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Are You Black First Or Deaf First: Binary Thinking, Boundary-Policing, And Discursive Racism Within The American Deaf Community

Micayla Ann Whitmer
William & Mary - Arts & Sciences, micaylawhitmer@yahoo.com

"Are You Black first, or Deaf first?": Binary-Thinking, Boundary Policing, and Discursive

Racism Within the American Deaf Community

Micayla Ann Whitmer

Palo Cedro, California, United States of America

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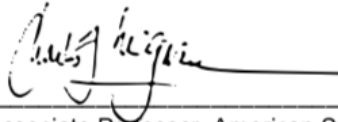
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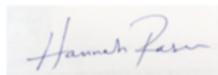
Committee Chair or Co-Chair
Grey Gundaker, Professor, American Studies and Anthropology
College of William & Mary

[signature]

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Charles McGovern, Associate Professor, American Studies and History
College of William & Mary

[signature] for Jamel Donnor

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Jamel Donnor, Associate Professor of Education, American Studies, and Africana
Studies College of William & Mary

ABSTRACT

The question "Are you Black first, or Deaf first?" is worth exploring for a variety of reasons; the most basic of which is that it is often asked of Black Deaf people. Black Deaf overwhelmingly report that the questioners in these situations are white Deaf. The question "Are you Black first or Deaf first?" asks Black Deaf individuals to justify their Deafness because of their Blackness--implying that both categories demand exclusive cultural loyalty and that they cannot overlap. This categorization is interesting because Black Deaf, and only Black Deaf, are grouped in this manner. This thesis sets out to contextualize the question "Are you Black first, or Deaf first?" and finds that this question is the result of the combination of binary thinking, boundary-policing, and discursive racism.

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When people ask me the question: "Are you Black first or Deaf first?" my first response is to question why they are asking this. It is almost like they are splitting me down the middle and asking me which side of me is me: the right or the left? Usually, my answer is something along the lines of: "If you were walking past a man, who happened to be Black, and you don't know if that person is hearing or Deaf, how would you describe them to someone who doesn't know them?" You can't say they are hearing or Deaf, you don't know. You could say they are a man; you could assume that. What else? That they are Black. You can clearly see their color. So of course, it's obvious, you describe them as Black. When you see a person, the first thing you see is their color. You can't hide that. . . What is the point of you asking me if I'm Black first or Deaf first? It's just a way for white Deaf to assert their power. If you're Deaf first, then you belong with us. If you're Black first, you're on your own. I have no control over my color. If I tell you I'm Deaf first, you still know I'm Black. You still treat me like a Black person. This is about race. You are forcing me to choose. To be with you or against you. To either be like you or unlike you. But that's not the truth of the matter. I am Deaf like you, I experience audism too. You aren't Black like me, you don't experience racism. But because you are uncomfortable discussing race you make me choose an identity and you leave it at that. This question of "Are you, Black, first or Deaf first?" it's just a power trip.[1]

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[1] Author's translation of a signed conversation with Lindsay Dunn (lecturer at Gallaudet University), October 26, 2020.

The story above depicts a false dichotomy of choice, which seems ironically contrary to the value American Deaf[2] culture places on shared Deafness. The question of "Are you Black[3] first, or Deaf[4] first?" is worth discussing for a variety of reasons; the most basic of which is that Black Deaf are often asked this question. When looking at this question, it is important to consider who is being asked, who is doing the asking, and what motivations are behind the asking of this question. This kind of questioning is rarely (if ever) posed to female Deaf, Latinx Deaf, LGBTQA+ Deaf, Asian Deaf, nor Indigenous Deaf. However, it is very frequently asked of Black Deaf. Black Deaf

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[2] This paper uses "the Deaf community" to refer to the American Deaf community. Deaf communities differ around the globe as do signed languages. This paper focuses solely on the American Deaf community, American Sign Language (ASL), and Black American Signed Language (Black ASL).

Signed language is not universal. Just as spoken languages develop out of distinctive social and geographic concentrations of people, so too do signed languages. These different languages are natural languages (meaning they developed naturally) instead of constructed languages (meaning they were created or did not develop naturally). There is, much like Esperanto, a constructed Universal Sign Language. For more information on global Deafness, see World Federation of the Deaf. "Who We Are." 2019. https://wfdeaf.org/who-we-are/. For more information on natural versus constructed languages see Nordquist, Richard. "What is Natural Language?" Thought Co. 2020. https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-a-natural-language-1691422. For more information on signed languages which differ by region, see Anja Hiddinga and Onno Crasborn, "Signed Languages and Globalization," *Language in Society* 40, no. 4 (2011): 483-505.

[3] "Blacks, like Asians, Latinos, and other 'minorities,' constitute a specific cultural group and, as such, require denotation as a proper noun." Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Race, Reform, and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Antidiscrimination Law," *Harvard Law Review* 101, no. 7 (1998): 13331.

[4] The capitalization of Deaf and Deafness is used to signify cultural Deafness whereas the lowercase deaf is used to refer to medicalized deafness. Arlene B. Kelly, "Deaf Organizations," (course lecture, Gallaudet University, Washington D.C. February 2017).

overwhelmingly report that the questioners in these situations are white Deaf.[5] Casually

and commonly posed, the question "Are you Black first or Deaf first?" asks Black Deaf

individuals to justify their Deafness because of their Blackness--implying that both

categories demand exclusive cultural loyalty and that they cannot overlap. This

categorization is interesting because Black Deaf, and only Black Deaf, are grouped in

this manner. There is no testing of loyalty or policing of boundaries when it comes to

white Deaf--that is to say that no one is asking white Deaf individuals if they are white or

Deaf first. The simple word substitution within the question not only reveals the

absurdity of this false dichotomy but also shows that, for white Deaf, whiteness is an

unmarked[6], normative quality that poses no conflict with being Deaf and, in fact,

whiteness is conflated with Deafness. This combining of racial and Deaf identity is an

interesting phenomenon that takes the racialized individualistic American culture and

applies those binaries to collectivist Deaf culture, creating further division therein.

This thesis sets out to contextualize this example of discursive racism and

explain why Black Deaf individuals must continue to endure the question: "Are you

Black first or Deaf first?" When confronted about this question, the response of white

Deaf often centers on identity salience as a way to dismiss accusations of racism. The

first step in contextualizing this question is to unpack why it has nothing to do with

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[5] Black Deaf consistently report that the askers of this question are white. Author's translation, Dunn, October 26, 2020.

[6] For more on markedness see Daniel Chandler and Rod Munday, *A Dictionary of Media and Communication*, Edition 2, "Markedness." Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2011.

identity salience. With that understanding, it becomes clear that this question centers around binary thinking. To be more specific, the question is the result of a mix of three binaries, which this paper terms: the Deaf/disabled binary; the Deaf/hearing binary; and the critical race theory construct of the Black/white binary. Taking these binary thought processes into account, it becomes clear that the people asking this question use it discursively to police cultural boundaries. The dominance of the Black/white binary over Deaf culture's core tenet of shared Deafness is contradictory in the extreme; however, it reveals a fallacy of defective induction within Deaf culture--that the cultural ideal of Deafness is synonymous with the cultural ideal of whiteness.

What It's Not

In order to better understand the question "Are you Black first, or Deaf first?"[7] perhaps it is best to first state what this question is not. The question of Black first/Deaf first is not about salience of identity. Emerging from identity theory, identity salience and identity prominence (although different) offer a useful perspective on how an individual organizes their identity and constructs their sense of self.[8] In this theorization, society and the self have reciprocal relationships. The self influences society through the creation of networks, groups, and institutions, and society impacts the self through social interactions, norms, mores, and meanings that allow individuals to reflect on their

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[7] This question will also be referred to as Black first/Deaf first.

[8] Philip S. Brenner, Richard T. Serpe, and Sheldon Stryker, "The Causal Ordering of Prominence and Salience in Identity Theory: An Empirical Examination," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 77, no. 3 (2014): passim.

concept of self. The self is constantly interacting with and within society. Different

situations and different societal contexts impact how and where the self exists.[9] Identity

theory builds on the relationship between the self and society, postulating that society is

a combination of fixed interactive role relationships (societal structures) and the self is

how an individual contextualizes the roles in which they find themselves.[10]

According to the psychologists and sociologists previously cited, individuals

create their sense of self through the incorporation of identities. Because an individual is

involved in so many different roles and relations within society, identity theory

subscribes to the idea that there are multiple selves which contain multiple identities.

