated with well-established community organizations, providing greater visibility within the school. However, many participants had no knowledge of community-based organizations like the NBDA, indicating a disparity in access to organizations that align with their intersectional identities. This suggests that White Deaf organizations are well-established for White Deaf students due to Whiteness as property, where these organizations center White Deaf experiences while leaving Black Deaf students without access to their own cultural knowledge and Black Deaf community. As a result, Black Deaf students are often left unaware of their own Black Deaf history, contributions, and identity within the deaf community.

Exploitation of Black Deaf Athletes

As mentioned in the previous section, the athletic program is one component of extracurricular activities that provides Black Deaf students with opportunities to participate outside the classroom. Many participants reported involvement in sports such as track, football, basketball, and cheerleading. The findings reveal mixed experiences among Black Deaf students, with some having positive experiences, whereas others faced challenges within the athletic program. A key finding highlights the exploitation of Black Deaf participants, often due to their athletic skills and/or Blackness, rather than genuine support for their overall development and well-being.

Pete shared that while his athleticism was exploited by the deaf school, he also used it as a strategy to navigate the school environment. Pete recounted his experience of competing in

sports for a mainstream school, with his deaf school claiming credit for his athletic success while doubting his academic ability:

> I did feel like they were using my athleticism for their own benefit, but at the same time, they weren't really doing the same thing for my academic or school success […] They had forced me to pay out of my pocket for a fee to qualify to participate in their high school competitions. I paid for the fee, and I was involved, and then they tried to highlight or spotlight my name whenever I had any successes or achievements. But there was no recognition [from the deaf school]. They would take advantage of my success when I was interviewed for the news and newspapers, but there was no official recognition. I didn't get any scholarships or awards at all.

As mentioned in the academic marginalization section, Pete's teachers doubted his academic skills but exploited his athletic abilities to attract media attention for the school's benefit. Despite bringing media recognition to the school, Pete still received little institutional support, either financially or in terms of acknowledgment. He further explained that he was finally inducted into the Hall of Fame for his athletic achievements only a few years ago.

However, despite feeling exploited by the school, Pete had a unique perspective and strategy. Rather than allow this exploitation to defeat him, Pete decided to "flip the tables" so to speak and capitalize on his athleticism as a navigational strategy. He reflected:

> Yes, I took advantage of it because that was their expectation that I was a good athlete. People would say oh, come on, you're Black. You're supposed to be good at this stuff. Their expectation was that Black means you must be good at football […] So yes, I took advantage of meeting their expectations of what a Black student should be, which was to be an athlete.

The quote reveals the assumption that Blackness is inherently linked to athletic ability, highlighting how societal expectations and racial stereotypes shaped Pete's identity as a student-athlete. This stereotype reinforced the school's prioritization of his athleticism over his academic success. As mentioned in the previous section, Pete experienced academic marginalization, with teachers doubting his academic abilities despite his achievements. However, as an athlete, he received more attention and support from the school, which he strategically leveraged to his advantage. This experience reflects systemic anti-Blackness, where Black Deaf students are often funneled into athletics while their academic potential and talents are overlooked.

Big Mike echoed this sentiment, noting that his athletic skills offered him certain advantages in his deaf school, where sports were highly valued. However, like Pete, his academic potential went unrecognized. In contrast, Koningin, Ama, and Tory had different experiences with athletics. Koningin, a skilled basketball player, was often excluded by her teammates, who refused to pass her the ball during games. Koningin explained:

> When we were playing basketball, they never passed me the ball. They knew I could make a good shot. I was in publications all the time. I was in newsletters all the time about my skills. We lost all the time because it would never pass me the ball. Really? Where was the teamwork? We had to help each other out if we wanted to win and we needed to pass the ball. It was just all about them. In track, I really wanted to make state. My team and I practiced after school […] I really wanted to make a state, and we didn't make it. They tried to blame me […] That really showed that we didn't work together.

This quote reflects anti-Blackness through Koningin's deliberate exclusion despite being a talented student-athlete. Although she received media attention, she was not equally respected as a team member. This lack of respect suggests that her talent was perceived as a threat rather

than an asset.

Ama and Tory believed they were good athletes who could contribute to the team; however, they both felt tokenized and/or exploited. While the coaches prioritized White Deaf athletes, praising and promoting their talents, Ama and Tory instead faced accusations. Tory explained:

> I definitely felt tokenized. I was in junior varsity basketball from freshman to junior. The basketball coach focused on their White elite players instead of me. I was a great player, very athletic. The coach thought that I did not practice, but I felt like I was kind of pushed to the side. There were always the White students or Latinx students who could play, not me.

Tory, in particular, felt overlooked by her basketball coach, leading her to join a cheer team where she finally found a sense of belonging among other Deaf Students of Color. Ama shared that she also felt the weight of the stereotype that she should be skilled at sports because of her race:

> As an athlete, I wasn't like an exceptional athlete. I enjoyed sports, and I already mentioned tokenism, being the only Black person on the team and them wanting to showcase or increase the diversity.

Ama further explained that she experienced a stereotypical expectation of a Black athlete. She added, “I still have that stereotype that you must be really amazing at sports because you're Black. And I was not. They were disappointed.” Ama and Tory’s experiences highlight how anti-Black bias shaped their athletic journeys, from being overlooked to being expected to perform in ways that aligned with racial stereotypes. Tory felt ignored by her basketball coach, who prioritized White elite players. When Tory used the word “elite,” she was referring to White

Deaf students from White Deaf families with strong ties to the school community. These students received extra attention from the coach, while Tory, despite being a strong and athletic player, was sidelined.

Ama, on the other hand, acknowledged that while she wasn't a top-tier athlete, she still struggled with the racial assumptions placed on her. Despite her natural abilities, or lack thereof, she felt pressured to prove she was still a capable player because she did not fit the expectation of an "exceptional athlete". The weight of these assumptions made her experience in sports more about justifying her abilities, rather than simply being a student athlete.

In conclusion, all Black Deaf participants experienced Social Marginalization across different eras. One major theme identified in the findings was the lack of affirming spaces during extracurricular activities. Extracurricular activities were designed to foster growth, leadership, and engagement outside the classroom; however, Black Deaf participants faced unbalanced expectations and exploitation, limiting their full participation in schooling spaces (Spencer & Ullucci, 2022).

Many Black Deaf participants were familiar with a well-known community-based organization affiliated with their schools. This organization has a long history of advocacy and youth programming and is widely recognized within the deaf community, particularly among those from generations of deaf families. As a result, Black Deaf participants often felt pressured to join these established clubs instead of new Black Deaf organizations that aligned more closely with their Black Deaf identity. However, newly established Black Deaf organizations were often seen as lacking resources and recognition compared to the well-known organization, further reinforcing this marginalization.

For some student-athletes, participation in sports provided opportunities to showcase their talents. However, many Black Deaf participants encountered racial stereotypes and their abilities were underappreciated or exploited for the school's gain. Their experiences in extracurricular spaces reveal how anti-Blackness operates—where Black Deaf participants are valued for their physical abilities but are denied full participation or acknowledgment of their contributions.

Discriminatory School Policies and Practices

The third major theme is *Discriminatory School Policies and Practices*, which highlights Black Deaf participants' experiences with unfair disciplinary actions and exclusionary practices that disproportionately impact them. Research shows that Black Deaf students have the highest suspension rates among all groups of Deaf students (LaMarr & Egbert, 2020). Findings reveal that all Black Deaf participants reported unfair school disciplinary actions, with most having been suspended.

This theme is divided into two subthemes. The first subtheme highlights Black Deaf participants' experiences with unfair school discipline, which led to consequences ranging from minor to severe. The second subtheme examines how school administrators treated Black Deaf students unfairly, resulting in disproportionate disciplinary measures and further marginalization.

Unfair School Disciplinary Procedures

Black Deaf students face disproportionate school discipline due to "adultification," where they are perceived as adults rather than children (Dumas & ross, 2016; Spencer & Ullucci, 2022). As a result, they experience harsher disciplinary actions than their White Deaf peers and are more likely to be excluded from academic settings compared to their White Deaf peers.

From the findings, all participants shared their experiences with unfair school discipline, ranging from yelling to being punished for their facial expressions to being unfairly treated as bystanders. They recounted instances of over-policing, where minor incidents were met with severe consequences. In the previous chapter, Koningin described her experience defending herself during a fight, and she ended up being suspended for a few days. Big Mike and Tory recalled their experiences with suspension over minor incidents. Big Mike recalled his experience during an activity after school where he and his classmates were outdoor riding on bicycles on schoolground. While riding around, he accidentally hit another student. He described:

> I got in a bike accident at school, and it was my fault. I didn't pay attention. I hit [another student's] bike and their bike got damaged. I apologized and I still got a severe consequence. I was not allowed to be involved in activities for five days and that was my punishment. I had to just kind of sit and watch everyone. They didn't give me a warning. It was just straight towards the punishment and punitive action. I've seen other students go through the same thing, and they didn't get punished, and they would just kind of mock me and tease me.

This quote reveals that Big Mike's empathy was not valued. He acknowledged that it was an accident and apologized, demonstrating an important social skill; however, he still faced consequences. This suggests that disciplinary actions can be rooted in anti-Black bias, where Black Deaf students receive harsher punishments despite showing accountability and social awareness.

Tory shared a memory from 4th grade, recalling a suspension for simply yelling in class while the teacher was teaching. She explained, "I was just yelling in class, and so I got in trouble

and was suspended for three days. Just for yelling." The teacher who reported her was a hearing person working at a deaf school. Generally, Deaf students make noises when they chat, unaware of the volume due to their deafness. In Tory's case, she faced consequences for it.

