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14. The Burden of Racism and Audism

LINDSAY DUNN

THIS CHAPTER will attempt to raise issues in the form of a debate about culture, social justice, and identity. It is based partly on conversations with hearing and Deaf friends and is intended to raise critical and controversial dialogues on the twin conditions of race and audism that are heavy burdens on Deaf people of color in general and black Deaf people in particular.

The author is a Deaf black South African who is married to a hearing African American; they have three South African-American children who are hearing. The author grew up in a multicultural and multilingual environment in both rural and township areas of South Africa. He became deaf from spinal meningitis at age eleven and acquired sign language skills at age thirteen (Irish Sign Language used at the Dominican School for the Deaf in Cape Town, which he attended for five years).¹ He learned American Sign Language (ASL) at twenty-one when he enrolled at Gallaudet University.

The antagonist in the dialogue is a white hearing male (WHM).

WHM: You know, the pharmaceutical industry has made great strides in introducing various new products over the years with great potential to alleviate social problems.

LD: Absolutely, I most certainly concur. Hopefully there will be a cure for cancer and the global HIV/AIDS epidemic in my lifetime.

WHM: Yes, but I am referring to the potential benefits of melanin, hair strengtheners, and even hair dyeing products.

LD: Oh, I see. But I am not sure I understand where this is leading to.

WHM: Well, actually since you and I have been in conflict over our views regarding the status of black people and minorities in this country as well as the status of deaf and disabled people, I have given great thought about the possibilities of medicine and technology as possible solutions to social problems.

LD: You are definitely kidding. Right?

WHM: Well, actually no. I would assume you would agree with me. Don't you?

LD: Please elaborate; I think I am losing you here.

WHM: I mean, let's look at it this way: it is definitely an advantage to be a normal hearing white person in society today, wouldn't you agree?

LD: Meaning that is a disadvantage to be black and deaf, is that what you mean?

WHM: Absolutely my friend; so you get the gist of my thinking?

LD: Actually, the isms, racism and audism, appear to be the first words entering my mind right now and frankly I hope I am exaggerating.

WHM: Oh come on, won't you agree that your children would live a more satisfying life if you had them looking white and don't you think that deaf children would integrate more easily and comfortably in society if they were implanted with cochlear implants from the time they were diagnosed as being deaf?

LD: No.

Perplexed, my friend shook his head and looked at me in consternation.

WHM: But my friend, affirmative action, multiculturalism, diversity, Deaf Culture, and all that bunk is really nothing but political correctness and such fads are just temporary attempts to penetrate the conscience of the dominant race. Frankly, I think you are abusing your children if you deny them this opportunity to become normal white children.

LD: Abusing my children by raising them as black children in America? Are you also suggesting parents who raise deaf children are abusing their children by allowing them to use sign language as their primary mode of communication and rejecting cochlear implants?

WHM: Absolutely. For one thing, there is no real hope for black folks and other minorities to ever gain equality in American society. It is just the way this society is designed. From the very beginning the idea was for this to be a white-dominated society and nonwhites were basically always going to be "guests" invited to serve at the beck and call of white superiors. It is just the reality of things. Just look at labor statistics and you find black and disabled people have high unemployment rates; just look at academic scores whether SAT, LSAT, GMAT, or whatever, and white students consistently rank well above black students. It is a fact that prime neighborhoods will always be the domain of the privileged white majority, and wealth will most certainly remain concentrated within this ethnic group wherever they are in the world. I mean I am sure you have read Charles Murray's *The Bell Curve*² haven't you? While I agree with the black Republican J. C. Watts³ who noted that affirmative action programs were one of a very few legal tools available to black folks that gave black folks a chance to squeeze inside the door of opportunity, the reality is that these doors will shut down. I envision the same fate for the Americans with Disabilities Act. Disabled people are a burden on society and demand too much in terms of resources and only remind society of imperfections we must eliminate in order to create a perfect world. Don't you agree that the recent mapping of the genetic code is a major scientific breakthrough? I am absolutely ecstatic as I ponder the medical possibilities.

LD: You mean such as cloning and its potential to eliminate black people and people with disabilities?

WHM: Well, since there is no benefit for being either, I certainly believe cloning offers society the best potential for eliminating burdensome conditions.

LD: Burdensome conditions? I have read Murray but have you read Bahan, Hoffmeister, and Lane's *A Journey into the Deaf-World*?⁴

I was reminded of a discussion at the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity (NCORE) conference in 2003 where Dr. Francis Kendall gave a workshop on "Being an Ally as a Person with White Privilege: This is Not Just About Being Friends."⁵ Dr. Kendall pointed out that: "we (white people) have been given unearned privileges that affect

each of our lives every minute of every day." The effect of these privileges brings nothing but bliss to the holder and nothing but misery for those who are not so privileged. It is the law of the haves and have-nots and it is necessary for this equilibrium to be maintained at all costs. So why would I deprive my children of melanin, hair strengtheners, and perhaps an eye implant to make their eyes blue? Why would I not want my children to enjoy this unearned privileged existence?

WHM: Surely you cannot force your children into a "pseudo Black Culture." Assimilation into mainstream America and into the majority (white) culture was the only way black people could be liberated from the bondage of their race.

LD: Wait a minute. The world was already quite familiar with examples of cultural genocide and eugenics.

WHM: That my friend is a fat load of bunk. If the Jews had assimilated into German society and behaved like Germans rather than Jews with their own separate places of worship, communities, and business, there would never have been a Holocaust. They would have assimilated and become German.