Identities comprise the possible meanings of roles, which an individual performs, and

the internalization of the significance society places on these roles. Salience of identity

is based on the premise that there are an infinite number of social situations in which an

individual and their self can be placed. Within each of these situations, one of the many

identities within the self will become most important in relation to the other identities an

individual holds. Thus, in a given situation there is a hierarchy of identities and the

salient identity is the one that is hierarchically paramount: the identity which the

individual performs in a given time and context.

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[9] Jan Stets and Peter Burke, "A Sociological Approach to Self and Identity," in *Handbook of Self and Identity*, eds. Mark Leary and June Tangney (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2003), *passim*.

[10] For more information about the conversation of sociological approaches to identity theory, see: Naomi Ellemers and Haslam S. Alexander, "Social Identity Theory," In *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology*, eds. Paul Van Lange, Arie W. Kruglanski, and E. Troy Higgins, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications (2012): 379–398; and Henri Tajfel, "Individuals and Groups in Social Psychology," *British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 18, no. 2 (1979): 183-190.

Although related to identity salience, identity prominence has its own elucidation. Identity prominence is the idea that some identities are more likely to be salient than others because of the importance of these identities to an individual's concept of self (which emphasizes the importance of contextualization in relation to identity development). For example, an individual who performs the roles of teacher, mother, follower of Islam, sister, aunt, and volunteer possesses all these identities within her concept of self. Depending on her situation, one identity will become most salient; so, if she is at work in her classroom it is probable to assume that her salient identity is that of a teacher. However, identity prominence refers to the identities that the individual most frequently adopts; so, it is probable that the aforementioned woman's identities of teacher, mother, and Muslim are her prominent identities as these are likely the roles she most frequently inhabits.

It is also important to note that identity prominence is a reflection of the ideal self-- how people see themselves overall--whereas salience of identity is what a person actually performs. Generally, the performance of identity refers to the idea that individuals act in a certain way so as to signal their role to themselves and others around them in a given situation. These signals or sign activities[11] can be expressions, verbal symbols, mannerisms, ways of dress--all behaviors that communicate who an individual is to observers. Those who view an individual's performance of self can make inferences about that individual's identities.

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[11] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (NY: Anchor Books, 2008 [1957]), 2.

Some of these inferences are made not from any sign activity the individual is producing, but rather from the location or social setting surrounding the individual. For example, it is easy to infer that an adult in a school is a teacher, parent, or administrator. These inferences based on social setting can also lend themselves to inferences about socio-economic status. The information gained about an actor from their performance of self signals to observers how that individual will behave within the given social norms of the situation, which provides a sense of security to the individuals around the actor. When an actor produces sign activity that does not fit the norm, this threatens the sense of security observers gain from knowing the actor's belonging and thus the guarantee of their adherence to expected behavioral norms. When this happens, actors may compensate by giving particular (and sometimes exaggerated) care to the signed activity they are performing, and observers may question or scrutinize an actor who does not seem to belong to a given situation. For example, a woman who is invited to an event attended by individuals of a higher socioeconomic status may wear her best dress and conduct herself in a way that is out of her norm; whereas the women who invited her to this event may gossip about her attire or scrutinize her manners, within their peer group. Some sign activities that can be considered out of place given a social setting can include, but are not limited to, categories such as race, gender, class, ability, and sexual orientation. For example, in the same way that a woman is not expected to be present at an all-male camping retreat, a middle-class Southern white woman may not expect a Black or Hispanic woman to be at her neighborhood's book club. These out of place sign activities have

less to do with the actor and more to do with the observer's contextualization of societal assumptions and stereotypes.

It is not the identity of the individual that causes a perceived imbalance in societal norms; it is the observer's identification of that individual that rocks the proverbial boat. Barbara and Karen Fields juxtapose identity and identification in their book *RaceCraft*. Fields and Fields cite a 2009 incident of gun violence in which a white police officer shot and killed an off-duty Black police officer who was trying to apprehend a suspect. Fields and Fields make the argument that the Black police officer's own salient identity in that moment was, in all likelihood, that of a police officer. The white police officer invalidated the black officer's own sense of identity and instead identified the Black officer as a criminal based on stereotypical beliefs of race, made his decision, and shot him dead.[12] The Black officer's "police officer" identity was invisible but his Blackness was visible to the white officer in the moments before the fatal shot. This is the argument that Fields, and Fields emphasize: Black identity is abrogated by white identification because "race as identity breaks down on the irreducible fact that any sense of self intrinsic to persons of African descent is subject to peremptory nullification by forcible extrinsic identification."[13] The prevalence of identification based on race creates a primary identity-identification paradigm, indicative of American society's perceptions of race as a marker that takes precedence over virtually any other possibilities.

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[12] Serge F. Kovaleski, "Two Officers' Paths to a Fatal Encounter in Harlem," *New York Times* (New York, NY), May 29, 2009.

[13] Barbara J. Fields and Karen Elise Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2012), 157.

W.E.B. Du Bois poses the same questions about racial identity as the Field sisters. He viewed racial identity "as a matter of trammels and impediments… of segregation, of hindrance and inhibitions."[14] Du Bois's idea of double-consciousness--a division of self experienced by African-Americans because of racial oppression combined with the awareness of different ways of being within white dominated spaces and Black dominated spaces--lends itself to this identity-identification paradigm. Regardless of one's own ideas about selves or identities, the racialized ideas of a white-dominated society--and thus of white observers--will manifest in identifications which take precedence over a racialized individual's identity.

Frantz Fanon also theorizes about the differences in identity and identification. Fanon explains that Black people are "sealed into that crushing objecthood," because society dictates that "not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man."[15] Fanon invalidates objections to these social relations, arguing that white people cannot be white in relation to Black people because "the black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man."[16] Fanon explains that regardless of Black people's way of being, white people's ideas about Black ontology will always prevail. In other words, white people's identification of Black people as Black will always eclipse any sense of identity a Black person possesses.

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[14] W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (Oxfordshire, England: Routledge, (1958 [1940]), 66.

[15] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Paris, France Éditions du Seuil, 1952), 82-83.

[16] Ibid.

This ideology is also present in the Deaf community. The following example of a Black Deaf student's experience during his time as class president at Gallaudet University illustrates this. In his vlog, the student describes his experience as the class of 2010 president, explaining his fellow officers' treatment of him as a Black Deaf man:

> I was very excited to work with that class. I was ready to roll up my sleeves and get started. But that experience, [as class president] was the first time that I experienced discrimination. My class secretary came up to me to have a private conversation, and I mean she was straight with me. She said "I need to tell you that we don't feel comfortable with a Black class president. We don't." She actually came up to me and said that. I was just taken aback. I thought back to all the struggles I had been having with officers, all of these experiences, all of the problems I had as president. All of that was because I was Black! This was the first time I experienced racial discrimination. I mean it wasn't only this secretary, it was many of the other officers. They resisted working with me. And I tried. I really tried. I struggled and struggled with them, tried to make things work, but it was just constant problems, constant animosity. I had really tried to figure out why this was happening. I had tried to analyze myself, the situation, I tried to understand why these people wouldn't work with me. I tried to work with them. I tried to discuss things with them, but they just wouldn't. They refused. And, you know, they put off a clear message. They didn't say anything like "I don't feel comfortable," or "You're not doing this, that, or the other." It was nothing like that. They just kind of shook their heads and shrugged like they couldn't care less. That was their response. And this secretary, what she said, it was like she was giving me the cold shoulder. I was just so frustrated up until that point. Until the secretary told me they didn't want a Black president. Because then I had this moment of "Oh, I see." It hit me hard.[17]

This experience had nothing to do with the student's identity. In fact, he discusses in-depth the process of his identity formation. At the time, he explains, he didn't feel a strong sense of Black identity. So, his struggles in the role of class president were not a result of his salient or prominent identity/identities, but rather a result of the white Deaf

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[17] *Black Deaf Person*, (produced by Tar2006, aired May 14, 2015) on YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LV8nF3TUuws. Translated by author. Accessed February 22, 2021.

student officers' identification of him as a Black man. This example clearly illustrates why the question of Black first/Deaf first has nothing to do with salience of identity, and thus why the only studies conducted on this question heretofore have serious flaws.