Pete also shared an experience when he was sent to the office during lunch detention, despite not being involved in the activity:

> I remember playing with different kids and messing around. They were drawing on the floor then on the wall. I was standing and watching them drawing on the wall. The staff came in and grabbed my arm and not the kids who had actually written on the wall. While holding my arm, the staff asked the students who wrote on the wall what they were doing. The staff did not touch the students at all. The staff dragged me with my hand lifted all the way to the office and I was in the office until lunch time.

What Pete shared about the staff touching him—while ignoring the students who wrote on the wall—shows that he was unfairly targeted, despite the staff witnessing who was responsible. Instead of addressing the actual students who wrote on the walls, the staff singled out Pete. As a result, he was sent to the office while his peers faced no consequences. Even though Pete was not directly involved, he still experienced anti-Black bias.

Big Mike, Pete, and Tory recalled experiencing discriminatory and undue punishment, leaving them confused about why they were disciplined. Big Mike accidentally hit another student with his bicycle, Tory was unaware of her voice level, and Pete was merely observing. Their actions were innocent, not malicious. This suggests a pattern of anti-Black bias, where Black Deaf students are often subjected to harsher discipline for innocent behaviors.

Some participants shared that they felt pressured to carefully control their behavior due to a pattern of being targeted and marginalized in school spaces. They noticed that while their

White peers engaged in similar behaviors, they faced little to no consequences, whereas they received harsher punishments. As a result, they felt they were not being treated fairly and they lost their motivation to excel as a student. For instance, Big Mike explained his frustration that he was often met with consequences:

> I would say, every time I got in trouble, I would get punished. And I would think, "Well, why was I getting punished?" For example, at school, I would get scolded, but I would see other students just get told to be stopped, but I would be sent to the principal's office more often than other students. And it became more justification, where I felt like I wasn't going to succeed, and even there I could do it, I felt like those instances kept pulling me down. I was showing that I was doing the work, but I felt like the teacher had already decided that I can't do it. They've already made a decision.

These narratives shared by the participants highlight a troubling pattern of unfair school discipline rooted in anti-Blackness that disproportionately affects Black Deaf students (Spencer & Ullucci, 2022). One major pattern identified in the findings is the high rate of school suspensions among Black Deaf participants, underscoring the anti-Black biases they face within schooling spaces. This pattern suggests that teachers and staff who work with Black Deaf students hold anti-Black biases and unconscious stereotypes based solely on race (Gilliam et al., 2016).

The findings reveal that Black Deaf participants were unduly punished for minor incidents, even when they were not directly involved, and experienced harsher disciplinary actions compared to their White Deaf peers. This pattern highlights how Black Deaf students were often perceived as criminal or guilty, reinforcing systemic anti-Black bias in school discipline. Through the lens of intersectionality, the findings also reveal that some Black Deaf

participants' experiences were shaped not only by anti-Blackness but also at the intersection of audism and ableism. For example, Tory was suspended for a few days simply for making noises, demonstrating how institutions reinforce the concept of silence while prioritizing the comfort of hearing teachers. As a result, Black Deaf students in the study faced compounded marginalization, where both their Blackness and deafness made them more vulnerable to punitive disciplinary practices that excluded them from schooling spaces.

School Administrators' Mistreatment

School administrators, such as principals and assistant principals, serve as key leaders who support and oversee school operations, including designing and enforcing policies that impact students' academic outcomes. However, the majority of school administrators are White (Simms et al., 2008), which significantly impacts Black Deaf students' schooling experiences. The racial disparity in school administrators can contribute to systemic anti-Black bias in disciplinary actions, academic expectations, and overall school culture.

From the findings, all participants reported that school administrators were predominantly White. Kalon and Big Mike described feeling unsupported and unencouraged during their final year of high school. Kalon recalled having two very different experiences with school administrators: one encouraged her to pursue college, while the other tried to prevent it. She shared that at the integrated deaf school, the principal, who Kalon described as a White hearing woman, was supportive and encouraged her to go to college. She explained, "I had become a bookworm. I was motivated. She saw that, and she kind of planted that idea in me." However, after that principal retired, Kalon faced a new principal, who Kalon described as a White hearing man, who exhibited racial bias. She recalled, "he was not very nice. He tried to prevent me from entering [university] by writing a letter that he sent to the [admission office]

that I was an awful leader, not a good student, and that I shouldn't be accepted at [university].” Kalon’s experience is an example of how school administrators are considered gatekeepers of academic opportunities (Spencer & Ullucci, 2022). Kalon added that the principal’s racial prejudice impacted her family members. She learned that one of her family members was expelled from the school she attended for simply holding hands with a White girl.

Kalon was not the only participant to experience mistreatment from school administrators. As a senior, Big Mike wanted to gain popularity by engaging in typical senior activities, such as horseplaying and being a silly, goofy student. He observed that many of his White Deaf peers did the same to gain attention from the student body. However, when he and his White Deaf friends were caught for their playful behavior, the school principal specifically targeted Big Mike, publicly disciplining him in front of his friends. When Big Mike advocated for himself by pointing out that his friends had engaged in the same behavior, his perspectives were dismissed. He explained:

> I was a senior. It was my last year; I was egoistic, and I wanted to be the “King of Campus.” The principal literally came to me and said, “If you do that again, I will kick you out.” I told her that she cannot do that, and she replied that she did with another [Black Deaf] student. I was just really shocked. I asked my friends; “Did you get in trouble?” and they didn’t. It really impacted me. After that, I was very careful not to get in trouble. I was kind of just doing my thing, but very careful.

Big Mike realized that he had to adjust his behavior to conform to the school principal’s expectations, while his White Deaf friends were not held to the same standard. Additionally, he observed that his Black Deaf peers were suspended for the same behavior, which prompted him to tone it down during his final year as a senior student.

The mistreatment of Black Deaf students by school administrators has been a pervasive issue across eras. As a result, these Black Deaf participants have experienced exclusion and marginalization within schooling spaces. Kalon, who attended an integrated Deaf school in the late 1960s, and Big Mike, who attended an integrated school in the early 2000s, both witnessed how school administrators weaponized their anti-Black bias against them. Kalon and Big Mike's experiences show the profound impact of mistreatment from school administrators on their educational trajectories and create significant barriers during their final high school years. While discrimination during their senior years could have affected their postsecondary outcomes, both Kalon and Big Mike possessed strong self-advocacy skills that helped them navigate these challenges, ultimately ensuring that the mistreatment did not hinder them beyond high school.

Erasure of Black Identity

The fourth major theme is *Erasure of Black Identity*, which highlights Black Deaf participants' experiences of suppressing their Blackness in predominantly White schooling spaces. García-Fernández (2014) reminds us that deaf education often emphasizes a single identity and single oppression, focusing solely on deafness and audism. Furthermore, research shows that Black Deaf students often struggle with developing their Black identity (Foster & Kinuthia, 2003). The findings reveal that all Black Deaf participants reported struggling to develop a positive racial identity, as they were frequently forced to focus on a singular identity due to the erasure of Blackness.

This theme is divided into two subthemes. The first subtheme highlights Black Deaf participants' late identification with their Black Deaf identity, which often occurred during or

after high school. The second subtheme focuses on Black Deaf participants' code-switching in both behavior and language to conform to White standards.

Late Identification

Teachers often focus on deaf identity while neglecting racial identity (García-Fernández, 2014). It should be noted, and understood, that racial integration disrupted and hindered the development of a positive racial identity for many Black students (Dumas and ross, 2016). In this study, Black Deaf participants reported often finding themselves at the intersection of deafness and race, navigating schooling spaces with a singular identity—deafness—due to the lack of racial support, such as teachers, peers, curricula, and race-neutral practices and policies.

From the findings, all participants shared that they did not identify as Black Deaf individuals until they were in high school or after graduation. Many knew they were "Black" but did not have a strong sense of pride in being Black Deaf. Kalon, for example, knew she was Black because she attended a segregated Deaf school and lived in a segregated neighborhood. She proudly stated, "I have always been Black, all the way. There was no hesitation. I knew my place. I knew I was Black." However, it was only when she attended a predominantly White deaf school that she discovered her deaf identity. During this time, Kalon began to embrace her identity as a Black Deaf person.

Koningin shared that her racial identity was formed within her Black Deaf family but had to be "hidden" in school. She knew she was Black but had to conform to Whiteness to thrive in her school. She stated, "[I had to] sign as a White person. Dress White. Style my hair in a White way. I also struggled to accept my identity as being Black until my senior year, when I reclaimed that identity." This quote highlights that Koningin was aware of her Black Deaf identity because of her family, yet she felt pressured to erase her Blackness in White spaces to conform to White

standards. She struggled with how to fully embrace her Blackness due to her strong family ties to Black Deaf culture; however, her school failed to affirm her identity as a Black Deaf student.

Many participants shared that due to a forced solo identity, they did not identify themselves as a Black Deaf person in K-12 schooling spaces. Pete reflected and shared, “I don't think anyone ever saw me as a Black Deaf person, but just as a Deaf person. I can't really remember any specific examples of anyone seeing me identifying as a Black person or even affirming my identity as Black.” Big Mike agreed with the same perspective. He shared, “They prepared me as a Deaf person, but not as a Black Deaf person. I was more prepared as a Black Deaf person through community-based organizations, and they helped prepare me for the Black Deaf experience.” Both quotes from Big Mike and Pete are examples of how deaf education focuses solely on deafness, overlooking other intersectional identities.