LD: Are you aware you are teetering on rather precarious grounds with this insinuation? For one thing, the majority of people in this world is neither white nor speaks English as their first language and therefore, since white people are a global minority, there is the possibility that the nonwhite majority will eventually determine the minority's fate. I hope you are not suggesting that Hitler's solution was rational and that majority cultures ought to use the same methods to eradicate minority cultures. After all, that would be tantamount to you suggesting that this be an option for the world's nonwhite majority to solve the "problem" of the Caucasian minority.

WHM: Your argument has merit; however, because of the intellectual superiority of the white race, power was vested in this minority white race for reasons you and I could not possibly fathom and therefore it was necessary to colonize or better yet, eradicate the nonwhite threat to protect white liberty, wealth, and the pursuit of happiness. The superior ability to harness the power of destructive violence will maintain white dominance for as long as the white race exists.

LD: So are you suggesting that your race is one that acknowledges its propensity to dominate over others forcefully with the weapons of violence, destruction, propaganda, colonization, and other "tools" usually associated with those you refer to as uncivilized? Is this not terrorism and therefore does it not imply that your race is no better than "terrorists"?

WHM: Actually no, I have never looked at this issue as uncivilized nor as a form of terror. It is merely dominance by the superior. I guess civilization and terrorism are relative concepts. Whoever has power is free to define them according to their whim.

I shook my head in disbelief at such a response.

LD: So given that you believe that the majority values must dominate, you would find it justifiable for the biomedical and biotechnology industries to seek solutions to remove disabled people from society? Is that right?

WHM: I most definitely believe that this will create a more harmonious society. Cochlear implant technology was only the beginning, and biotechnology will eventually eradicate imperfections in human beings. I believe that one day, even homosexuality

will be eradicated from society. After all, how does such deviant behavior benefit a heterogeneous society? The fields of psychology are going to be obsolete as genetic engineering would ensure perfect children would be born in a world where it was possible to design a nation that was uniform in its uniformity—blond, blue-eyed, rose cheeked, heterosexual, with IQs that embodied the superiority of their whiteness and physical prowess that would render the accomplishments of today's athletes nothing more than puny in comparison. This is simply human progress and as long as humanity possesses the capacity to invent, create, and genetically modify any living organism, there is no limit to what humans will ultimately achieve.

LD: But wouldn't this scientific industry exhibited by human beings ultimately demand subservient uniformity, or will human diversity in all its awesome variety be lost as a vital ingredient in this mystery we call human life?

I certainly could not concur with my friend on any of his points. Then I pondered the "burden of my race" and somehow I did not wish to be, and could not imagine myself being, anyone other than the black deaf male that I am proud to be. Although I was born hearing, I have lived the majority of my life as a deaf person, and yet I do not consider myself imperfect or inferior in any way to my friend. In regards to my deafness, I consider myself unique in that I am able to see the world without the nuisance of "noise" or the false security of a privilege not earned but granted solely by being born into a certain race. I see myself as a contribution to this gorgeous human mosaic that makes our world vibrant and stimulating. However, it is a heavy burden to be a pawn in a chess game where physicians attempt to make a cyborg out of me. I am rather tired of being a pawn in this game in which someone else gets the satisfaction of manipulating my life in order to savor the delight of power over me simply because of my race and inability to hear.

Charles Mills, in his book *The Racial Contract* states that "white misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception on matters related to race are among the most pervasive mental phenomena of the past few hundred years, a cognitive and moral economy psychically required for conquest, colonization, and enslavement. And these phenomena are in no way accidental, but prescribed by the terms of the Racial Contract, which requires a certain schedule of structured blindness, and opacities in order to establish and maintain white polity."⁶

Thinking about such a powerful assessment of those who are conditioned to colonize, conquer, and enslave, I pondered my own state of mind and my position in a society where I was already handicapped by being a black male in a society that fears my kind like the plague. According to a Justice Policy Institute publication, *Reducing Disproportionate Minority Imprisonment*, black youth represent a disproportionate number in our prison system. The Justice Policy Institute states that "The number of black men in jail or prison has grown fivefold in the past 20 years, to the point where more black men are behind bars than are enrolled in colleges or universities."⁷ The study also noted that "the increase in the black male prison population coincides with the prison construction boom that began in 1980. At that time, three times more black men were enrolled in institutions of higher learning than behind bars."

What does this imply? That our young black males are better off in prison than in

college? That society is safer with the black man in confinement? That whiteness must be protected from this threat to liberty, wealth, and the pursuit of happiness? Is this not the same colonizing, enslaving, and conquering tendency that historically permeates Western history? (I shook my head in disgust at this thought.) I did not think melanin or cochlear implants were a justifiable response to deafness just as Hitler's idea of the "Final Solution" was unpalatable to every decent human being anywhere on earth. My race was obviously a major disadvantage in a society that sees me more as a threat than as an equal member of society.

WHM: My friend, as difficult as it is to acknowledge that your race is a burden on you and presumably on society that fears your ilk, your deafness does not offer an opportunity to lighten this burden but rather, I believe it further hinders your ability to integrate and assimilate into privileged society. Let's take, for instance, the fact that deaf people in general read at the 3.8 grade level. In a society that demands advanced literacy and numeracy skills in order to survive in a rapidly expanding technology-based society, what are your chances of living a decent life? Surely you must give great consideration to the alternatives that science offers. Deaf education has failed and only offers the misguided idea of a "pseudo deaf cultural identity" just as the failure of multicultural-based education for black children has only lead to a misguided pseudo black culture that is steeped in anti-Western historical and cultural thought. Neither prepares you for the realities of modern society.