There are two primary studies that address the salient identity of Black Deaf people. The first is a 1989 study conducted by Anthony J. Aramburo, titled "Sociolinguistic Aspects of the Black Deaf Community." The second is a thesis written by Andrea Solomon, titled "Cultural and Sociolinguistic Features of the Black Deaf Community" which draws heavily from Aramburo. While Aramburo claims to investigate sociolinguistic factors within the Black Deaf community (and indeed his first two questions do), it is clear his study centers on the salient identities of Black Deaf people. Putting aside the fact that Black people are not a monolith and salience of identity is highly personal and individualistic in nature, the study still has major flaws. Aramburo examines what he calls the "double immersion" of Black Deaf in the Black and Deaf communities and claims that three "issues" arise from this cultural duality. The issues which come about as a result of this double immersion are: 1) the "reality of a black deaf community, as distinct from both the black community and the deaf"; 2) the identity of Black Deaf people; and 3) the "communication patterns as defined in terms of differences between black signing and white signing."[18] Aramburo's second question is the most pertinent to this thesis.

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[18]Anthony J. Aramburo, "Sociolinguistic Aspects of the Black Deaf Community," in *Sociolinguistics of the Deaf Community*, ed. Ceil Lucas (Cambridge, MA: Academic Press, 1989), 103.

This work was revolutionary for its time, yet its the cultural connotations and impressions cause real harm. In its paternalism,[19] Aramburo's discussion draws a negative distinctions between white and Black Deaf. He implies that an individual must be Deaf or Black: they cannot be both. This problematically chooses Black Deaf's identity and as a result, claims that identity should be static. Aramburo frames his study with leading questions that force participants to choose either their Blackness or their Deafness. While the study found that 13 percent of participants identified as Deaf first while 87 percent identified as Black first, because of the previously mentioned critiques, the faults within the methodologies of this study—the *a priori* assumption of static, binary categories-- and paternalistic motivations are more important than the conclusions.

Andrea Solomon's "Cultural and Sociolinguistic Features of the Black Deaf Community" expands on Aramburo's work and also reaches the same conclusions. Solomon and Aramburo both postulate that the reasons for Blackness being the salient identity among their participants is due to Deafness being invisible until one signs, whereas Blackness is definitely visible. However, both authors ignore the fact that Black Deaf are not a monolithic group and that identity salience and prominence is individual in nature. Given this, these studies are fundamentally faulty, as they take specific individuals' identities and overlay them on all Black Deaf people. Thus, the studies reinforce the division between white and Black Deaf.

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[19] For examples of paternalism see Aramburo, "Sociolinguistic Aspects of the Black Deaf Community," 106, 107, 111.

Other notable works address identity differently than Aramburo and Solomon. Glenn B. Anderson and Cynthia Grace's article *Black Deaf Adolescents: A Diverse and Underserved Population* examines the oppression of Black Deaf teenager. Anderson and Grace argue that how Black Deaf teens make up a "minority within a minority"[20] and as such experience unique realities during a major transitional period of their lives. Looking at socialization processes within the community, the family, and the school, Anderson and Grace discuss ways in which educators of Black Deaf teens can help scaffold their development and learning. Dismissing the stereotype that "the commonality of deafness supersedes the existence of racial and cultural differences among deaf people,"[21] Anderson and Grace discuss the complex nature of identity development. Anderson and Grace examine the importance of identity formation within adolescence and the importance of solidifying a positive sense of self. This sense of self is developed through interactions and feedback with and from others, so the development of a strong positive sense of self can be hindered by continuous negative feedback. Anderson and Grace explain that Black Deaf teens face negative feedback within both of their cultural groups but also develop identity through both of their culture's own norms and values which is sometimes in contrast with the dominant societal norms and values. Anderson and Grace postulate that as members of two non-dominant cultural groups, Black Deaf teens are likely to experience negative

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[20]Glenn B. Anderson and Cynthia. A. Grace, "Black Deaf Adolescents: A Diverse and Underserved Population," *The Volta Review,* 93, no. 5 (1991): 74.

[21]Ibid, 74.

stereotyping and oppression that can negatively impact their sense of self. They also suggest how educators can best scaffold their Black Deaf students during a critical time in identity formation.

The difference in these three works is that the first two seek to find trends of identity salience within the Black Deaf community, while the third seeks to explore ways for educators to support Black Deaf students in their identity formation. The question of "Are you Black first or Deaf first?" seeks to pinpoint a single identity within the self--not out of curiosity but out of animosity at worst, simple ignorance of Black diversity at best. As such, claims of this question's merit in terms of identity salience are erroneous because the question is used to identify Black Deaf rather than truly inquire about their identities; in other words, the issue at stake is not a matter of identity salience, but rather a matter of identification.

Binary Thinking

Deaf/Disabled Binary

The disabled and Deaf communities simultaneously converge and diverge. Understanding how these groups both concur and contradict each other can help shed light on the question of Black first/Deaf first. In order to more closely examine the difference between the disabled and Deaf communities, it is helpful to delve first into the intricacies of Deaf culture. There are many ways in which to be d/Deaf.[22] Most

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[22] Lowercase "d" deaf refers to the medical view of deafness. Capital "D" Deaf refers to Deaf culture, Deaf identity, and the Deaf community. The combination of d/Deaf is used when referring to both. Recently there has been debate over the continuity of capitalization as a cultural signifier; while recognizing that, this thesis uses the capitalization to match the field's application heretofore. Kelly, "Deaf Organizations."

generally, there are two primary perspectives on d/Deafness: the medical view of

deafness, which sees deafness as a disability, of the body, and something to be cured,

managed, or fixed; and the cultural view of Deafness, which sees Deafness as a cultural

identity and the Deaf community as a cultural and linguistic minority. The Deaf

community is a global community in that Deaf people, Deaf cultures and Deaf

communities exist internationally. While it is important to note that signed languages

exist globally and differ by region (in the same way as spoken languages), what unites

these communities is a shared Deafness and a shared culture rather than linguistic

modality.[23]

While Deaf culture belongs only to Deaf individuals, the Deaf community

comprises both hearing and Deaf individuals. Within the Deaf community, generally, are

Deaf people, children of Deaf adults (CODAs), the signing hearing[24] members of Deaf

people's families, and signing hearing people who work in the Deaf community.

Essentially, the Deaf Community is made up of "those deaf and hard of hearing

individuals who share a common language, common experiences and values, and a

common way of interacting with each other, and with hearing people" and the hearing

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[23] For more information see Hiddinga and Crasborn, "Signed Languages and Globalization."

[24] The term "signing hearing" is used to classify those hearing individuals who are familiar/fluent/proficient in signed language and who respect and observe Deaf culture's norms, mores, and values within Deaf space, in contrast to the greater hearing community/world. Paddy Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood*. (Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2003): 167.

people who understand and abide by those common values.[25] Deaf culture, like any

culture, is a set of learned behaviors that reflect the norms and values of Deaf people

and centers around the use of "the language of Deaf people, and share the beliefs of

Deaf people towards themselves and other people who are not Deaf."[26] Deaf culture

has distinct values that influence the way Deaf act and what they believe.[27]

While being a collective, the Deaf community is not a monolith. Because

Deafness is rarely hereditary the Deaf community is made up of individuals with varying

ethnic/racial backgrounds. In fact, ninety percent of Deaf children are born to hearing

parents, and ten percent of Deaf children are born to Deaf families.[28] This results in a

unique form of cultural transmission; the majority of Deaf acquire Deaf culture through

peer's linguistic transmission rather than that of family members.[29] While the Deaf

community encompasses a wide range of ethnic and familial backgrounds, the uniting

factor is the cultural value placed on shared Deafness, Deafhood.

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[25] Charlotte Baker and Carol Padden, *American Sign Language: A Look at its Story Structure and Community*. (San Francisco, California: T.J. Publishers Inc., 1978), 4.

[26] Charlotte Baker and Robbin Battison (eds) (1980). *Sign Language and the Deaf Community: Essays in Honor of William Stokoe* (Washington D.C.: National Association of the Deaf, 1980): 93.