Ama added that she did not identify herself as a Black Deaf person because she internalized Whiteness:

> I just internalized the [White] culture. I would just think that the White teachers who had degrees knew better than the BIPOC people who work at the dorm. I was too embarrassed, but looking back, I could have seen that [Black Deaf staff] were trying hard to help grow my Black identity and for them to give me the value of cherishing my identity. And I remember if that person had been a teacher, I would have listened to them. Looking back on that, there’s a little bit of regret.

Ama admitted that her friends considered her elite because she was on the academic track and came from a family that worked at her school. As a result, she was constantly around her White peers and staff, rarely interacting with Students of Color, except during lunch or sports practices. The more she was around her White peers, the more she internalized their culture and

values, leading her to assume that Whiteness was superior.

Tory and Big Mike shared a similar sense of liberation when they discovered their Black Deaf identity. Big Mike discovered his Black Deaf identity through NBDA:

> I knew I was Black. After learning about history, culture, language and identity through NBDA, that's when I identified myself a Black Deaf person [...] my identity was affirmed through the YES program. It wasn't until much later, I came to [university], and I started interacting with more Black people. And I said, Okay, I'm Black. I have Black culture, and these little things would come up, and would more and more feel affirmed.

Tory explained that she did not identify as a Black Deaf individual until college:

> The first time I realized I was Black. I didn't really feel I had a strong identity as Black person until I got to college, maybe even closer to graduation. I didn't have a lot of Black teachers. Most of my teachers were White, so it was really hard to find connections with them [...] I look back at my identity, and I saw a lot of struggles to really understand myself as a student, because I felt like there were Black students around me, but I don't think we both understood our identities. There wasn't exposure to other folks who were older, who were Black Deaf and had those similar identities. As I mentioned, I didn't find that strong connection to my Black identity until I was in college, and that was a big shift for me. It was so important for me to find my Black identity. It was so significant for my upbringing and my journey.

Tory and Big Mike described feeling liberated when they attended college. Unlike K-12 schooling spaces, college was a place where their Black Deaf identities were affirmed. Most importantly, they explained that it was the Black Deaf community that introduced them to Black Deaf culture. If they had Black Deaf teachers or staff in K-12 schooling spaces, they likely

would have developed a stronger sense of identity as Black Deaf individuals.

Similarly to Tory, Ama recognized her Black Deaf identity for the first time in college. She recalled:

> At [college], I was an “Oreo”, and I was whitewashed. I just remember being resistant to that. My hair was fucked up because I had a perm and all of that, like, you know, with the washing and hair damage and breakage and eventually got my hair shaved by a White person. It was really bad. I had an experience that first year of hanging out around different crowds and I liked being able to move amongst different groups[...] I found a [Black Deaf] group, and I started to feel a lot more comfortable [...]And that's when I kind of realized, like, you know, I'm always going to be Black, period.

Ama resisted being labeled as "whitewashed" despite having internalized white values and culture due to her upbringing in a racially mixed family. After her K-12 schooling years, she began unpacking Whiteness and its influence, leading to a pivotal moment of realization. Claiming her Black Deaf identity was a powerful act of resistance for Ama. Her journey highlights the significance of Black resistance in the face of assimilation pressures.

Kalon attended a segregated school where Blackness was central, as most of her teachers and staff were Black and hearing; however, in this environment deafness was erased. This segregated environment reinforced Black cultural values, including those instilled by her family. However, when she transferred to a racially integrated school, her Blackness was erased—a pattern that persisted for other participants across different eras. These experiences highlight the challenges of embracing Blackness in predominantly White spaces. Black Deaf participants explained that the lack of representation—such as Black Deaf history and Black Deaf teachers—shaped their self-perception and sense of belonging, leading to internal conflicts about their

racial identities in K-12 schooling spaces. Their post-secondary experiences reveal that Black Deaf identity was something they fully embraced later in life, which is concerning, as it should be nurtured and affirmed during childhood in K-12 schooling spaces.

Code-Switching

Code-switching is the practice of switching between two or more languages (Muysken, 2000). Code-switching is something that is not solely limited to spoken languages. For instance, Black Deaf signers code-switch by using more English-like signing when conversing with White Deaf individuals, and by incorporating more expressive facial and body movements when signing with other Black Deaf people (Aramburo, 1989; Woodard, 1976). Furthermore, Black Deaf signers often adjust their signing based on different social contexts (Bayley et al., 2017; McCaskill et al., 2011).

The findings reveal that most participants had to adapt their language, behavior, and expression when they were in White spaces. Tory, Big Mike, and Kalon explained that they had to adjust their communication styles to conform to Whiteness in order to be understood. When they were with their Black Deaf friends, they felt authentically themselves and able to express themselves without barriers or misunderstandings. Tory commented:

> With my White friends, I had to change my signing style. I had to sign more clearly. I couldn't sign in the more comfortable way; in the way my body would flow; I couldn't express how I wanted to use the words and signs. If I sign the way I want with my White peers, they wouldn't understand my language, or they would get lost. So, I had to change how I signed with what they knew and how they understood me.

Big Mike reflected on how he constantly had to change his behavior to meet the expectations of Whiteness in schooling spaces:

> All teachers were all White, and so I couldn't behave a certain way. I could see them getting angry. I had to say, “good morning” in a certain way. I had to put on this certain behavior. And if I didn't, they would question my behavior. I couldn’t act like I would when, if I was with Black students, I had to try harder to act a certain way. And at moments, there were times where I could act natural with other Black students. We were homies. They were my people. I could be comfortable in those spaces with them […] But then when I was out of those spaces in White spaces, I felt like I was code switching. I was navigating between these different spaces, and it was getting difficult, and I was emotionally exhausted.

Similarly, Kalon described how she navigated friendships with both Black Deaf students and White Deaf students by switching between two languages:

> I had my friends and I mentioned that I was good friends with a Black Deaf student at the Black Deaf school, and then I integrated at the White deaf school. So, once I finished integration, I, you know, was chatting with folks, and I became friends with a lot of folks […] I was socializing with my Black Deaf friends. I kind of hopped between both groups at that time, and when I would talk with [Black Deaf friends], they would look at me and they would say, you sign differently. And I said, what do you mean? They said, you talk differently. Now you talk like a White person […] I would code switch and talk like [Black Deaf friends] do. And then when I was with the White Deaf students, I would code switch and talk like them.

Tory, Big Mike, and Kalon’s experiences highlight how they were able to be their authentic selves around their Black Deaf peers. They shared a cultural identity that allowed them to connect on a deeper level, fostering a sense of solidarity in

predominantly White spaces. Furthermore, being with other Black Deaf peers helped reduce racial stress, as they didn't need to explain or justify their racial identity. However, when they were with their White peers, they had to adjust their language and behavior to conform to Whiteness, which further increased their isolation and exhaustion.

Koningin explained that she was taught by her father that she had to act white, or she would get in trouble:

> He taught me what's appropriate and how to behave a certain way around certain people. For example, if I got upset or had a temper, I have to make sure not to be out of control, because I could get labeled a certain way or seen a certain way. My dad told me I had to behave like White people. I really couldn't be who I wanted to be. I couldn't be too much. I had to control myself. I needed to protect myself to not get in trouble.

This quote highlights how families had to teach their children how to navigate interactions with White people by acting in a certain way to protect themselves, or else they would be portrayed as a stereotypical Black Deaf individual. Koningin had to suppress her emotions when encountering unfair treatment to avoid reinforcing negative stereotypes.

In conclusion, participants from different eras described the ongoing need to modify their language, behavior, and expression in predominantly White spaces. A major theme across these eras related to code-switching was switching between ASL and BASL. They all shared that they could express themselves authentically when with their Black Deaf friends, creating an affirming space without the need for modifications. However, in academic track classes or around their White peers, they would drop their BASL. Their experiences highlight how code-switching can serve as both a tool for

survival and a source of exhaustion (Cross et al., 2017). Furthermore, code-switching prompts intersectional erasure of their Black identity where they had to downplay their Blackness in order to fit into predominantly White Deaf spaces. This pressure to conform not only reinforced their marginalization but also complicated their ability to fully embrace and express their intersecting identities. The lack of institutional support for Black Deaf cultural and language expressions highlights how schooling spaces continue to privilege whiteness and hearingness, forcing Black Deaf students to constantly negotiate their identities.

Transforming Deaf Education Through Participants' Lens

As emphasized throughout this dissertation, my commitment is to center the stories and perspectives of Black Deaf participants. When discussing the transformation of deaf education, it is important to recognize that academia often operates within a white-centric structure, prioritizing the researcher's perspective while marginalizing the voices of Black Deaf participants. Their views are just as important as my own. In the interviews, I asked Black Deaf participants to share their vision of what is needed to transform the system. Through their narratives, the reimagining deaf education requires a critical reevaluation of institutional power to ensure that Black Deaf students are fully supported and valued within schooling spaces.

Kalon described her experience reading a book about Black Deaf history, emphasizing the importance of representation in education. She believes Black Deaf students should see themselves reflected in the curriculum, which should include their history and contributions. Kalon strongly advocates for K-12 deaf education programs to collaborate with the Center for Black Deaf Studies (CBDS). The Center for Black Deaf Studies (CBDS) was established in the summer of 2020 during the Black Lives Matter movement. Its goal is to serve as a resource hub,

advancing research and education on the history, culture, and contributions of the Black Deaf community. She explained:

> [Black Deaf students] need to see themselves within the curriculum […] the Center for Black Deaf Studies (CBDS) was set up for the purposes of spotlighting the rich history and cultures and experiences of our community. I really want people to see that Black Deaf community has a lot to offer, and that we are contributing to the fabric of America and its history. I really want people to leave with a sense of awe. Black Deaf students deserve that. I didn't have that feeling growing up, but this is a different generation, so now we have every opportunity to build on that.