LD: Wait a minute; I am not sure I understand what you are implying here. Are you suggesting that deaf education, and education of black children in particular, is the problem?

WHM: Absolutely.

LD: In other words, you are implying that auditory-based, Eurocentric education would be most appropriate in enabling deaf and black people to better integrate into society.

WHM: As an alternative to eradicating the twin conditions, yes, I would suggest that as the most viable alternative. The oral method after all, has afforded deaf people better access to the hearing world.

LD: Are you implying that sign language is a hindrance to the effective education of deaf children? And that we ought to adopt the oral method?

WHM: It definitely has some advantages in that it is auditory/verbal-based and therefore affords deaf children the same quality education as hearing nonsigners. Don't you agree?

LD: I am not an expert in linguistics but I am rather certain that education via one's native language is preferable to education in a foreign language. Could you imagine yourself, an American English user, going through college using German or French in all your subjects? Wouldn't that be difficult for you and isn't that similar to a deaf person using the oral method rather than his/her native sign language?

WHM: Well, fortunately I never had to deal with that hypothetical question; after all this is an *English*-speaking nation and I hope it will always remain so. After all, English is the political, social, economic, and scientific language of our modern global society.

LD: That is not necessarily the case in the rest of the world. In my native South Africa,

the average South African spoke three to seven languages and it was also common among Europeans to speak English, French, and Spanish and perhaps even German.

Obviously multilingualism is possible among human beings; why is it a problem for Americans to be comfortable communicating in other languages? Many Americans speak Spanish, French, and other indigenous Asian, European, and African languages, so why would it be a problem for them to also learn sign language?

WHM: But sign language is *not* auditory based and therefore cannot constitute the academic or scientific definition of a language.

LD: Are you familiar with the work of Dr. William Stokoe, Dr. Ursula Bellugi, Dr. Carol Padden, or Dr. Harlan Lane?

WHM: No! But I can imagine that they are all simply attempting to justify the existence of a "Deaf Culture" and to do that, it is necessary to prove that this language of signs is evidence of the existence of the culture; correct?

LD: So what then is it about this language of signs that actually allows us to understand a signed or sign-interpreted reading of Shakespeare, Virginia Woolf, Frantz Fanon, Toni Morrison, Paulo Freire, James Baldwin, Amy Tan, Harlan Lane, and Oliver Sacks? What then is it about this language of sign that allows us to enjoy a theatrical performance that is either sign-interpreted or performed by skilled performers in ASL? If this language of sign makes this possible, why is it not accepted as equal? After all, the end objective being to understand the dialogue and therefore the story being told is ultimately achieved in both mediums. How can one be accepted as a language and the other not if the end result is the same? Didn't humans communicate nonverbally by means of gestures prior to developing verbal communication systems unique to their ethnocultural enclaves?

My friend hesitated a bit and seemed a bit confused.

WHM: You mean deaf people can follow *Othello* in sign language? But why would they be interested in theater? After all, theatrical performances place heavy emphasis on sound.

LD: Actually one of my favorite activities during summer is going to the Carter Barron Amphitheater in Washington, D.C., or a "Shakespeare in the Park" play in Central Park, New York City, which often either have ASL-using actors or are sign interpreted.

WHM: I don't mean to sound rude or ignorant, but I really have never seen black deaf folks at any theatrical performance I have ever attended—do you folks really go to dramatic events?

LD: Well, actually, I thought Phylicia Rashad's recent performance in *A Raisin in the Sun*⁸ on Broadway was superlative. But I think Phyllis Frelich's performances are classics. After all, she is a native signer and, like Rashad, an award-winning actress also.

He was now genuinely perplexed. His brow furrowed in deep contemplation.

According to his reasoning, deaf people are technically, functionally illiterate and on top of that, being a black male, statistically I should either be in jail or dead, not enjoying cultural activities that are normally the domain of the "cultured white elite." It was inconceivable. Furthermore, I do not even have a cochlear implant or hearing aids so how

could I possibly even understand cultural events that demand hearing? It was obvious that my friend had little understanding about language and culture.

All communication is culturally bound. The very means of communicating (writing, the use of a telephone, person-to-person interaction) are affected by unwritten cultural rules and, in turn, influence how we learn. One of the greatest sources of miscommunication among people who are culturally different from one another is communication style.⁹

However, despite my admiration for Phylicia Rashad and enjoyment of sign-interpreted performances, I still would rather attend a naturally signed performance than an interpreted one. Our language is vibrant and expressive and, in a sense, enables us to enjoy visual performance mediums in a dynamic manner.

Identity Development Theories

Although there is much work already done on ASL and Deaf Culture, there is much needed to be done to explore the phenomenon of identity development among deaf people. This is especially essential in light of the fact that much research and literature on deafness has been from a Eurocentric perspective and mainly based on the Euro-American experience. Neil Glickman has done an outstanding job of developing a Deaf Identity Development Scale (DIDS),¹⁰ which is based on the work of Dr. Janet Helms and others. It is often necessary to look at the parallels with the African American experience to understand the experience of Deaf people in a culture that oppresses those different from the majority.