[27] For more information see Paddy Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood,* specifically the Introduction.

[28] Mitchell E. Ross and Michael A. Karchmer, "Chasing the Mythical Ten Percent: Parental Hearing Status of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students in the United States," *Sign Language Studies* 4, no. 2 (2004): 157.

[29] Paddy Ladd, "Deafhood, Deaf Culture, & The Wall of Silence" (Recorded lecture, HOME Manchester, February 2020), 1:21:07, accessible through https://ad-infinitum.org/dr-paddy-ladd

In 2003, Paddy Ladd brought forth the theory of Deafhood. Ladd argues that the Deaf community is a political, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic entity. Deafhood, Ladd explains, is not static but rather "represents a process--the struggle by each Deaf child, Deaf family and Deaf adult to explain to themselves and each other their own existence in the world."[30] Arguing that the key to Deaf liberation lies within cultural recognition, Ladd emphasizes the necessity of distinguishing between the Deaf and the disabled community.[31] Hearing society does not see Deaf people as a cultural entity in their own right but rather lumps them into the social category "disabled," which brings forth ideas of helplessness, pity, and charity rather than conceptions of a political and social group. Ladd explains that this insidious benevolence prevents Deaf from being given the same political and social standing as other linguistic and cultural groups, resulting in the Deaf's "inability to transcend one's social conditioning and to be able to [be] perceive[d]... as fully human," because of the way hearing society "construct[s] them [Deaf], not as collectives of language users, but as medically, karmically or intellectually damaged beings."[32] Ladd argues that the Deaf community is subaltern--a group so marginalized by society that it is included in neither the categorization of the oppressors nor the oppressed. In fact, it is not even included in society's conceptions of categorization.[33]

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[30] Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood*, 3.

[31] Ladd, "Deafhood, Deaf Culture, & The Wall of Silence."

[32] Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood*, 8.

[33] For more information on the subaltern see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can The Subaltern Speak?* (Stuttgart: Macmillan, 1988).

Hearing society not only marginalizes but also colonizes Deaf people. While most argue the case of linguistic colonization, there is a case to be made for social and geographical colonization as well. The first American school for the Deaf began in 1817, yet documentation dates Deaf people in America back to the 15th century. However, most recognize the establishment of the Connecticut Asylum for the Education of Deaf and Dumb Persons, later named the American School for the Deaf, as the first school for the Deaf and see it as the linguistic birthplace of American Sign Language (ASL).[34] ASL evolved from a combination of *langue des signes française* or French Sign Language (LSF) (provided by Deaf teacher Laurent Clerc, considered the Father or Apostle of the Deaf), home signs[35], and Martha's Vineyard sign language.[36] Approximately thirty-seven Deaf schools were established between 1817 and 1860, the

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[34] Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood*, 14.

[35] Home signs are communication systems that Deaf children produce, when their family is hearing and does not sign. Often these signs are gestures and relate to what is physically present in a particular moment, as gestures do not have the linguistic ability to convey past, future, nor surrogates for imagined concepts. For more information on home signs see Hannah Joyner, *From Pity to Pride: Growing Up Deaf in the Old South* (Washington D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2004), specifically Part II.

[36] Between the seventeenth and twententh centuries, there was a large population of congenitally Deaf people residing on the island Martha's Vineyard. Because of the number of Deaf people there, the hearing people on the island learned sign language. Martha's Vineyard is not the only place where this has happened. There have been recorded instances of communities adopting sign language (this form of sign language is often called rural sign language), for example Ban Khor, Thailand and Amami Oshima, Japan. For more information on Martha's Vineyard Sign Language see Nora Ellen Groce, *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language: Hereditary Deafness on Martha's Vineyard* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), passim. For more information on rural sign languages see Connie de Vos and Victoria Nyst, "Introduction: The Time-depth and Typology of Rural Sign Languages," *Sign Language Studies* 18, no.4 (2018): 477-487.

dates of the founding of ASD and the Milan conference,[37] respectively. In 1860,

educators for the Deaf[38] gathered internationally in Milan, Italy to discuss the best

method for teaching Deaf students:[39] oralism[40] or manualism.[41] Oralism is a method of

teaching the Deaf focused on spoken language production and speech reading.

Manualism is a method of teaching the Deaf focused on signed language production

and reception. While these methods are not mutually exclusive and are used in different

ways in the twenty-first century,[42] in 1860 the debate among the educators for the Deaf

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[37] The Second International Congress on Education of the Deaf (Milan Conference) was held in Milan, Italy on September 6th-11th, 1880. International educators for the Deaf gathered to deliberate on the best teaching methods for Deaf students. Following the conference oralism was considered to be the educational standard. For more information on the Milan Conference see Terptree, "What Happened in Milan?" Terptree: Changing the World for Deaf people, access date April 10, 2020, https://terptree.co.uk/bsl-students/what-happened-in-milan/.

[38] The phrase "for the Deaf" means hearing individuals are doing an action onto the Deaf community. The phrase "of the Deaf" means Deaf individuals are doing an action within and for their own community. Kelly, "Deaf Organizations."

[39] California School for the Deaf American Sign Language Corpus, "Milan Conference in 1880 Summary," March 14, 2014, 2:35, recording available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=puq6hQRtxCQ. Accessed December 29, 2020.

[40] Oralism is a pedagogy for teaching the deaf that centers around using speech reading and speech production. For more information on oralism see Thomas P. Horejes and Catherine O'Brien, "Language: Oralism Versus Manualism," in *The SAGE Deaf Studies Encyclopedia,* eds. Genie Gertz and Patrick Boudreault (New York, NY: SAGE Publications Inc, 2015), 721-723.

[41] For more information about manualism see Horejes and O'Brien, "Language: Oralism Versus Manualism," 545-547.

[42] There have been many different pedagogies suggested for deaf education. One of the most prominent pedagogies in the twenty-first century is Bilingual Bicultural Education (BI-BI education). For more information on BI-BI education see Sharon Baker and Keith Baker, "Educating Children Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing: Bilingual-Bicultural Education," *ERIC Digest* #E553, (1997).

focused on choosing a singular method for education. The Milan Conference and discussions of oralism were contentious, not due to determining best teaching practices, but rather because eugenics was the insidious motivation behind the propagation of oralism.

Alexander Graham Bell spoke in favor of oralism at the 1880 Milan conference. Bell was an avid eugenicist, who conducted research into hereditary deafness and invented instruments to aid in the production and reception of speech. Bell's eugenic musings were particularly preoccupied with deafness; he believed that

> Dumbness comes from the fact that a child is born deaf, and that it consequently never learns how to articulate, for it is by the medium of hearing that such instruction is acquired… The whole source of trouble, then, is that the ears of these unfortunates are closed. Their brains, their minds, are as fully developed or as capable of development as yours or mine.[43]

Bell's mother was Deaf, and he was reported to have beautiful mastery of signed language.[44] This did not prevent him, however, from creating and chairing the Committee on Deaf Mutism for the American Breeders Association. To Bell's credit, he was adamantly opposed to sterilization which was in direct contrast with the general beliefs of American eugenists from the time. Rather, Bell propagated "the marriages of

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[43] John Hyde, "President Alexander Graham Bell on Japan," *The National Geographic Magazine* 9 (1898): 511

[44] Brian H. Greenwald and John Vickrey Van Cleve, "A Deaf Variety Of The Human Race": Historical Memory, Alexander Graham Bell And Eugenics," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 14, no. 1 (2015), passim.

the desirable with one another,"[45] and conversely the prevention of marriage between

undesirables.

Figure 1: Cartoon of Alexander Graham Bell and the Prohibition of Deaf Marriage[46]

Bell went so far as to marry a Deaf woman, Mabel Gardiner Hubbard who was his

student from the time she was fifteen. Bell's eugenic musings stoked the flame of his

vigorous support of oralism; for if the Deaf could not sign, then they could not marry,

and thus they would not produce Deaf children, views perhaps best stated in his words:

> Those who believe as I do, that the production of a defective race of
> human beings would be a great calamity to the world, will examine
> carefully the causes that lead to the intermarriages of the deaf with the
> object of applying a remedy.[47]

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[45] Greenwald and Van Cleve, "A Deaf Variety Of The Human Race": Historical Memory, Alexander Graham Bell And Eugenics."