Building on the concept of representation in the curriculum, Koningin explained that the curriculum cannot be effectively taught without teachers engaging in introspective work and becoming more intentional in their efforts to be culturally prepared for Black Deaf students:

> It is the responsibility of the teachers to provide the curriculum focused on the Deaf Black experience that validates Black Deaf students. It would show that they care and are respectful of our experiences […] If there are moments where wrong information was shared, that's an opportunity for teachers to correct and have hard conversations with us. I think training is important for teachers so they will know what to do and will not cause harm. This needs to be required, not optional, for teachers and administration to take the training.

While Koningin advocated school staff and teachers to decenter whiteness and address the impact of systemic violence through teaching practices, Pete shared a similar sentiment, explaining that white teachers often learn about Blackness through a white-

centric lens, which perpetuates biases and assumptions about Black Deaf students. Furthermore, Pete emphasized that schools should focus on building authentic relationships with families and caregivers. Pete explained:

> We need to support the families because families send their kids to school, and that's the environment where their kids interact for 6,7, 8, hours a day. So how do we encourage their identity there? So, it's important that there's collaboration and working together with the community and making sure that the school is affirming their identity [...] To the white teachers, I would like to tell them that they shouldn't believe everything that they see online or on the news or what you read. That's where they got their assumptions from. Is there any time in their lives that they really consider their own whiteness? It's important to know how whiteness can influence others and their experiences.

Echoing on Pete's statement about white teachers' assumptions and bias, Big Mike explained that teachers need to engage in ongoing self-reflection and accountability to address anti-Blackness and their own biases:

> If I had to give White teachers advice, I would say, go back to your roots to understand your background and where you're from. It doesn't necessarily mean that you're wrong and your behavior is wrong, but you can take the time to do the work. There are so many resources out there. Your family might haven't unpacked, but it does not mean you shouldn't. It's important that you unpack all of your shit. You and everyone are very diverse. There are many races in this world, and you can't behave like that. And if your family is not following suit, you can decide to step away for a moment to pack your own shit, and whether they join you or not, that's on them. And folks need to learn that unpacking is

ongoing. There's no one set goal like today, I'm going to unpack anti-Blackness, and now I'm done. There's no certificate at the end of the road, there's no award for doing this work. You don't get a pat on the back. You will make mistakes. You will fall down sometimes but get up and continue. Keep unpacking your shit.

While Big Mike urged White teachers to embrace deeper levels of accountability, Ama pointed out that Black Deaf students can recognize whether teachers are genuinely committed or not. She encouraged teachers to show up authentically in the classroom and honor students' multiple identities. She explained:

> Be empathic in seeing Black Deaf students and encourage them and give them different opportunities and choices. Yes, look at Black students as students. Humanize them […] Don't be a white savior because we can see when someone is becoming a savior because they don't want to be racist. They will always be racist period. Educate yourself and do the work.

Lastly, Tory advocated for early identification of Black Deaf students, emphasizing the need for schools to develop curricula that center on Blackness and identity development. She described:

> [Black Deaf students] are uplifted and they no longer have to feel targeted or oppressed. I want them to feel powerful, empowered and have a strong connection with their identity. I want Black Deaf students to have access to learn about their identity earlier. We need more joy in the sense of belonging, a sense of home especially in education programs. We need systems in order to approach different isms. We need to fight. This change needs to happen. We need to incorporate racial justice and social justice in the classrooms.

As highlighted by the participants, there is a critical need to challenge and disrupt anti-Black practices and policies in education. Such efforts are important not only for Black Deaf students to succeed academically but also to thrive as individuals with a strong sense of identity and belonging. Their statements call for meaningful changes in policy and practice, including collaboration with the CBDS to collect and preserve Black Deaf history, which should be integrated into K-12 schools. This collaboration will decenter whiteness in deaf history while mandating the use of culturally affirming materials to represent and affirm students' identities. Schools should also focus on building authentic relationships with families and caregivers, developing policies that center Black families' perspectives in decision-making and curriculum. Lastly, participants collectively called for teachers to implement accountability measures, creating systems to address and reduce racial disparities in discipline, academic tracking, and other school practices that disproportionately affect Black Deaf students.

Black Deaf Joy as an Act of Resistance

Despite participants' traumatic experiences, they believe Black Deaf joy is necessary and an act of resistance. As I define it and as expressed by participants, Black Deaf joy is about being free, resilient, safe, and affirmed. It reminds us to remain grounded and prioritize self-preservation. It helps us to embrace our authentic selves in an anti-Black society.

Here are all participants' thoughts and perspectives on Black Deaf joy. Kalon and Big Mike describe Black Deaf joy as freedom and the ability to exist fully and authentically without constraint or prejudice Kalon said, "joy means freedom. Freedom to

learn and freedom to be myself, and the freedom to do whatever I want and to grow. That's joy, freedom." Big Mike had a similar perspective, he said:

> Being free, for sure. Being free of who you are and want to be. To be encouraged to embrace the Black identity, embrace your Black identity, embrace your culture, just to express however you want to express yourself, and not feeling like you have to hold back. Being in a space where we elevate each other through Blackness.

Koningin, Pete, Tory and Ama describe Black Deaf joy as a space where their Black identity is affirmed and embraces Black Deaf culture and community. Koningin wrote, "Black Deaf joy is a beautiful and powerful concept that celebrates the intersectional identity of being both Black Deaf […] the joy, resilience, and cultural richness found within the Black Deaf community." Pete mentioned, "[Black Deaf joy] means that we should have a space where Black Deaf people can feel comfortable being themselves without fear of being targeted or policed […] Black joy is to have that natural spontaneity to represent yourself without fear of retaliation." Tory described the concept of Black Deaf joy as having a deeper sense of connection and identity:

> Black Deaf Joy means happiness, connectivity, feeling aligned with our Black Deaf cultures and values, being together and mixing intergenerationally with youth and our elders. The goal is to feel at home and belong. Whether you feel far or near your community, you feel that sense of belonging and you feel at home…. This means the classroom no longer erases or hides those histories. They bring those histories to life to create joy within the classroom.

Ama empathized with the importance of affirmation through voices, stories, and history. She explained:

> To be seen, to be seen and to have our voices heard and uplift us and to share culture. To make them feel safe and like they can express themselves and no tokenism. The curriculum would include Black history, or Black Deaf history, Black identity, how that can be cherished or valued and for White students to be a great ally to them.

All participants believe in having the freedom to heal, resist oppression, and reclaim their Black Deaf identities and cultures. They believe that liberation, as freedom from oppression, is important for them to thrive beyond struggles and to focus on resilience and the strength of shared experiences.

Chapter Summary

These narratives reveal how the intersection of anti-Blackness and Whiteness continues to evolve across different eras. From Kalon, who attended a segregated Deaf school, to Tory, who graduated during the Black Lives Matter movement, all participants' experiences are interconnected. Despite educational reforms and efforts by lawmakers to ensure equal access to education, anti-Blackness and racial violence persist. The findings show that, while the educational landscape has evolved, Black Deaf students continue to face academic marginalization. Each participant encountered racial bias from their teachers, experienced isolation as one of the few Black Deaf students, struggled to find a sense of belonging in extracurricular activities, spent less time in the classroom due to unfair discipline, and had to code-switch to conform to White standards. Despite the changes in policies and the landscape of education, the deep-rooted impact of White supremacy and its manifestation in school settings is undeniable. The findings call for a critical need for transformative deaf education that not only disrupts anti-Blackness and Whiteness but also creates liberatory spaces for all Black Deaf students with intersectional identities.

Chapter 7: Discussion

I begin the chapter by discussing the participants' narratives through the lens of the BlackDeaf Crit framework to examine how anti-Blackness and Whiteness operate within K-12 deaf education. By centering the voices of Black Deaf participants, I highlight the urgent need for transformative changes in K-12 Deaf education to address racial oppression. In doing so, I propose implications for practical interventions, policy reforms and future research that prioritize equity and actively challenge the anti-Black structures in K-12 deaf education. I conclude the chapter by emphasizing the importance of creating liberatory spaces where Black Deaf students can thrive in anti-Black schooling spaces. Application of Conceptual Framework: Black Deaf Critical Theory

In Chapter 2, I developed Black Deaf Critical Theory (BlackDeaf Crit) framework to explicitly examine how White power structures contribute to the anti-Blackness deeply rooted in Black Deaf students' schooling experiences through a deaf epistemological lens. Using the BlackDeaf Crit framework allowed me to examine how anti-Blackness permeates the deaf education system by centering the experiences of Black Deaf students rather than focusing on Whiteness (Bell, 1992). The BlackDeaf Crit framework provided a lens through which I could identify the nuanced ways in which Black Deaf participants navigated issues such as adultification, pressure to assimilate into a White Deaf culture, and the erasure of their Black identities within anti-Black schooling spaces. Using the BlackDeaf Crit framework, I was able to deeply examine participants' narratives, revealing how anti-Black practices and policies impact Black Deaf students' schooling experiences. Through this lens, the BlackDeaf Crit framework demonstrates how systemic racial oppression functions in schooling spaces and provides valuable insights into the lived realities of Black Deaf students through their counter storytelling.