We like to think of our visual language as expressive, dynamic, emotionally intense, and demonstrative just like black folks view their use of the English language. A sign-interpreted performance featuring well-trained sign language interpreters enables us to derive intense satisfaction from visual arts performances. My encounter with my protagonist suggests that cultural and social experiences apparently made it more likely that our perspectives would differ.

Janet Helms was concerned with the dominant bias in counseling psychology, which focused on the pathology of blacks. Helms found "from the experience of her White colleagues that their relationships with people of color were so rarefied that they resembled those who experience culture shock when visiting or living in another country."¹¹ This appears to describe my protagonist's response to my arguments that deaf people are in fact normal, intelligent human beings who enjoyed the same pleasures he assumed were beyond us, especially black deaf people, given our race and deafness. It further reminded me of the many stories black deaf folks have of their encounters with white deaf people in situations such as Deaf clubs or organization events where the black deaf person is perhaps the only person of color in the room or one of a few. The most recurring comment is "I am so happy to see you here. I hope you can bring more of your people to come here next time." I usually ask "Why?" and the answer invariably suggests that it is my responsibility to promote their event within the black Deaf community as if I

am some official representative rather than just an individual accompanying my white friends to a Deaf club for the very same reasons my friends are attending. It's as if I am some foreigner and the people here are unsure as to how to respond to my presence at their establishment. Helms's model on black identity development is based on four stages: preencounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, and internalization.

In my particular experience where I became deafened at age eleven and had no prior encounter with deaf people, my preencounter experience was one of apprehension, confusion, and fear of a possible world without sound. When I first encountered deaf people at the Dominican School for the Deaf in Cape Town, South Africa, apprehension was replaced with awe, excitement, and determination to master this language that would free me from this new world I was entering. My attitudes to hearing people changed somewhat in that my dependence was reduced and my internalized assumptions of hearing people, which were similar to my assumptions of white people based on my experience being born into a segregated nation, changed drastically. The Irish Sign Language, which was used at my school, afforded me an opportunity to engage in dialogues regarding racism and audism and how these twin vices affect my life.

My subsequent immersion into this world and new consciousness was almost parallel with the Black Consciousness Movement of my generation, which culminated in our rejection of the perceived inferiority of black people as a race. I was now rejecting this perceived inferiority of myself as a deaf person. I went on to attend a hearing high school without interpreters or note-taking support and did exceptionally well because my consciousness was changed and I no longer saw myself as deficient in comparison to my hearing peers. Rather than internalizing negative stereotypes of my experiences under a brutal apartheid regime and an ignorant hearing world, I found liberation and hope that there was a very important place for me in this world. I was beginning to reclaim my humanity, and this was absolutely liberating.

Those of us who are socialized into Deaf Culture through sign language and early interaction with adult members of the Deaf community tend to have a comfortable sense of ourselves as Deaf people. In families where sign language is used early in our life, we have a social environment where our deafness is not perceived as a disabling condition but rather in a similar manner as black people perceive peers who use Ebonics, or native speakers of languages other than English. We participate in cultural activities within the Deaf community, and this in turn leads to our having a greater sense of our cultural self. We are therefore more likely to have a strong sense of awareness of audism and are more likely to respond in the same way people of color respond to oppression. It is no accident therefore that the four student leaders during the Deaf President Now movement were children of Deaf adults and the group of young Deaf men who organized behind the scenes were also mostly children of Deaf adults save for only one. They were socialized into the culture from an early age and were therefore comfortable with their self-concept as normal Deaf individuals and members of a vibrant community.

On the other hand, there are those who reject the concept of a Deaf Culture and a community. They insist that deaf people can be assimilated into the dominant culture's concept of "normal." Rather than acknowledge the validity of sign language as a natural and normal form of communication equal to verbal language, we have proponents of

the oral method whose premise is that Deaf people can be taught to speak intelligibly regardless of their degree of hearing loss. I believe this is possible among those with sufficient hearing ability that they are able to make sense of verbal utterances. This conflict regarding the best educational methods for deaf and hard-of-hearing people has continued for over a hundred years and there are very few signs that this debate is reaching a conclusion. Proponents of inclusion believe that every disabled child should be receiving the same education in the same environment as nondisabled students. While there are conflicts in regards to the definition of disabled within the general disability community and the Deaf/hard-of-hearing community, deaf and hard-of-hearing children are the ones victimized by political sparring among various groups. It is often difficult for disability activists to fathom the reality that deaf people are extremely disadvantaged in environments designed for audio-based learning except in the case of those who have sufficient hearing to manage to some degree. However, there are those who have enough hearing to manage in a one-on-one social environment and can also utilize sign language interpreters for larger group encounters.

Mainstreaming assumes that deaf students must interact with "normal" hearing kids and therefore adapt the values of the "normal" society. Jean Kim refers to Sue and Sue whose model, she suggests, presents what is essentially a personality typology in their description of the Asian American identity development process.¹² The three-part model consists of traditionalist, marginal, and the bicultural. According to their theory, the traditionalist places family first and has strong traditional Chinese cultural values. These may encounter conflicts when majority cultures are perceived to conflict with these traditionalist values. In the second example, the marginal person attempts to mainstream and adapt/assimilate into mainstream culture. This person finds it necessary to earn acceptance from the majority culture and often experiences conflict when they find that they are not equally or fully accepted by the majority regardless of their academic, economic, or social successes. The third part of this model is the bicultural where the traditional values are integrated into the realities of the majority culture. The latter apparently finds a middle ground that fully accepts their ethnic/racial identity while acknowledging the majority culture without attempting to become assimilated into it at the expense of their traditional values.