[46] Carlisle, Twitter thread, 2018, retrieved from https://twitter.com/carodoodles/status/958860267764543490

[47] Wendy Harris," 'Kill the Indian, Kill the Deaf' Teaching About the Residential Schools," Rethinking Schools, 2021, accessed January 7, 2021, https://rethinkingschools.org/articles/kill-the-indian-kill-the-deaf/

This was the flame Bell carried to Milan in 1880, which sparked an all-consuming fire,

destroying the systems of global Deaf education.

Figure 2: De'Via Art Depicting the Ramifications of the 1880 Milan Conference[48]

The educators for the Deaf decided in Milan that sign language and manualism[49]

would be banned. While this was not an official legal ban, the wording of the resolutions

passed by the convention leave little room for interpretation. The first two tenants the

convention agreed upon were:

1. The Convention, considering the incontestable superiority of articulation over signs in restoring the deaf-mute to society and giving him a fuller knowledge of language, declares that the oral method should be preferred to that of signs in the education and instruction of deaf-mutes.

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[48] Lauralee Rivas, "American Sign Language: The Silent Movement Through Time," *Languages in Conflict*, 2016, retrieved from https://languagesinconflict.wordpress.com/tag/milan-conference/

[49] To quote Paddy Ladd, ""What the fuck is the matter with sign language?!" Ladd, "Deafhood, Deaf Culture, & The Wall of Silence."

2. The Convention, considering that the simultaneous use of articulation and signs has the disadvantage of injuring articulation and lip-reading and the precision of ideas, declares that the pure oral method should be preferred.[50]

As a direct result of the Milan conference, Deaf teachers were fired, the use of sign language in public was considered taboo, and oralism thrived. The decision in Milan launched the Dark Ages for the Deaf which officially ended in the 1960's.[51] During these Dark Ages and the rise of oralism (and still today), Deaf children were forced to assimilate into hearing society.
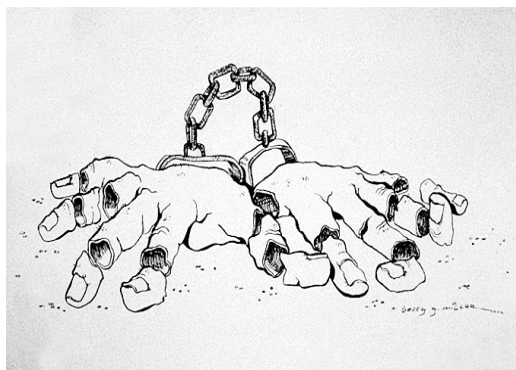
Figure 3: De'Via Art Ameslan Prohibited by Betty G. Miller[52]

This assimilation process took place in schools for the Deaf, as the schools which once taught manualism switched to oralism. Most schools for the Deaf were

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[50] Jamie Berke, "The Milan Conference of 1880: When Sign Language Was Almost Destroyed: An Unpleasant Setback in Deaf Education," *Very Well Health*, (January 21, 2020), https://www.verywellhealth.com/deaf-history-milan-1880-1046547. Accessed January 12, 2021.

[51] Jack R. Gannon, *Deaf Heritage: A Narrative History of Deaf America* (Silver Springs, Maryland: National Association of the Deaf, 1981).

[52] Betty G. Miller, "Ameslan Prohibited," retrieved from https://deaf-art.org/deaf-art/devia-posters/resistance/#iLightbox[gallery_image_1]/1

residential, and at oralist schools Deaf children were forbidden to sign.[53] If caught

signing in the classroom, children's hands would be bound together or their knuckles

slapped with blunt instruments.[54] This kind of "physical penalty for attempting a manual

communication was justified by proponents of the Oral Method through a rhetoric that

insisted that a deaf child permitted to sign would lack the motivation to speak."[55] Oralism

propagated the myth that "the deaf child can transcend her deafness, [and] will one day

become 'normal,'" or rather, become hearing.[56] In fact the current mission statement for

the A.G. Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing[57] is: "Working globally to

ensure that people who are deaf and hard of hearing can hear and talk."[58] This

perceived transcendence of deafness and the belief in the ability of will power to change

a child's physiology, is indicative of the assimilation process condoned by oralism; as is

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[53] Wendy Harris, "'Kill the Indian, Kill the Deaf' Teaching About the Residential Schools."

[54] Hannah Anglin-Jaffe, "Signs of Resistance: Peer Learning of Sign Languages Within 'Oral' Schools for the Deaf," *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 32 (2013): passim. 261-271.

[55]Nicole Markotic, "Oral Methods: Pathologizing the Deaf 'Speaker,'" *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 34, no. 3 (2007): 134. 127-140

[56] ibid, 131.

[57] The AGB foundation still propagates oralism but after a scandal 2007 has issued a statement recognizing ASL and the organization's mission to provide knowledge of all language options. However, throughout the site ASL is referred to as a communication method, whereas spoken English is referred to as a language. A.G. Bell Association for the deaf & Hard of Hearing, "American Sign Language," 2021, accessed February 2, 2021, retrieved from https://www.agbell.org/Media/American-Sign-Language.

[58] Ibid.

the categories in which oralism places its students: "oral successes" and "oral

failures."[59]

      In addition to language assimilation and linguistic colonialism, there is also a

perpetual quest to medically alter the body to produce a replicated hearing. It is once

again important to recognize that this thesis focuses on the cultural view of Deafness

and the experiences of individuals who are culturally Deaf and that the experience of

those who are within the scope of medical deafness is different. The following

interpretation of "cures" for deafness is consistent with the cultural view rather than

medical. Attempts to alter the body in relation to Deafness have long been documented.

From snake-oil remedies to experimental surgeries, hearing assistive devices to

implantations, the cure for Deafness has been sought and marketed. An 1847

newspaper advertisement for Cooper's Ethereal Oil, claims to be "a prompt and lasting

remedy for DEAFNESS," insisting that the oil has cured hundreds of cases which were

"deemed utterly hopeless" making it the superior over "every former Medical

discovery."[60] [all sic]

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[59] Brian Greenwald, "Oralism Before DPN," (course lecture, Gallaudet University, March 27, 2018), notes in author's possession.

[60] Library of Congress, "1847 Newspaper Advertisement Quack Medicine - The Northern Galaxy - VT - Cooper's Ethereal Oil to Cure Deafness," retrieved from https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84023649/1847-09-28/ed-1/seq-4/image_681x432_from_3516,5133_to_4705,5888.jpg
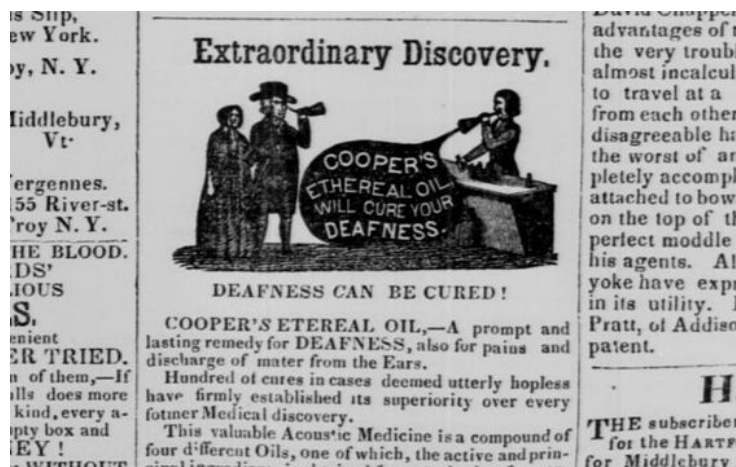
Figure 4: Cooper's Ethereal Oil 1847 Advertisement[61]

A 2021 advertisement for Nucleus® Sound Processors claims to cure the side effects of deafness by "working hard so you don't have to—helping you hear more clearly, making your life easier and allowing you to connect with your world;" while also issuing a disclaimer that "views expressed by Cochlear recipients and hearing health providers are those of the individual"[62] not of the company. No one wants to be liable for damage or to be held to futile results.