The BlackDeaf Crit framework has five framing ideas: (1) anti-Blackness is endemic, (2) pervasiveness of Whiteness, (3) hearingness as property, (4) intersectionality, and (5) counter storytelling. The findings from this study highlight how the Black Deaf participants contradicted and challenged master narratives and privileged discourses about their lived experiences (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). I used the first framing idea, counter storytelling, to allow Black Deaf participants to reclaim their stories and histories that had been silenced (Moges, 2020b). Dingus (2006) emphasizes the importance of listening to the voices of marginalized individuals and allowing them to oppose narratives rooted in anti-Black ideology, which is an approach I took in this study.

The second framing idea, hearingness as property, became evident in this study as I uncovered the subtle yet persistent influence of hearing-centric standards in schooling settings (Cawthon & Garberoglio, 2021; Holcomb et al., 2024). All participants reported having hearing teachers and school administrators, and almost all also noted being required to wear hearing aids, use FM systems, and to use spoken language. These experiences reflect systemic audism, where Black Deaf participants were expected to conform to hearing-centric norms, as evidenced in my study (Gertz, 2003; Lawyer, 2018). For example, Kalon shared a specific experience of feeling pressured to conform to hearing norms; she recalled being reprimanded for mispronouncing words despite having no access to sign language or a teacher of the deaf.

As I unpack the remaining three framing ideas, I will discuss how oppressive structures and practices continue to marginalize and subordinate Black Deaf students. This marginalization is not a collection of isolated experiences, but rather a systemic form of violence deeply embedded in K-12 deaf education.

Framing Idea: Anti-Blackness is Endemic

The BlackDeaf Crit framework frames anti-Blackness as permanent and endemic in the United States. In this study, I pointed out how anti-Blackness manifests in schooling spaces and showed *how* anti-Blackness functioned to reproduce the ideologies and practices that maintain Black Deaf students' dehumanization and racial subordination across eras. Black Deaf students' daily interactions with educators, administrators, peers, curriculum, standards, and expectations in schools are deeply shaped by the pervasive realities of anti-Blackness (Coles, 2020). These daily interactions contribute to a cycle of marginalization and reinforce racial subordination. My findings reveal that academic, social, disciplinary practices, and lack of Black Deaf teacher representation are deeply interconnected and shaped by the enduring force of anti-Blackness, which continues to influence the experiences and outcomes of Black Deaf students in schooling spaces.

Anti-Black bias and academic marginalization intersect in ways that uniquely disadvantage Black Deaf students by reinforcing racial hierarchies in schools and disregarding their academic potential (Ford & Harris, 1996). These hierarchies are maintained both institutionally and interpersonally. For example, there is a long history of Black Deaf students being relegated to low academic tracks that neither challenge them nor recognize their academic potential (Hairston & Smith, 1983; Holt & Allen, 1989; Myers et al., 2010). This hierarchy is reflected in how participants in this study reported being the only Black student or one of very few in higher track classes. Further, teachers often hold anti-Black bias and negative assumptions about Black Deaf students' abilities (Bigler & Wright, 2014), which was evidenced in my study. All participants shared experiences where their academic accomplishments were overlooked, undervalued, or underappreciated, illustrating how anti-Black bias contributes to teachers' lack of

support and low expectations (Trask-Tate & Cunningham, 2010). For example, some participants felt compelled to constantly prove themselves, as their academic achievements went ignored. This lack of recognition can harm Black Deaf students' motivation and sense of belonging in school (Warren & Boston, 2015).

Social marginalization is a pervasive force that systematically excludes Black Deaf participants outside of classrooms, further limiting their access to social opportunities and affirming spaces (Spencer & Ullucci, 2022). These limitations hindered participants' social skills and perpetuated isolation, particularly as related to extracurricular activities. For example, all participants were involved in sports and/or school-based organizations, but most participants reported they were not involved in Black Deaf organizations for a primary reason: the lack of institutional support from their schools. This lack of institutional support suggests that anti-Blackness creates and increases systemic barriers to opportunities for Black Deaf students; particularly when it comes to engaging with organizations that center their Black Deaf experiences, while reinforcing White dominance in organizations for White Deaf students (Spencer & Ullucci, 2022). Furthermore, the participants' narratives revealed that their schools focused more on their athleticism than their academic achievements. For example, Big Mike and Pete described their experiences as talented athletes, but noticed how their athletic skills garnered more attention from school personnel than their academic skills. Their experiences show how the lack of recognition and support for their academic achievements further marginalized their intellectual contributions, which reinforced the systemic devaluation of Black Deaf students' intellectual abilities (Spencer & Ullucci, 2022).

Academic and social experiences are not the only important aspects of schooling; teachers play a big role in shaping students' identities, sense of belonging, and overall

educational journey (Wentzel, 1997). My study findings shed light on the significant underrepresentation of Black Deaf teachers. Almost all participants reported never having had a Black Deaf teacher, highlighting the continued dominance of White, hearing educators in deaf education (Andrews & Jordan; Simms et al., 2008). As a result, White Deaf students experience racial representation in which their connections to Whiteness are affirmed through role models who reflect their own racial and cultural backgrounds (García-Fernández, 2014). Thus, the underrepresentation of Black Deaf teachers further marginalizes Black Deaf students by denying them access to role models who understand their unique needs and challenges.

Further, this study revealed how school policies are not race neutral, but they are structured in ways that reinforce racial hierarchies (Dowd, 2018). All the study participants faced adultification, which was connected to their experiences with unfair and disproportionate disciplinary actions for minor incidents. For example, nearly all participants were suspended—for incidents both inside and outside of school—for behaviors ranging from yelling to accidentally hitting a student with a bicycle. These findings reinforce LaMarr and Egbert's (2020) study, which found that Black Deaf students have the highest suspension rates among all racial/ethnic groups of Deaf students. This finding suggests that school policies and practices are constructed with inherent anti-Blackness that targets Black Deaf students, which further perpetuates a cycle of exclusion and dehumanization (Spencer & Ullucci, 2022).

Framing Idea: Pervasiveness of Whiteness

BlackDeaf Crit emphasizes that Whiteness is pervasive and functions to uphold White supremacy in society. Whiteness continues to be socially constructed in opposition to Blackness, reinforcing White supremacy by framing Whiteness as the societal ideal and Blackness as a symbol of failure (Coles, 2020). This study examined participants' narratives to uncover ways

Whiteness and White dominance and power are established and maintained in K-12 deaf education.

Some of the ways evidenced in this study are depriving Black Deaf students of curriculum on Black Deaf History, compelling Black Deaf students to adhere to white Deaf culture and suppressing or even forbidding expressions of Blackness in school. For example, all participants reported not learning about Black Deaf history until college. During their K-12 schooling, they were only exposed to deaf history curricula which reinforced the ideology that Whiteness is the standard for what Black students should be taught. This finding supports Harris' (1993) argument about Whiteness as property and how it is used to erase Black Deaf history, prioritizing White Deaf experiences and leaving Black Deaf students ignorant of their own history and culture (Moges, 2020b). This "omission and whitewashing" of curricula supports the structures of White supremacy (Spencer & Ullucci, 2022, p. 57) by erasing the histories, contributions, and experiences of Black Deaf community members who have shaped the deaf community and deaf education. This erasure not only perpetuates systemic anti-Blackness in deaf education but also normalizes Whiteness while reinforcing the subordination of Blackness.

The participants' stories revealed the intense pressure, both subtle and overt, to conform to a White Deaf culture in their schools. They were often expected to suppress aspects of their Black identity to assimilate into these schooling spaces. For instance, Ama faced criticism for her hairstyles, clothing, and presentation, which were deemed "too Black." Similarly, Tory, Big Mike, Koningin, and Kalon had to adjust their signing styles to align with the norms of White Deaf culture (Bayley et al., 2017; McCaskill et al., 2011). While code-switching across different social settings is common among Black Deaf signers (McCaskill et al., 2011), research by Bayley et al. (2017) and Hill (2017) suggests that when forced to use White signing practices in school,

some Black Deaf students may abandon their Black practices altogether. This abandonment may disconnect or alienate them from the Black Deaf community.

The expectation that they assimilate into Whiteness not only erased participants' Black identities but also led to a sense of dehumanization, as they navigated school spaces that did not affirm their Blackness (Annamma, 2015). These pressures stemmed from unspoken rules implying that conformity to Whiteness—including in one's language and behavior—was expected. Such norms were often implicitly communicated and reinforced through the policing of participants' behaviors and signing skills, as well as the denial of their cultural expressions. These practices upheld racial hierarchies in schooling spaces, positioning Whiteness as the standard while marginalizing Black Deaf students' identities and ways of being, which are framed as "other" or "inferior" (McIntosh, 1988; Myles et al., 2004). In school, educators set norms—such as those pertaining to signing and deaf identity—that are inherently White. Consequently, Black Deaf students who do not conform to these "norms" are often viewed as inferior and deficient, as reflected in the narratives of participants in this study and in prior research (Hollins & Guzman, 2005).

Framing Idea: Intersectionality

The BlackDeaf Crit framework rejects a single-identity approach and pushes for an intersectional analysis to understand how intersections between race, disability, gender, and other oppressed identities impact Black Deaf students in schooling spaces. My findings revealed that all participants did not identify as Black Deaf individuals until late high school or during college. The late identification of a Black Deaf identity demonstrates how deaf schools, as institutions, reinforce a single-identity framework that prioritizes deafness over other identities. This single-identity framing of deafness reinforces the concept of "DEAF SAME" (Burke, 2014; Ruiz-

Williams et al., 2016), leading to schooling spaces that privilege White Deaf experiences as the sole focus (García-Fernández, 2014). This framing not only excludes Black Deaf students, but perpetuates systemic anti-Blackness by positioning Whiteness as the default in deaf education.