The black community has a similar experience and history that is well represented with caricatures of so-called Uncle Toms who discover that they are not immune to the same fate as others of their race. We also have those exemplified by the Black Power Movement who attempted to do a complete makeover of their identity. Rather than shiny straightened hair, they let it grow into Afros of all sizes, declined skin lighteners, took up African names, and rejected the "Colored" or "Negro" classification for the terms "Black," "Afro-American," and the present "African American." Then there also are those "tweeners" who value the traditionalist ways of their race and yet are not intimidated by the requirements of successful coexistence in a majority white society. They are able to adapt and move effortlessly between multiple cultures.

The Deaf world has its own examples of these experiences. We have the traditionalists who are invariably referred to as the Big D. These are folks that Padden and Humphries, Bahan, Lane, and Hoffmeister, and others refer to as people who are from Deaf families

and attended Deaf schools, and as Kannapell suggests, membership within this group requires not only ASL skills, but shared values, beliefs, and experiences.¹³ Members of this group tend to have a strong sense of identity as Deaf members of society and do not consider themselves disabled but rather refer to themselves as a cultural-linguistic minority. We also have people who have a negative self-image attributed to their deafness and often feel isolated and inferior. They grow up believing that they must become "hearing" in order to assimilate into society. They reduce contact with other deaf people or behave as if they are "not like them" and, because they have had cochlear implants and speech training, are more "hearing-like" than "them," and therefore should be afforded more privileges in society. This conflict is at the root of the Deaf community's struggle to gain legitimacy in society's eyes. Since a greater number of people with hearing loss are able to "pass," it is often assumed that they are therefore evidence that deafness is a condition that can be fixed.

However, like the "marginals" in Sue and Sue's model, they are also vulnerable to rejection by normal hearing people and experience conflicts in their self-identity. After all, skin lighteners and hair straighteners did benefit many dark-skinned and nappy-haired black people but did not exempt them from experiencing racial discrimination.

In the black community we have what is known as the "brown bag standard" that was used to determine if a black person was light enough to enroll at certain schools, and even a few Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) at one time used this standard. Ms. Julia Pitt, my longtime assistant in the Office of the President at Gallaudet University and a native of Washington, D.C., told me that she failed the "brown bag test" and could not attend one of the finest public high schools for blacks in the 1960s and was too "black" to be admitted to Howard University. Spike Lee illuminated this problem in his movie *School Daze*.¹⁴ I believe that human deficiencies are the major cause of intolerance and that it was the simple desire to usurp power over others that was the fundamental barrier to peace and brotherhood within our communities and in the global community we are destined to share. Blackness cannot be a problem in itself. Why else would white men, brothers to be exact, kill each other simply for the right to own this human who was black? What was it that even a great American President would love this thing that is black and father children from her? And yet racism has survived centuries and persists to this day. Deafness in itself does not threaten humanity in any manner, and yet it is perceived as a social stigma for reasons that cannot be logically or scientifically justified.

However, I began to consider what might cause us to feel secure or insecure and looked up literature that addressed identity development for insights. Sonia Nieto in her book *The Light in Their Eyes* begins chapter three with this excerpt attributed to Mary Kalantzis, Bill Cope, and Diana Slade from their book *Minority Languages*:

[We] are not simply bearers of cultures, languages, and histories, with a duty to reproduce them. We are the products of linguistic-cultural circumstances, actors with a capacity to resynthesize what we have been socialized into and to solve new and emerging problems of existence; we are not duty-bound to conserve ancestral characteristics which are not structurally useful. We are both socially determined and creators of human futures.¹⁵

I thought this aptly described the current attempts to legitimize Deaf Studies. We are, after all, a linguistic-cultural community and we do have the capacity to resynthesize what we have been socialized into believing is our status in society. What then was it that caused us to see differently from the majority that has for many years attempted to describe us? Hardiman and Jackson's Racial Identity Development Theory model suggests that there are five stages, which are as follows:

- Naïve/No Consciousness: unaware of the rewards and sanctions associated with membership in a racial group and with breaking the rules of one's racial group.
- Passive/Active Acceptance: person unaware of own outlook, then when person becomes aware, moves into Active Acceptance where person is conscious of biases and perpetuation of racial stratification occurs.
- Resistance: in this stage person focuses on understanding and resisting the existence of racism and its manifestations (begins to question the status quo).
- Redefinition: redefining own racial group's history and culture.
- Internalization: occurs when people look to internalize a new sense of racial identity not based on or in reaction to the assumptions and functions of racism.¹⁶

Could this model be used to discuss identity development in deaf children? I believe it is possible. Wing and Rifkin suggest that we all look at the world through the lens of one of the stages of identity development.¹⁷ A hearing person with little or no experience or knowledge about deafness is probably very likely to begin with the Naïve stage; then when he/she begins to understand a little more, they may develop a sense of superiority and perhaps assume that a deaf person's inability to hear automatically suggests that deaf people are inferior to those who can hear. However, interaction and more understanding about deaf people awakens a sense of resistance to prejudice against deaf people, and this hearing person may begin to question assumptions. With a greater sense of understanding of the biases that deaf and hard-of-hearing people endure, this hearing person may begin the redefinition process whereby they may realize a need to review society's assumptions. William Stokoe and Harlan Lane might be useful examples. Stokoe is known to be a poor sign language user and yet it was his breakthrough research on sign language that basically forced a rewrite of old assumptions about sign languages. Dr. Harlan Lane has published powerful treatises in defense of Deaf people and their culture and yet he is a hearing scholar who initially had little knowledge of deafness until his exposure to deafness through his research in sociopsychology led to his redefining hearing views of deafness in his powerful book *When the Mind Hears*.