While it is important to recognize how hearing assistive technologies are helpful for some, it is vital to recognize that they are not a "cure" for deafness.[63] In fact when cochlear implants (CIs) first came on the market it was widely propagated that

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[61] Ibid.

[62] Cochlear, " Nucleus® Sound Processors," 2021, accessed March 28, 2021, retrieved from https://www.cochlear.com/us/en/home/products-and-accessories/nucleus-system/nucleus-sound-processors. Accessed January 12, 2021.

[63] To hear a replica of what sound through a cochlear implant "sounds" like see Ariel Zych, "What Do Cochlear Implants And Hearing Aids Sound Like?" *Science Friday*, April 11, 2017, retrieved from https://www.sciencefriday.com/educational-resources/cochlear-implants-hearing-aids-sound-like/

CIs could not possibly restore any useful hearing, primarily because the patterns of stimulation and neural responses provided with the CIs ... were incredibly crude and distorted compared with the patterns and responses observed in animals with normal hearing… [and] "direct stimulation of the auditory nerve fibers with resultant perception of speech is not feasible."[64]

However, capitalism being capitalism CIs have been and continue to be pushed on individuals of younger and younger ages. As previously mentioned, 90 percent of Deaf children are born to hearing parents. The first thing these parents hear when their child has finished their APGAR test is something to the effect of "I'm so sorry, but your baby is deaf."[65] The first part of that sentence speaks for itself. Shortly after, parents will be visited by an audiologist and depending on the institution and the prognosis of the infant, the audiologist will often call in a surgical consultant or recommend CIs as treatment.[66] CIs can be implanted in children as young as 12 months, sometimes younger. During the operation the surgeon "make[s] an incision (cut), then places the implant under the skin and inside the skull [then t]hreads the wires with the electrodes into the spirals of the cochlea, [s]ecur[ing] the implant in place and closes the incision with stitches."[67] CIs are considered Class III medical devices, meaning they are

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[64] Adrien A. Eshraghi, Ronen Nazarian, Fred F. Telischi, Suhrud M. Rajguru, Eric Truy, and Chav Gupta. "The Cochlear Implant: Historical Aspects and Future Prospects," *PubMed Central* 295, no. 11 (2016): 5.

[65] CJ Jones, *What Are You, Deaf*?, comedy show, 2006, 1:19:45, retrieved from https://dcmp.org/media/5589-what-are-you-deaf#:~:text=Deaf%3F,-1%20hours%2019&text=Features%20comedian%2Factor%2Fwriter%2F,Golden%20Gloves%20champion%20boxer%20dad.

[66] Leon Lipson (Ear Nose and Throat Physician and Facial Plastic Surgeon) in discussion with the author, March 2021.

[67] William J. Parkes, "Cochlear Implants," *Kids Health*, 2020, retrieved from https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/cochlear.html#:~:text=Doctors%20consider%20cochlear%20implants%20for,implants%20are%20a%20good%20option.

"devices that have a high risk to the patient and/or user."[68] This calls into question

parental decision, especially considering that the child is not given the agency to decide

if they want the procedure. And yet CIs are marketed, and they sell well. The "global

cochlear implant market size was valued at USD 1.67 billion in 2019 and is likely to

grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10.6% from 2020 to 2027."[69]

Statistically, CIs are big business; and this business is a direct threat to Deaf culture.

CIs are not the only technological threat to Deaf culture; recent advances in

genetic testing also threaten the Deaf community. Where CIs threaten the Deaf

community linguistically, many in the Deaf community see prenatal genetic testing as a

threat to the lives of Deaf people.[70] Prenatal testing for deafness raises concerns about

termination of these pregnancies. Similar to activists with Down Syndrome, many within

the disabled community find moral, political, and ethical fault with the termination of

pregnancy based on disability.[71] This is a contentious issue between both abortion

rights activists and disability rights activists, and while this thesis does not argue for or

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[68] BPM Medical, "What's the Difference Between the FDA Medical Device Classes?" 2021, Retrieved from https://www.bmpmedical.com/blog/whats-difference-fda-medical-device-classes-2/#:~:text=Class%20III%20medical%20devices%20are,devices%20regulated%20by%20the%20FDA, Accessed March 31, 2021.

[69] Grand View Research, "Cochlear Implant Market Size, Share & Trends Analysis Report By Type Of Fitting (Unilateral Implant, Bilateral Implant), By End Use (Adult, Pediatric), By Region, And Segment Forecasts, 2020 - 2027," June 2020, retrieved from https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/cochlear-implants-industry

[70] For more information about the Deaf and disabled communities views on abortion see Mary Ziegler, "The Disability Politics of Abortion," *The Utah Law Review* 6, no. 3 (2017), *passim*.

[71] Ibid, *passim*.

against termination of pregnancies it is important to note that the Deaf community has

concerns about termination of pregnancy based on deafness.[72] Combatting this concern

with humor, a recent study on termination of pregnancy on the basis of deafness

reported that "two percent of deaf participants said they would prefer to have deaf

children and would consider a [termination of pregnancy] if the fetus was found to be

hearing."[73] The discussion of technological and genetic interventions as a threat to the

Deaf community remains very much in process.

It is no wonder then, that the Deaf community seeks to disassociate itself from

the disabled community, rather relying on linguistic, cultural, and political solidarity.

Paddy Ladd argues that the Deaf community has long been viewed in a "Yes, but"

manner, stating:

> [T]here is a bottom line – one either respects Deaf communities enough to
> accept that they have a consistent and collective view of their own as
> language users which should be granted acceptance such as would be
> given to any other language. Or . . . there is something which holds one
> back from being able to accede to this. And from where Deaf people
> reside, they interpret this as an inability to transcend one's social
> conditioning and to be able to perceive them as fully human; that you
> construct them, not as collectives of language users, but as medically,
> karmically or intellectually damaged beings.[74]

The key to achieving recognition as fully human depends on hearing people's

recognition of the Deaf as a cultural entity; for "[n]o matter from which position one

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[72]Anna Middleton, Jenny Hewison, and RH Mueller, "Prenatal Diagnosis for Inherited Deafness--What is the Potential Demand?" *Journal of Genetic Counseling* 10, no. 2: (2001): 121-131.

[73] ibid, 121.

[74] Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood*, 8.

approaches these subjects, it is the concept of culture which is the key to resistance

and change."[75] The resistance to the label of disability can be best surmised in this way:

"The problem stems from the word 'disabled.' And we are part of the disabled group; we

should be part of the disabled group. But we are also part of a linguistic minority group.

We are part of both and that is what confuses governments and other statutory bodies"

[interpreter sic].[76] The need for stark differentiation stems from the lack of recognition of

the intersection of these two groups; if one cannot be both, it is important to pick a side.

When recognizing the Deaf community as a linguistic, cultural, and political

group, it is also important to recognize the disabled community as a political and social

entity and discuss the difference between the two. Since the mid-twentieth century there

has been a growing movement within the disabled community to advocate for individual

agency, civil rights, and political recognition. As a result of this political activism, many

laws have been passed banning discrimination based on ability, protecting the civil

rights of disabled persons, promoting educational equity, etc. These laws are

reminiscent of the shift in the greater American society's views toward the disabled:

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[75] ibid, 9.

[76] This is a quote pulled from a live lecture in which there is live interpretation. The lecturer is Deaf and is using BSL. The interpreter is interpreting into spoken English. In this quote the interpreter seems to falter, and as a result the live interpretation may not be the best or most accurate rendition of what is signed. While this is a common occurrence in live consecutive interpretation (as languages are interpreted concept for concept, and thus interpretations can be constructed in a myriad of ways), it is still important to note the potential difference between the spoken interpretation and the original signed statement. Ladd, "Deafhood, Deaf Culture, & The Wall of Silence."

"disability really was looked at as an issue of civil rights rather than an issue of charity and rehabilitation at best, pity at worst."[77]

As with any law, the benefits of these laws are varied throughout the disabled community. Perhaps the best example of a law that drew a distinction between the disabled and Deaf communities was the 1975 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).[78] Famous for its implementation of placing children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment, the IDEA impacted the disabled community and the Deaf community very differently. While placing children with disabilities in environments with able-bodied peers can be enormously beneficial to most disabled students, placing Deaf children in a classroom with hearing students or other children with disabilities becomes problematic because the Deaf children have a different language and language modality than the other children in that classroom.[79] Instantly the Deaf child's language use is restricted, as he or she is linguistically isolated by what lawmakers deem the "least restrictive environment." So, while this law benefits many school aged children with disabilities, it does not benefit school aged Deaf children.