Furthermore, my data point to a potential flaw in three well-known studies by Aramburo (1989), Foster and Kinuthia (2003), and Valli et al. (1992), in which participants were asked to choose a primary identity. In contrast, participants in this study talked about having multiple identities that were interconnected and not hierarchical (Crenshaw, 1981, 1991). As Lorde (1984) states, "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives" (p. 138). Intersectionality is crucial for understanding the diverse experiences of Black Deaf individuals, extending beyond a white-centric Deaf identity. The erasure of identities, specifically Blackness, in schooling spaces underscores the importance of an intersectional lens to recognize the compounding effects of anti-Black racism and other forms of oppression that Black Deaf students experience.

Same Story, Different Time

The striking similarities in participants' experiences across the three eras reveal the enduring nature of anti-Blackness and White dominance in K-12 deaf education. By applying the BlackDeaf Crit framework, my analysis exposes how anti-Black educational policies and practices have continuously marginalized Black Deaf students; they appear to have remained largely unchanged, indicating a lack of progress in addressing racial violence in schooling spaces. This lack of progress is very concerning because, while the educational landscape has evolved, many educators have failed to confront and challenge the deep-rooted structures of anti-Blackness and White supremacy. In addition, there is a continued lack of understanding of how Whiteness is structured by anti-Blackness, positioning Black Deaf students as inferior in deaf

education (ross, 2020), erasing their intersectional identities. Without intentional efforts to restructure deaf education through intersectional lens, Black Deaf students will continue to face exclusion and oppression in schooling spaces.

This study showed a pattern of anti-Blackness by highlighting how the belief in Black inferiority has contributed to the intentional construction of an ideology that reinforces a deficit perspective on Black Deaf bodies (ross, 2020). Scholars point out that discussions about racism have received little attention in the deaf education (García-Fernández, 2014, 2020; McCaskill, 2005; Moges, 2020b; Stapleton, 2014). In addition, the deaf community is deeply connected to deaf education, as deaf people generally share a common goal—to center (White) deaf experiences from birth to postsecondary education (Lane, 1996). However, the deaf community, overall, has failed to recognize how anti-Blackness is deeply entrenched in their beliefs and behaviors, shaping the experiences of Black Deaf students both inside and outside of school.

Burch (2002) asserts that the White Deaf community does not address inequalities that Black Deaf students experience. This lack of consideration has led to a disconnection between Black Deaf students and the larger deaf community, as the exclusion and neglect of their educational rights has reinforced racial hierarchies in deaf spaces. The lack of educational reforms and attention from the broader deaf community suggests that Black Deaf students' experiences have remained largely unchanged across eras. ross (2021) challenges us to critically examine how anti-Blackness functions and is embedded in K-12 deaf education, urging us to recognize how Black Deaf bodies are dispossessed and marginalized in schooling spaces. In response, this study uncovers the pervasive nature of anti-Blackness and calls for systemic changes that center Black Deaf experiences.

This study calls for disrupting anti-Blackness in K-12 deaf education by addressing and confronting K-12 educational systems, practices, and policies that reinforce White power structures. It emphasizes that transformative change requires a collective community effort with intentional action to build race consciousness and examine how White supremacy and anti-Blackness perpetuate racial violence and dehumanization in K-12 deaf education. The study advocates for the creation of liberatory educational spaces and demands a fundamental restructuring of systemic practices, to prioritize and center Black Deaf voices and experiences.

Implications of the Collective Work

Ultimately, deaf education has the potential to liberate or oppress (Friere, 1968). We, collectively, must understand how anti-Blackness, Whiteness, and hearingness are embedded within pedagogical practices that marginalize and silence Black Deaf students' voices and experiences. Efforts to resist anti-Blackness must be embedded in all practices and relationships, not treated as an "add-on" (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021). We must understand anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism, recognizing their impact on daily educational practices and educators' relationships with students (Coles, 2020). Through self-reflection and examining their positionality, educators can identify areas to learn and unlearn, taking ownership over the issue to initiate changes in school practices (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021). Further, we must create policies that pave the way for systemic change, actively dismantle anti-Blackness and Whiteness in school curricula, increase the representation of Black Deaf teachers and staff, mandate comprehensive equity training for all school personnel, and establish strong accountability measures to ensure fair treatment and support for Black Deaf students and their intersectional identities.

We must challenge ourselves to create spaces that empower Black Deaf students to envision paths to freedom—spaces of radical hope that embody Black futurity (Dumas & ross, 2016). Black liberatory fantasy holds significant implications for deaf education, offering a lens to critically examine anti-Blackness in educational systems. Drawing inspiration from Dumas and ross' concept of Black liberatory fantasy, we should seek to (re)imagine deaf education as something beyond what it has traditionally been, with the goal of demonstrating how hope can transform schools into liberatory spaces centered on Black Deaf joy, love, resistance, and happiness (Love, 2019).

Practical Interventions

Black Deaf students deserve humanizing educational experiences that challenge the dehumanization they face, and they often seek affirming spaces to cope with anti-Blackness. Creating "homeplaces" in anti-Black schooling environments is crucial. hooks (1990) define homeplace as a space of belonging, love, racial healing, and resistance, where Black Deaf students can have their full identities recognized and affirmed. These homeplaces can provide protective environments that shield Black Deaf students from daily racial oppression, supporting both their social and academic well-being. As an example, Black Deaf school-based organizations for youths, where they can thrive, persevere, and experience joy and cultural fulfillment, are necessary (Hairston & Smith, 1983).

Further, when Black Deaf students are expected to focus solely on their deaf identity and disregard their Blackness, it reinforces anti-Blackness and neglects the intersectional nature of their multiple identities. Additionally, the lack of education about Black Deaf culture and history perpetuates anti-Blackness and further marginalizes their experiences. To help Black Deaf students reach their full potential, educators must examine how anti-Blackness affects their

Black identity through teaching practices, curricula, and policies, and Whiteness must be decentered in the K-12 deaf education system as a whole (Ohito, 2016). The current, pervasive race evasive approach to deaf education limits opportunities for Black Deaf students to connect with their authentic selves and meaningfully engage in discussions about anti-Blackness. By disrupting anti-Blackness, practitioners can invite complexity into conversations about truths and empower Black Deaf students to navigate an unjust society. The experiences of all K-12 Black Deaf students must be prioritized, with their knowledge, needs, and aspirations taken into account in the schooling spaces.

While teachers may have limited influence over policy changes, they can implement counterspace pedagogy (Grace-Williams, 2018). Grace-Williams (2018) developed a counterspace pedagogy as "a reference to decolonizing instructional strategies that are culturally responsive to the daily realities (e.g., racism and xenophobia) of Black students in urban spaces and beyond" (p. 18). Counterspace pedagogy challenges educators to name Black Deaf students' racialized experiences. By centering Blackness, teachers engage in self-reflection, disrupt anti-Black biases, and critically examine classroom dynamics. These strategies enable educators to understand how Blackness shapes Black Deaf students' identities and worldviews, offering an opportunity to challenge harmful narratives and support these students in developing critical consciousness while disrupting the anti-Black biases embedded in schooling spaces.

Grace-Williams (2018) provides three ways to implement counter space pedagogy: *see*, *space*, and *support*. First, *see* refers to an opportunity for educators to engage in self-reflection to disrupt anti-Black biases by attending ongoing professional development and collaborating with other Black Deaf educators and community members. Second, *space* involves classrooms that affirm Black Deaf students' identities by centering their experiences and

challenging deficit views of them. This affirmation of identities can be done through BASL poems and songs that incorporate multiple truths about Black Deaf communities. Building on the concept of *space*, Coles (2020) provides a model for this process through the creation and collection of critical literacy artifacts that challenge prevailing narratives about Black Deaf students' experiences. This approach goes beyond dismantling oppressive norms; it recognizes the inherent power of Black Deaf students to shape and co-create their own realities through art, videos, and literature. Lastly, *support* refers to involving families and community members in the educational process. Since practices and policies are often decided by those in positions of power, this *support* encourages families, caregivers, and community members to have a seat at the table in developing policies and practices that center Blackness.

Policy Reforms

Deaf education must explicitly acknowledge the existence and impact of anti-Blackness in its policies. Two themes in the present study on policies are school disciplinary procedures and code-switching. First, to effectively address punitive and exclusionary practices in deaf education, school policies should adopt restorative practices as a framework for creating spaces where Black Deaf students are empowered to engage in meaningful dialogue and develop a sense of belonging (Lustik, 2021). Unlike punitive discipline practices, restorative practices focus on repairing relationships, promoting healing for those harmed, and preventing repeat harms (Zehr & Gohar, 2002). Restorative practices should be implemented proactively, not just as a response to harm. These practices can be integrated into the school environment as a collaborative effort between the school and Black Deaf students, fostering a positive school climate and reducing racial disparities in school discipline.

Second, schools that implement a bilingual philosophy of ASL and English have a

significant, negative impact on Black Deaf students who use languages other than ASL and English. Black Deaf students who are required to sign "White" to fit into school norms, both linguistically and in other ways, often experience a sense of erasure. Lim (2022) argues that the ASL and English bilingual philosophy does not adequately honor deaf students, particularly Deaf Students of Color with multilingual backgrounds and their linguistic identities. Deaf Students of Color are taught that ASL and English are the *only* pathways to success in deaf education, without recognition of how multilingualism and race influence language ideologies.