While the attempts to remove deaf people from the mosaic of humanity will continue to exist, there will also be resistance to these attempts. The Deaf community is resilient and has survived Alexander Graham Bell's eugenicist movement and many other attempts that both preceded and followed Bell. As a resident of a democratic nation, I also concur that individuals have a democratic right to choose a cochlear implant or any other scientific option that may be available in order to become part of the hearing majority. However, I should also have the right to choose my mode of receiving information, which is basically the function of hearing. A child with a cochlear implant will

receive it auditorily through artificial means while I could receive the same information through a sign language interpreter or in text form. A child with a cochlear implant would also, like a hearing child, be required to acquire knowledge through the institutions of family, school, and community. The same holds true for a black child and a deaf child. A black child would face barriers due to his/her race while a deaf child would face barriers due to his/her inability to hear. The condition of blackness and deafness *per se* should not be rationale for unequal treatment or the denial of options available in a democratic society.

WHM: Black teachers are ill prepared to provide decent education for black children.

LD: Oh! Really? Why would this be so? I would like to remind you that until just a decade or two ago, black superintendents of school districts were rather rare and many black people believe that this was by no accident but an intentional effort by states and federal agencies to handicap the black community's ability to offer top notch education for fear that it would contradict commonly held notions of black intellectual inferiority. The arguments of Thurgood Marshall's legal team in their Supreme Court argument in *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education* convinced the court that America had two educational systems "separate and unequal." In regards to deliberately offering false assumptions of black inferiority that have been used for social engineering purposes, let me point you in the direction of the "pseudo-scientific" research done in the controversial publication *The Bell Curve*,¹⁸ which implied that there is scientific evidence that black people had intellectual deficiencies that were genetic. While white conservatives eagerly embraced the proclamations in this book, history has offered numerous examples that simply contradict the basic assumptions Herrnstein and Murray offer.

WHM: If you are referring to the content of J. A. Rogers's book, *The World's Great Men of Color*,¹⁹ that is revisionist bunk. Cleopatra was Macedonian for one thing and the Egyptian Pharaohs were of North African stock and not black sub-Saharan.

LD: Whether Cleopatra or the Pharaohs you are referring to were sub-Saharan Africans or not is moot because it still does not make them Caucasian and therefore the title is indeed valid. Dr. Henry Louise "Skip" Gates, of Harvard University, in a partnership including Microsoft, embarked on a historical journey to Africa to produce and narrate the documentary *The Africans*, and what he found and learned absolutely debunks the misinformation black people have been given for years.

WHM: So what are you suggesting?

LD: I am suggesting that black people were deliberately miseducated. I am suggesting that there was fear of the black person's intelligence when white slavers forbid black people from reading and writing and those African slaves who were found to be literate had their tongues and hands dismembered. I am suggesting that this was because the notion of a Negro who was intellectually superior to the slaver definitely terrorized the slaver to the point of barbaric responses to this fear. I am also suggesting that even colonialism, evil as it was, is a good example of the debunking of this intellectual inferiority myth. How? British boarding schools that offered top-notch education to even the poorest Africans produced Africans who went on to receive advanced education in the finest European universities. How could this be possible given that this education is

offered in a language foreign to the native African who has to master his master's tongue before conquering his master's science? I am therefore suggesting that fear of the truth has paralyzed oppressive classes throughout history and encouraged these oppressors to invent artificial social structures intended to preserve a lie.

WHM: Okay . . . but deaf people? Surely you must concede that it is impossible to expect them to be educable.

LD: Again, let me suggest you consider the implications of sending your children to a Chinese high school that does not offer English as a medium of instruction. What will be your children's chances of earning superior grades in such a school? Do you believe that your children would master the language sufficiently to ace the SATs and gain entrance to Harvard? Let's be realistic. Now suppose a deaf child was socialized in an environment where ASL was his/her first language and this child grew up in an environment that provided bilingual cues (English and ASL). This child is able to express thoughts, communicate desires, and receive responses in a language he/she understands; would it be difficult to imagine that this child would possess normal language skills? The ability to learn to read is not dependent on the ability to hear or speak. It is dependent on the ability to comprehend vocabulary and grammar of a particular language, and that happens within the socialization environment (home and school). Attempting to force oralism on a child that can neither hear nor speak is the equivalent of sending your child into a language environment where the child is simply unable ever to articulate the sounds or comprehend the language. Would this make this child genetically inferior or would this simply imply that this child is placed in the wrong environment? By the way, there are already quite an impressive number of deaf graduates of Harvard University and several other Ivy League schools.

WHM: Hhmmmmmm. Interesting point. Wait a minute, you mean deaf students have graduated from Ivy League schools including Harvard?

LD: I am sure you will enjoy verifying this with phone calls to Ivy League schools. Have fun.