In addition to differing political goals, the Deaf and disabled communities also differ in their methodology to achieve those goals. The disabled community advocates

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[77] Perri Meldon, "Disability History: The Disability Rights Movement," *National Park Service*,2019, retrieved from https://www.nps.gov/articles/disabilityhistoryrightsmovement.htm. Accessed February 3, 2021.

[78] Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1975, U.S.C. Sec. 300.114

[79] Tawny Holmes and Matthew Malzkuhn, "Deaf Studies Conference: Transformations" (conference proceedings, Gallaudet University, Washington D.C., November 1-3, 2018).

that society was built for able-bodied individuals, that human rights should not be an

"adding-on process," and that any society should "be built and managed with all its

members in mind, taking collective responsibility to ensure equal access and full

citizenship for all, and refusal to do so should be seen as social and political

discrimination."[80] The disabled community's "radical social model … asserted their

fundamental equality as human beings with entitlement to full citizenship."[81] Whereas:

> Deaf discourses focus on policies which maximize not only the strength of
> the individual, but also the whole community. Thus, when critiquing the
> damage created by policies of individualism, their concern is for how the
> damage to those individuals negatively impacts on the running of their
> own communities. As such, therefore, their concern is for policies which
> encompass language planning, social, cultural and artistic regeneration
> and development.[82]

This is not to say that these communities' political goals are mutually exclusive, or even

in contrast to one another. While the Deaf community sees itself as a linguistic and

cultural minority, the United States of America also does not have an official language,

and contains many linguistic minority groups, so there is little legal ground to stand on in

regard to arguing for linguistic equality. However, since the passing of the Americans

with Disabilities Act (ADA) there are constitutional protections against discrimination on

the basis of disability. Howard Rosenblum, Deaf attorney and CEO of the National

Association for the Deaf, explains this disconnect not as a cultural disability but rather a

legal disability, explaining that: "culturally, we[the Deaf] are a linguistic minority, but

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[80]Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood*, 15.

[81] Ibid, 15.

[82] ibid, 167.

legally, we have [to have] a disability in order to qualify for services."[83] In this way Rosenblum argues for finding ways to "use the system for us, [for i]n a perfect world, we would be a linguistic minority, not a disability minority."[84] However, the legal battle for the Deaf community is still being fought on both fronts (via disability rights and linguistic rights), flanked by the community's desire to distance itself from the label of disability.

While the label of disability provides some legal protections, it also produces social stigma which the Deaf community (for the most part)[85] vigorously seeks to avoid. The connotations of deafness as a disability evoke pity.[86] Deaf culture operates out of a sense of pride, belonging, identity, etc. In the words of I. King Jordan, the first Deaf President of Gallaudet University, "Deaf people can do everything hearing people can do except hear."[87] Connotations of deafness as a disability cause Deaf individuals to be seen by what they can't do, rather than what they can do or who they are as members of a community and a culture.[88] Questions of ability come into play when deafness is

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[83]Holmes and Malzkuhn, "Deaf Studies Conference: Transformations."

[84] Ibid.

[85] The contingency here is due to the fact that the Deaf community is not a monolith, and as such there is always variation with individuals' views. However, for the most part disability is stigmatized within the Deaf community. For more information see Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood.*, specifically Chapter 1.

[86] Emily Trio, *What Is It Like To Be Deaf?* (2020; Los Angeles, CA: BuzzFeed Motion Pictures), YouTube, retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mleaWwxMWtI. Accessed January 14, 2021.

[87] Translation and Transcription of I. King Jordan, "Press Conference" (speech, Gallaudet University, Washington D.C., 1988).

[88] Emily Trio, *I'm Deaf, But I'm Not...* (February 5, 2020; Los Angeles, CA: BuzzFeed Motion Pictures), YouTube, retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mleaWwxMWtI. Accessed January 15, 2021.

viewed as a disability: Can deaf people drive?; Can deaf people think?; Can deaf people laugh?; Can deaf people read?[89] It makes sense then that Deaf individuals seek to distance themselves from the label of disability. Deaf "get put in [the category of] disability, or [they] get put in [the category of] language, but never the twain."[90] If forced to align with one side of a binary, it is no wonder that Deaf wish to be viewed as a cultural group, rather than a disabled one.

Deaf/hearing Binary

Through the lens of Deaf culture there are two worlds, two ways of being: The Deaf world and the Deaf way, and the hearing world and the hearing way. These worlds are not distant in cultural interplanetary space, but rather they orbit each other, often colliding and eclipsing one another. The Deaf world takes up space within the larger hearing world, making that space its own. Deaf space travels with a Deaf person wherever they go. It's in the way they stand, the way they sit, the way they hold themselves, the way they interact with others. For example, when riding the MARC Train service from Fredrick, Maryland into Washington D.C., Deaf faculty members of Gallaudet University sit in the booth area (where two rows of seats face one another). In this example, these Deaf faculty members are taking what is normally a hearing space and turning it into Deaf space. Through this seating arrangement all Deaf persons can

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[89] Emily Trio, *Deaf People Answer Commonly Googled Questions About Being Deaf*(2020; Los Angeles, CA: BuzzFeed Motion Pictures), media, retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IgmB9c29UKU

[90] Ladd, "Deafhood, Deaf Culture, & The Wall of Silence."

see one another, and thus one another's signs clearly. This facing formation is an integral part of the Deaf way, so when conversing Deaf often form a circle, semicircle, or place their chairs or bodies in such a way that every member of the group can see each other's signs clearly. By creating this Deaf space, the former hearing space within these chairs ceases to exist; or to refer back to our planetary metaphor, the Deaf world eclipses the hearing world.

Similarly both Deaf individuals and signing hearing members of the Deaf community take part in the creation of Deaf spaces. Some of this space creation is due entirely to Deaf ways of being. In Deaf space, the only language modality used is signed; all members of the community (should and are expected to) respect this, including signing hearing members. For example, it is plausible to assume that two signing hearing interpreters eating lunch on a park bench would be conversing in English. Given Deaf cultural norms, when their Deaf colleague, a Certified Deaf Interpreter, joins them the hearing interpreters would automatically switch the modality of their conversation. Regardless of where the hearing people are in their conversation (starting, finishing, mid-sentence, etc.), the moment a Deaf person enters into that physical space, it shifts and becomes Deaf space, where the only language modality is signed. Another possible example of community creation of Deaf space would be when the signing hearing parents of a middle-school-aged Deaf child hosts their child's Deaf peers for a dinner/game night. When these signing hearing parents in hearing space sit down for dinner and practice American cultural manners of "elbows off the table," we might notice soundless use of utensils, speaking only when one's mouth is not full, and soft tones of voice considered polite. When their child has his peers over, that same

dinner table becomes Deaf space. Fists pound the table which causes vibrations signaling attention, quiet use of utensils is disregarded, sign production and eating happen simultaneously, and discourse takes place only in sign language. In this example the hearing parents are involved within the switching of hearing space to Deaf space, which the Deaf children initiate. To continue with this example, where the signing hearing mother might use her voice to call to get the attention of her hearing daughter and her hearing friends for their game night, for her Deaf son and his friends she will flick the light switch on and off--a signal used to call attention in Deaf space. These are all examples of signing hearing individuals participating in Deaf space and respecting Deaf culture. However, Deaf space and ways of being are initiated by Deaf people sharing in the culture of Deaf people. Signing hearing participants' involvement, while a sign of cultural respect, is an afterthought in cultural and spatial production.

These Deaf cultural behaviors and thus the creation and claiming of Deaf space, are considered to be the Deaf way. As previously mentioned, Deaf people share in a global community and the Deaf way transcends international geographic and cultural boundaries. The ability to communicate through sign language without barriers is "a way of connecting. . . a bond. Even if someone's from another country . . . [they're] not strangers."[91] So important is this Deaf way of being that an international Deaf Way conference was held in 1989 and again in 2002 for Deaf Way II.[92] These shared cultural

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[91] Ibid.