School policies must adopt frameworks that encourage multilingualism, including BASL and Black English, so Black Deaf students can authentically use and express their languages. Language is a powerful tool for affirming identity (Baker-Bell, 2020), and it has a profound impact on Black Deaf students' schooling experiences. By intentionally incorporating languages beyond ASL and English, schools can help break the cycle of systemic, White linguistic dominance that negatively affects Black Deaf students. School language policies must be evaluated to ensure they reflect the realities of Black Deaf students, and spaces must be created for them to discuss their history and language.

In conclusion, the implications of practices, policies, and understandings related to anti-Blackness can significantly shape the educational experiences of Black Deaf students. These students should be centered and honored in schools, and their aspirations must be taken into account. We must be intentional about recognizing and disrupting anti-Blackness in the institutional practices, curricula and policies that contribute to the dehumanization of Black Deaf students.

Future Research

Black Deaf students are sorely under-researched in the deaf education field. Research is needed to understand how we can dismantle educational systems that reinforce anti-Blackness, audism, linguism, and other forms of oppression. In this study, I articulated the need for specific analyses that center Black Deaf experience, which led me to the development of BlackDeaf Crit. I challenge scholars who study Black Deaf students in deaf education to think deeply about the power of anti-Blackness, Whiteness, and hearingness and how they are (re)produced to maintain White supremacy. The BlackDeaf Crit framework will guide scholars to the complexity of and hidden narratives in educational research and gain a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between race and disability/deafness. BlackDeaf Crit can be used to build on the existing body of knowledge and to better document and understand Black Deaf students' experiences and perspectives, through the lens of intersectionality, to improve their educational outcomes.

Study Limitations

This study has several limitations which have implications for future research. First, I focused solely on Black Deaf participants who graduated from deaf schools, excluding those from public school settings. Black Deaf individuals who graduated from public schools could offer valuable insights into navigating hearing-centric schooling spaces—an area where I lacked sufficient data. Second, all participants identified as "Deaf," so I did not capture the experiences of individuals who identify as DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, Hard of Hearing, or Late Deafened. Third, deaf education involves multiple stakeholders, including families and deaf educators; their perspectives are crucial for more fully understanding the effects of anti-Black policies and practices on Black Deaf students. Finally, this study concentrated on systemic violence and

oppression without exploring liberatory spaces that center Black Deaf joy, love, resistance, and happiness. In conclusion, increasing the body of research on Black Deaf students is integral to transforming educational practices, policies, and schooling spaces and ensuring these students are not only accommodated but truly empowered to succeed and thrive in all aspects of their educational journeys.

Final Thoughts

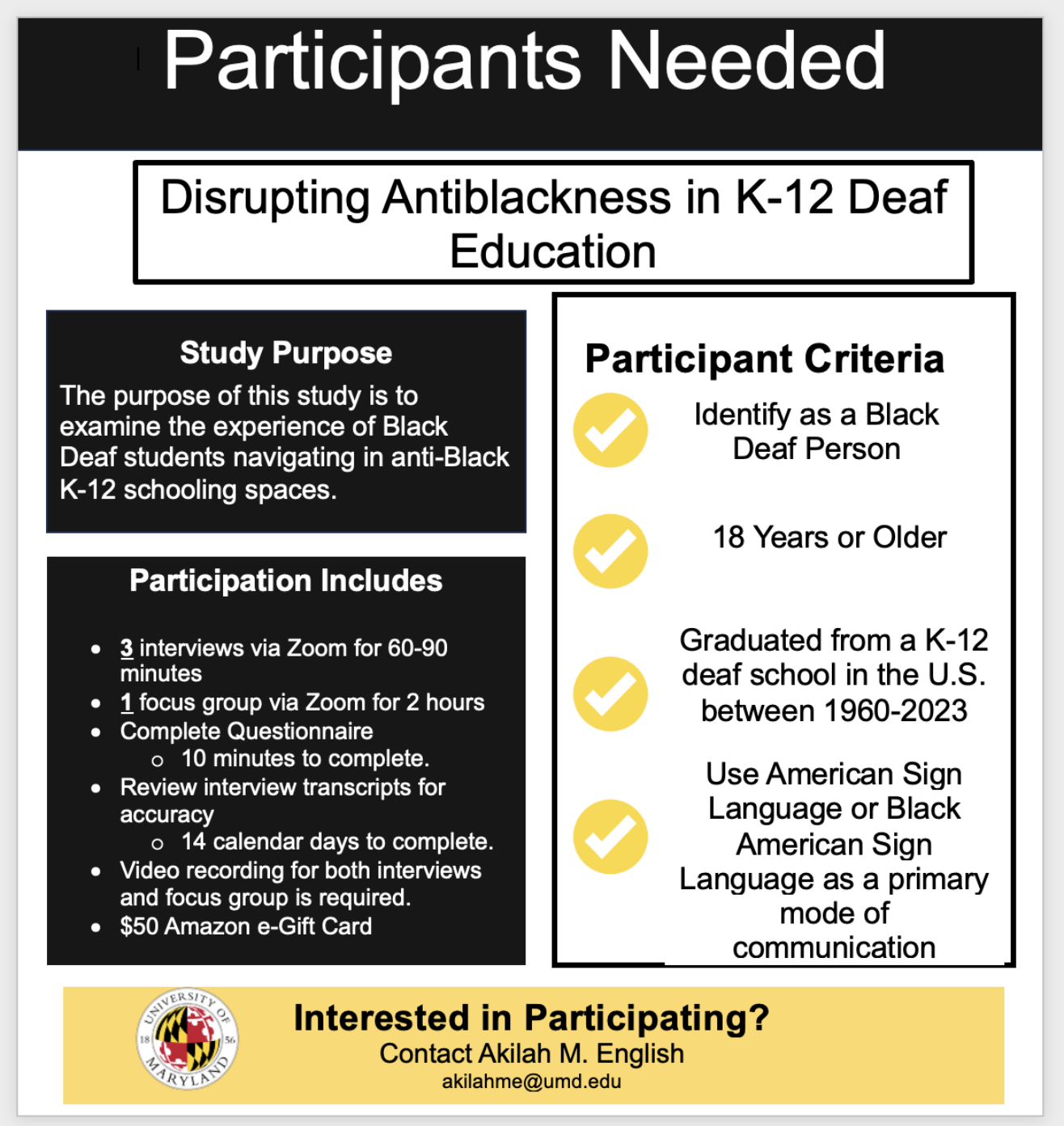
I conclude this dissertation with a statement I co-authored: "We now understand that the system of deaf education was originally never designed for Black [Deaf] students and continues to be a space for anti-Blackness" (Nicolarakis, 2022, p. 72). This sentiment resonates strongly with my study findings. The deaf education system was and remains unequipped to equitably serve Black Deaf students. The persistence of anti-Blackness within K-12 Deaf education means Black Deaf students often encounter curricula, practices, and policies that disregard their identities and humanity. It is crucial to acknowledge that Black Deaf students navigate multiple intersecting identities, and their schooling experiences are shaped by at the intersections of anti-Blackness, whiteness, hearingness, and other systems of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). While many critical race scholars believe racism is a permanent fixture of society (Bell, 1992), this belief does not preclude the creation of Black liberatory spaces—spaces where Black Deaf joy, identity, and humanity are celebrated (Dumas & ross, 2016; hooks, 1994).

We must remain committed to supporting the hopes and dreams of Black Deaf students, even in anti-Black schooling spaces. My hope is that this work serves as a catalyst for change, encouraging the deaf education system to reckon with its structurally anti-Black past and present, and ultimately move toward a more equitable and just future for Black Deaf students. In Chapter Six, I shared the participants' reflections on Black Deaf joy and highlighted how they find

resilience and hope despite systemic challenges. Their joy is an act of resistance and a path to radical healing and reclaiming spaces that were not originally intended for them. By celebrating Black Deaf joy and honoring the complexities of Black Deaf individuals' intersecting identities, we affirm that Black Deaf students deserve educational spaces that nurture their full humanity, resilience, and brilliance. This study calls for a reimagining of K-12 deaf education—one that rejects anti-Blackness and genuinely supports Black Deaf students in realizing their fullest potential. It is time.

Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Material



Appendix B: Research Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Project Title	Disrupting Anti-Blackness in K-12 Deaf Education
Purpose of the Study	This research is being conducted by **Akilah English** at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you identify yourself as a Black Deaf adult and you attended a deaf school in the United States. The purpose of this research project is to understand the experience of Black Deaf students in K-12 deaf education.
Procedures	The procedures involve you completing a questionnaire, three interviews, and one focus group, as well as reviewing the transcripts for accuracy and clarity. The purpose of the questionnaire is to gather your background information to better understand your experiences and perspectives. The questionnaire takes 10 minutes to complete. The focus group aims to understand how you and other participants navigate in K-12 deaf education as Black Deaf students. You will be in a group of up to 6 participants. I will ask questions and encourage you and other participants to share your experiences and perspectives. The focus group should last approximately 2 hours. The three one-on-one interviews focus on your specific experience as a Black Deaf student. The interviews give you an opportunity to share your story about your challenges and joys in K-12 deaf education. Each interview should last 60-90 minutes. The focus group and interviews will be scheduled at a time that is mutually convenient for both you and the researcher. You may review a copy of the interview questions, focus group questions, and questionnaire up to 2 weeks before the scheduled interviews and focus group. They will be sent via email. All interviews, including focus group, will be video recorded through Zoom, and recording is required to participate. You can choose whether or not to participate in the interviews and/or focus group, and you may stop at any time during the course of the study. After the interviews and focus group, the recorded videos will be transcribed. You will receive the transcripts, and you have up to two weeks