The Power to Determine Our Destiny Is in the Hands of Others

I believe that if we provide top-notch early childhood, elementary, and high school education for *all* deaf children (regardless of their race and degree of hearing loss) in an environment where the children's intellect is challenged from birth to completion of their undergraduate education, we would probably see results that would indeed disprove this myth that deafness has any connection to intelligence. Corbett and Jensema reported that the vast majority of teachers of the deaf are white and hearing,²⁰ so if these white and hearing educators are responsible for our children and they are members of a superior race, shouldn't we expect them to attain superior results with our children? Why is this not happening? What if black people and deaf people had full control of their schools on all levels? What if they had the necessary funding to ensure that their facilities adequately meet the academic expectations of local and state education boards? Are we so blinded by a "blame the victim" mentality that we refuse to consider the systemic factors necessary for a community to advance? I believe people, regardless

of race and disability, simply wish to be given a chance to learn, work, and live in peace. In order to seek answers to these questions, I needed to understand this phenomenon of institutionalized oppression. It is widely understood that "isms" are a product of the desire to have power over others.

Lisa Delpit describing the culture of power suggests that

- Issues of power are enacted in classrooms.
- There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a "culture of power."
- The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the roles of those who have the power.
- If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier.
- Those with power are frequently least aware of—or least willing to acknowledge—its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence.²¹

I believe that deaf people, like black people, are victims of this culture of power from the day they step inside a school room where the educators are different from learners. It cannot therefore be presumed that a deaf child or a black child can enter a classroom with a white hearing teacher on equal terms as a hearing child or a black child since they are more likely to not have access to these codes or rules that determine participation in the culture of power. Since those who own this power are likely also to be least aware of it, there is little likelihood that it would be checked and, hopefully with greater consciousness, redefined.

My friend thought about this a while and conceded that there was merit in this perception. "Life demands constant change and yet human nature constantly resists change," he stated with what I thought was incredible foresight. It appeared this debate was indeed enlightening to him as much as it was to me, and I felt confident that there would be brighter days to look forward to in this world. Hopefully I had changed his initial perspectives (even if some were meant to engage me in a controversial argument) sufficiently for him to become a much stronger ally in our constant struggle to overcome racism and audism. Of course it was not lost on me that it also applied both ways. Deaf and hearing people must continue to revisit our own beliefs and constantly redefine them as we gain more knowledge and understanding about the human condition in its many diverse forms. There are, among us Deaf people, those afraid of the rapid changes in society, which we feel are changing the way we live. We feel the frustration of closing schools for the deaf and closing of Deaf clubs. However, we sometimes take for granted that technology is also narrowing the gap in other ways. We do indeed find visible examples of extraordinary progress such as the growing number of Deaf people holding PhDs, law degrees, and even medical degrees. Deaf people in the fast-growing Information Technology sector often say that technology has removed barriers in their workplace, and the only barriers are those who harbor bigoted attitudes to those different from themselves.

Kendall suggests that antibias/racism work is integral to good education for *all* children. Derman-Sparks defines antibias as:

an active/activist approach to challenging prejudice, stereotyping, bias, and the "isms." In a society in which institutional structures create and maintain sexism, racism, and handicapism, it is not sufficient to be non-biased. . . . Nor is it sufficient to be an observer. It is necessary for each individual to actively intervene, to challenge and counter the personal and institutional behaviors that perpetuate oppression.²²

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that we continue this dialogue on racism and audism. Deaf intellectuals have for some time recognized that the liberation struggles of various minority groups parallel their own struggle for equity. Despite laws such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1972 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1989, deaf people are far from achieving equality in society, with current challenges to affirmative action under the strange logic that it constitutes "reverse discrimination" when its sole objective is to legally ensure that *qualified* women (of all races), people of color, and people with disabilities (of all races) are afforded equal opportunities to enroll in schools that would otherwise refuse their admission or to jobs that would otherwise not be offered them because of their race, gender, or disability. The goals or numerical targets that an institution or workplace sets up are being attacked as "quotas" when it is acceptable for policy makers to use statistical numbers for making policy decisions. It seems hypocritical that laws that were written barely thirty years ago and intended to remedy injustices that were enacted legally over a few centuries are suddenly considered unconstitutional because it is perceived that a certain group of people are going to have to reduce their privileges and power. There ought to be enough at the dinner table to feed everyone who has a seat. ADA is also under attack and the pending confirmation of an anti-ADA Justice for the First Circuit is perceived as threatening the civil liberties of disabled people. As a black Deaf person, I have this strange feeling of having bars sprouting up all around me, and it is very uncomfortable. Racism and audism, like all isms, cause great pain, anguish, and injustice, and we must do whatever is necessary to fight this threat to human dignity.

Notes

1. From the time they arrived in South Africa the Irish Dominican Sisters undertook the teaching of the deaf. Mother Dymphna Kinsella, who had considerable experience teaching the deaf in Ireland at the School for the Deaf in Cabra, Dublin, was the main driving force behind establishing South Africa's first school for the deaf. Bishop Grimley, vicar apostolic at the Cape, gave the project his support, and when the school opened in 1863 it was named after him. The Grimley School for the Deaf did more than provide a religious and academic education for deaf children in Cape Town. It also served as an example to the authorities, showing them what could be done for handicapped children. All schools subsequently founded for the deaf took inspiration from this source. Since then the Grimley School has moved from Cape Town city centre to Hout Bay. Two other schools were also opened: the Dominican School for the Deaf in Wittebome (1937) and Hammanskraal