	to review them and check for accuracy. Here are examples of questions: Interview Questions: ● What was your relationship like when you were with your Black friends? ● Do you feel other students respect you as a Black individual? Provide examples. ● Was your culture represented well in the classroom? (video, books, curriculum). Provide examples. Focus Group Questions: ● Share your experience of being discriminated against or oppressed as a Black Deaf student. ● How did your teachers or peers treat you as a Black Deaf student? Questionnaire: ● Do you know what racism means? Yes ____ No _____ ● Do you know what anti-Blackness means? Yes ___ No ____
Potential Risks and Discomforts	I will take precautions to protect you and your data to minimize potential risks. Interview questions may cover sensitive topics such as experiences with anti-Blackness, racism, and oppression, which could evoke anxiety or distress. Additionally, you may feel uncomfortable knowing that the interview is recorded. You are not obliged to answer any triggering questions. You may ask questions at any time during the study or withdraw from it without facing any consequences.
Potential Benefits	There are some potential benefits. You may benefit from the opportunity to share your stories and knowing that your stories will be used to better understand and improve deaf education and research on deaf education in the future.
Confidentiality	Throughout the study, I will take multiple steps to protect your confidentiality. I will be the only person with access to the data, and no identifying participant information will be included in any publications (including the dissertation), or presentations based on the study. All study data (video recordings, transcripts, and any notes I take during or after the interviews) will be stored on my password-protected computer. The recorded videos will be destroyed when the transcriptions are completed. All of the data, including transcripts and notes, will be destroyed after completing doctoral studies. Questionnaire: Your identifiable information from the questionnaire will be collected. The purpose of identifiable information is a preparation for the interviews and focus group. When the transcripts are completed, the questionnaire will be destroyed.

	Focus Group: You will be asked to respect the privacy of other focus group members by not disclosing any content discussed during the study. If I write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.
Compensation	After completing the questionnaire, interviews, focus group and reviewing the transcripts, you will be compensated with a $50 Amazon e-gift card for your time and expertise. *You may leave the study at any time. All eligible participants, regardless of whether they leave the study early, will receive a $15 Amazon e-gift card.* *The Amazon e-gift card will be sent to you via email.*
Right to Withdraw and Questions	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator: **Akilah M. English** akilahme@umd.edu
Participant Rights	If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678 For more information regarding participant rights, please visit: https://research.umd.edu/resources/research-compliance/institutional-review-board-irb/research-participants This research has been reviewed according to the University of

	Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.	
Statement of Consent	Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this consent form via email. If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.	
Signature and Date	**NAME OF PARTICIPANT [Please Print]**	
	SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT	
	DATE	

Appendix C: Participant Questionnaire

Name: _____

How do you identify racially?

Black: ____ African American ____ AfroCaribbean American: ____ Multiracial: _____

Biracial: _____ Other: _____

How do you identify yourself?

Deaf: ____ DeafBlind: ____ DeafDisabled: ____ Hard of Hearing: _____

Late Deafened: _____ Other: _____

What is your gender identity?

Woman ____ Men: ____ Transgender: _____ Non-Binary/Non-Conforming: _____

Prefer not to respond: _____

Did you attend a deaf school? Yes ____ No _____

If so, where did you attend? _____

How long did you attend a deaf school? _____

What year did you graduate? _____

What kind of sign language do you use? Select all that apply.

American Sign Language: _____ Black American Sign Language: _____

Other: _____

Do you know what racism means? Yes ____ No _____

Do you know what anti-Blackness means? Yes ____ No _____

Do you know what audism means? Yes ____ No _____

Do you know how to use Zoom platform? Yes ____ No _____

Do you need accommodations during the interview? Yes ____ No _____

If so, what kind of accommodations? _____

Appendix D: Interview Protocols

Research Questions:

1. What stories do Black Deaf adults tell us about anti-Blackness in K-12 deaf education?
    a. How do Black Deaf adults describe their lived experience in K-12 deaf education?
2. How has K-12 deaf education been designed, over time, to perpetuate anti-Blackness through educational policies and practices?

Interview Protocol #1

Self-Identify

1. What is your race and ethnicity? Were you born deaf or hearing? If you were born hearing, when did you become deaf?
2. Do you identify yourself as deaf, deafblind, deafdisabled, hard of hearing or late deafened?
3. What mode of communication do you use?
4. What is your gender identity?
5. What else do you identify yourself that I haven't asked?
6. Please choose a name by which you will be identified in this study. This should not be your actual first name.

Family History

1. Is your family deaf or hearing?
2. Does your family use American Sign Language?
3. Does your family use Black American Sign Language? What about other sign languages?
4. If your family does not sign, what kind of mode of communication did you use?

Deaf School

1. Did you attend a deaf school since early childhood education? If not, when did you start attending a deaf school?
2. Can you describe your school's language philosophy?
3. Is your school a part of "a big deaf school" or "a small deaf school"?
4. Is your school in the city or rural?
5. Were you a day student or a day/dorm student?
6. Most of the students at your schools are predominantly White or Black?

Racial Identity

1. Can you tell me about the first time you became aware of your identity as a Black person? What happened?
2. Can you share a story about a time when your identity as a Black individual was affirmed? What made that moment significant for you?
3. What has your journey of racial identity development been like? Can you describe any key moments or experiences that stand out to you?

Wrap Up

1. Is there anything we have discussed about which you would like to elaborate?
2. Do you have any questions for me?

Interview Protocol #2

Schooling Experience

1. How would you describe yourself as a student?
2. Can you walk me through a moment that stands out as a favorite memory during your time as a Black Deaf student? What made it special for you?
3. Thinking back on your relationships with teachers, can you share a story that captures an experience you had—whether it was uplifting or challenging?
4. Tell me about a time with your friends that brought you joy or left a lasting impression on you. What made that moment meaningful?
5. Reflecting on your relationships with friends, what stories do you recall that highlight the positive or difficult aspects of those connections?

Curriculum

1. Can you share a story about how your Blackness was represented in the curriculum? Were there aspects of your identity or background reflected in videos, books, or the curriculum? Can you share specific examples or moments when you felt seen—or unseen?
2. What stories, lessons, or knowledge about Black Deaf history have you learned? How have these influenced your understanding of yourself and your experiences as a Black Deaf student?

Wrap Up

1. Is there anything we have discussed about which you would like to elaborate?
2. Do you have any questions for me?

Interview Protocol #3

Anti-Black Practices and Policies

1. Can you share a story about a challenge you faced as a Black Deaf student? How did it shape your experience at school?
2. 2.Tell me about a time when you felt discriminated against because of your identity as a Black student? What happened?
3. Can you think of a school policy that felt harmful to you as a Black Deaf student? How did it affect your experience, and what stands out to you about it?
4. Looking back, can you share a story about how other students treated you as a Black Deaf student? Were there moments when you felt respected or disrespected?
5. Reflect on your relationships with teachers. Can you tell me about a time when you felt respected or disrespected?

Supportive and Affirming Spaces

1. Can you share a story about a time when you felt truly affirmed as a Black Deaf student? What happened, and how did it make you feel?
2. How would you describe Black Deaf joy in the classroom? Can you share an example or moment that reflects what it means to you?
3. Thinking about deaf education, what kind of resources or support do you wish had been available? Can you share how those resources might have changed your experience?
4. If you could give advice to teachers about creating an affirming space, what would it look like?
5.

Wrap Up

1. Is there anything we have discussed about which you would like to elaborate?
2. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix E: Focus Group Non-Disclosure Agreement

You have been invited to participate in a focus group for my dissertation. This focus group aims to understand how you navigate in anti-Black schooling spaces as a Black Deaf student. The information from this focus group will be used to better understand and improve deaf education and research on deaf education in the future.

Procedure: For this study, you will be part of a group of 6 individuals. I will ask you several questions while facilitating the discussion. This focus group will be video recorded. However, your responses will remain confidential, and your pseudonym will be used in the dissertation.

You can choose whether or not to participate in the focus group and may stop at any time during the study. Please note that there are no right or wrong answers to focus group questions. I want to hear the many varying viewpoints and would like everyone to contribute their thoughts. Out of respect, please refrain from interrupting others. However, feel free to be honest even when your responses counter those of other group members.

Confidentiality: Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to respect the privacy of other focus group members by not disclosing any content discussed during the study. I will analyze the data, but—as stated above—your responses will remain confidential, and your pseudonym will be used in the dissertation.

I understand this information and agree to participate fully under the conditions stated above.

Sign name: _____Date: _____

Print name: _____

Appendix F: Focus Group Protocol

During this focus group, I will ask questions and facilitate a conversation about the participants' lived experiences in K-12 deaf education.

Before proceeding with the focus group, remind the participants:

Appreciation for their time and expertise in this study.

- Researcher will ask questions to stimulate the conversation.
- Share openly and honestly. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers to any questions.
- With respect for each other, one participant speaks at a time.
- Comments from the focus group will remain confidential.
- Focus group session will be recorded.
- Their real name will not be used, and please use self-selected pseudonyms.
- Provide an opportunity for the participants to ask questions or to clarify.

The focus group questions listed below are samples and will be adjusted based on information obtained from the interviews and questionnaire.

1. Let's do a quick round of introductions. When you introduce yourself, please use your self-selected pseudonym. Share the year you graduated from a deaf school.
2. Share your experience of being discriminated against or oppressed as a Black Deaf student.
    a. Is there any specific example that you want to share such as teacher bias, school curriculum and school policy?
    b. How did your teachers or peers treat you as a Black Deaf student?
3. Share your experience when your Black Deaf identity was affirmed.
4. If you want to give advice for teachers for creating an affirming space, what does it look like?

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