- School for the Deaf (1962). See <http://www.nationalarchives.ie/search/index.php?browse=true&category=19&subcategory=148&offset=60&browseresults=true> and http://www.stmarysdeafgirls.ie/s2_history.html.
2. Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve* (New York: Free Press, 1994).
 3. J. C. Watts, "J. C. Watts Goes Home to Oklahoma," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (Autumn 2002): 34.
 4. Harlan Lane, Robert Hoffmeister, and Ben Bahan, *A Journey into the Deaf-World* (San Diego: DawnSignPress, 1996).
 5. The author has attended the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity the past eleven years and attended a number of Dr. Kendall's Institutes and workshops on White Privilege: <http://www.ncore.ou.edu>.
 6. Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 19.
 7. V. Schiraldi and J. Ziedenberg, *Reducing Disproportionate Minority Confinement: The Multnomah County, Oregon Success Story and its Implications*, 2002, <http://www.justicepolicy.org/downloads/MultnomahSuccessStory.pdf>.
 8. See <http://www.raisinonbroadway.com/about.html>.
 9. Francis Kendall, *Diversity in the Classroom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996).
 10. Neil Glickman, "Deaf Identity Development: Construction and Validation of a Theoretical Model" (PhD diss., University of Massachusetts, 1993).
 11. Janet Helms, *Black and White Racial Identity: Theory Research, and Practice* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1990), 16.
 12. Jean Kim, "Asian American Identity Development Theory," in *New Perspectives on Racial Identity Theory*, ed. Charmaine Wijeyesinghe and Bailey W. Jackson (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 111. D. W. Sue and D. Sue, *Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 1971).
 13. Barbara Kannapell, "Inside the Deaf Community," in *American Deaf Culture: An Anthology*, ed. Sherman Wilcox (Silver Spring, Md.: Linstok Press, 1989), 22-28.
 14. *School Daze* was a social documentary movie by the African American director Spike Lee. The movie was about the internal conflicts black people deal with based on skin tone and fraternity and sorority affiliation among other issues that are debated within the black community and that cause intergroup tensions.
 15. Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999). The quote is from Mary Kalantzis, Bill Cope, and Diana Slade, *Minority Languages and Dominant Culture: Issues of Education, Assessment and Social Equity* (London: Falmer Press, 1989), 47.
 16. Rita Hardiman and Baily Jackson, "Conceptual Foundations for Social Justice Courses," in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, ed. M. Adams, W. J. Blumenfeld, R. Castaneda, H. W. Hackman, M. L. Peters, and X. Zuniga (New York: Routledge, 2000), 23-29.
 17. L. Wing and J. Rifkin, "Racial Identity Development and the Mediation of Conflicts," in Wijeyesinghe and Jackson, *New Perspectives on Racial Identity Development Theory*, 189.
 18. Herrnstein and Murray, *The Bell Curve*.
 19. J. A. Rogers, *The World's Great Men of Color* (New York: Touchstone, 1996).
 20. E. Corbett and C. Jensema, *Teachers of the Deaf* (Washington D.C.: Gallaudet College Press, 1981).
 21. Lisa Delpit, "The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other Peoples's Children," *Harvard Educational Review* 58, no. 3 (1988): 282.
 22. L. Derman-Sparks and C. Brunson-Phillips, *Teaching/Learning Anti Racism* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997).

15. Where Is DeafHERstory?

ARLENE BLUMENTHAL KELLY

ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS in which dominant groups maintain their power is by depriving the people they dominate of the knowledge of their own history.¹ This is well understood by Frantz Fanon, a leader of the Algerian resistance against the French in the 1950s, who wrote in his *Wretched of the Earth* that "colonialism is not satisfied with merely holding a people in its grip . . . but by a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of an oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it."² Members of oppressed communities are frequently deprived from appreciating their own historical experiences and the glory of the actions of their own people. Because of this lack of appreciation, the colonized are kept powerless. Instead this glory should come alive to those living in the present and future in order to reduce the dominance of the others.

Women have long understood this deprivation. In 1404, Christine de Pizan, chronicler of great women, wrote to bring her readers "out of the ignorance which so blinds your own intellect."³ Philosophers also have long trivialized women. Christine de Pizan suggested that women who did not know their history were like a field without a defense.⁴ On the other hand, knowing their historical experiences allowed women to become like a strongly constructed city wall.⁵

In the mid-nineteenth century, American women began to archive their history. Most notable was Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony's six volumes of *History of Woman Suffrage* completed in 1881.⁶ Meant to be an arsenal of facts for the next generation of scholars, these volumes were unfortunately largely ignored. In 1933, historian Mary Beard wrote that an accurate understanding of the past required an analysis of women's experiences and this analysis needed to be conducted with as much attention as historians devote to the experience of men.⁷

Five decades later, historian Gerda Lerner suggested four stages in writing women's history, each stage more complex than the last. The first stage is known as "compensation history" in which historians seek stories about women who succeeded in their actions. Examples are Amelia Earhart, the solo airplane pilot in the 1930s demonstrating courage, and Zora Neale Hurston, an African American folklorist who brought life to independent black women. The next stage is "contribution history" in which women's contributions to topics, issues, and themes of the day are described. For example, the women behind Jane Addams's Hull House project in Chicago aided in promoting Progressive reforms of the day. The third stage of writing women's history moves to understanding what actually happened, thus prompting us to rewrite our own history. For example, we were taught in schools to believe that American slaves were given adequate