[92] Manny Fernandez, "Celebrating the Deaf Way," *The Washington Post* (2002), retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2002/07/12/celebrating-the-deaf-way/a86aa32d-929c-4252-82f9-5409b5b1bd70/. Accessed March 23, 2021.

behaviors can be termed many things with Deaf way being one and Paddy Ladd's 2003

theory of Deafhood another. But regardless of terminology these ways of being are Deaf

culture.

As the dinner table contrast illustrates, many Deaf ways of being are separate

and distinct from hearing ways of being. In fact, the terminology of "hearing" society and

"hearing" people is a cultural Deaf lens of seeing the world in which "hearing" becomes

the marked case instead of "Deaf." Nevertheless, the Deaf world is perpetually related

to the hearing world, creating a binary system. American Deaf people are inherently

American, as their community and culture is located within the boundaries of the nation

state America, and vicariously American culture. American culture and Deaf culture

coincide, much in the same way that French Deaf culture coincides with French culture,

or Ghanaian Deaf culture coincides with Ghanaian culture. While American, French,

and Ghanaian Deaf people share a global Deafness, Deafhood, and way of life, they

also differ culturally depending on the geographic boundaries of their nations.

Culture includes "food, music, religion, traditions, art, sports, clothing, language,

history, values, beliefs, stereotypes, politics, environments, morals, ethnicities, dance."[93]

American culture encompasses specific variants of these practices. Any number of

observers have claimed the specific description of American culture as individualistic,

capitalistic, consumeristic, nationalistic.[94] Although encompassing many variations,

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[93] Penelope McFarlane, "Developing a Culturally Specific e-learning Website,"
7th International Conference on Information Technology Based Higher Education and Training, Sydney, NSW: (2006): 1.

[94] These descriptions are one viewpoint of American culture and used to emphasize the points laid out in this thesis. There are many different views of American

America has a way of dress, set of morals, musical and dance styles, history, religions, foods, all specific to and of itself. Deaf culture is one of many cultures that operate within and around American culture.

Because of this some American Deaf cultural aspects are uniquely American, and others are uniquely Deaf. Deaf culture absorbs American food, religion, stereotypes, politics, environments. Separate from American culture, Deaf culture has its own language, history, values and beliefs, morals, art, etc. Some aspects such as national history and value and belief systems overlap with American culture. Because of the cultural value placed on nationalism in America, it is understandable that other cultures within the geographic borders of the United States adopt aspects of American culture. American people do not view the world as being categorized by American and Deaf, and it is safe to assume that an individual who has never been exposed to the Deaf community would not view the world through the lens of Deaf and hearing. The separation of the Deaf world and the hearing world is a cultural lens and perception unique to the Deaf community. Because of the colonization and oppression of the Deaf by hearing America, it is understandable that a binary is drawn between Deaf and hearing.

Binary thinking is a way of sorting complex concepts into clear categories, often dichotomies. Binary thinking can range from thinking in terms of sun/moon, day/night, male/female, right/wrong, (b)Black/white,[95] logical/irritational, and even Deaf/hearing. In

culture, and other adjectives such as optimistic, practical, tolerant, diverse, etc. can be used to depict American culture as well.

[95] The punctuation of (b)B here is used to refer to both the colors black and white but also racialized thinking in terms of Black and white. For more on the Black/white binary see Juan F. Perea, "The Black/White Binary Paradigm of Race: The 'Normal

this way, "the remarkable prevalence of theories based on opposition in so many

societies at different stages of technological development"[96] function as a way to

understand society and social structures of hierarchy and dominance. There are two

traditions when it comes to binary or dialectical thinking, Hegelian tradition and another

tradition which is:

> Older and called itself "dialectic" long before Hegel. This tradition sees
> value in accepting, putting up with, indeed seeking the non-resolution of
> the two terms: not feeling that the opposites must be somehow reconciled,
> not feeling that the itch must be scratched. This tradition goes as far back
> as the philosophy of yin/yang. In the West we see it in Socrates/Plato, in
> Boethius, and in Peter Abelard's Sic et Non, and it continues down
> through the present. The goal is lack of resolution of opposites.[97]

Toying with these two traditions of thought is not new. Socrates and Plato discuss both

dialectical traditions. This is evident in Platonic dialogues that strive towards a single

answer while simultaneously recognizing that some contrasts are unresolvable.

Boethius also adopted Neo-Platonic tradition in his beliefs that

> unity or truth often exists in a realm or form where human reason cannot
> grasp it either with logic or language, and that the closest we can come to
> the highest or deepest knowledge is to try to hold in mind propositions that
> are irreconcilable.[98]

This long line of debate about binary thinking and its merits and deficiencies reveals that

regardless of the approach, binary thinking is immensely prevalent within societies.

Science' of American Racial Thought," *California Law Review* 85, no. 5 (1997): 1213-1258.

[96]Peter Elbow, "The Uses of Binary Thinking," *Journal of Advanced Composition* 13, no. 1 (1993): 51.

[97] ibid, 52.

[98] Ibid.

Social psychologists explain binary thinking as a natural response of the human mind to avoid cognitive dissonance. Binary thinking easily allows for classification of complex information seeming to be "the path of least resistance for the perceptual system, for thinking, and for linguistic structures."[99] This might mean that humans are inherently ill-at-ease when it comes to irresolution. The oversimplification of binary thinking allows for individuals to search for and find the (projected) desired resolution, for "even at a sensory level [humans] are constantly presented with contrasting views and shifting perceptions, but [their] brains always yield single, stable objects and categories."[100] When constructing binaries, it is easiest to clump categories together based on dichotomies: good/bad, us/them, me/you. Inherently dichotomies are situated as either positives and negatives, and it is easy to assume that "it may be that the very structure of our bodies and our placement in phenomenal reality invite us to see things in terms of binary oppositions."[101] Dichotomies also extend to social hierarchies that classify what is socially perceived to be positive and negative; for example, white/Black, rich/poor, male/female, hearing/Deaf, colonizer/colonized, oppressor/oppressed.

It is no wonder then that colonized groups often adopt these same binaries, the label of the colonizer growing in negative proportions as colonized groups face more oppression and trauma. Where colonizers apply stereotypes to the people they colonize (the "welfare queen," the "savage Indian," the "feebleminded Deaf-Mute"),[102] the

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[99] ibid, 5.

[100] ibid, 54.

[101]ibid, 53.

[102] To be abundantly clear, these are examples of stereotypical tropes.

colonized create stereotypes for their oppressors (the "Bible-thumping White

Supremacist," the "greedy white man," the "Oralist hearing oppressor").

Approaches to analyzing the functions of stereotypes include economic,[103]

sociological,[104] and social cognition approaches. Theorized from social psychology, the

social cognition approach looks at stereotypes as instances of cognitive theories or

schemas which are an individual's intuitive generalizations about other's relation to the

individual's self. In this regard stereotypes function as a tool for conserving cognitive

resources, in that stereotypes are:

> mental representations of real differences between groups [which allow
> for] easier and more efficient processing of information. Stereotypes are
> selective, however, in that they are localized around group features that
> are the most distinctive, that provide the greatest differentiation between
> groups, and that show the least within-group variation.[105]

In this way stereotypes are reminiscent of the psychological understanding of heuristics

in regard to probability judgments. Heuristics function as a tool for cognitive problem

solving by providing quick often nonoptimal solutions to immediate problems. In this way

heuristics and stereotypes go hand in hand in terms of oversimplifying complex

probabilities and theories as well as oversimplifying characteristics and traits of groups.

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[103] The economic approach understands the function of stereotypes to be rooted in "stereotypes as a manifestation of statistical discrimination: rational formation of beliefs about a group member in terms of the aggregate beliefs about that group." Pedro Bordalo, Katherine Coffman, Nicola Gennaioli, and Andrei Shleifer, "Stereotypes," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 131, no. 4 (2013): 1753.

[104] The sociological approach sees stereotypes in their relation to social groups which are "fundamentally incorrect and derogatory generalizations of group traits, reflective of the stereotype's underlying prejudices... or other internal motivations." Ibid, 1753.

[105] ibid, 2.

So, while stereotypes provide a quick (often seemingly accurate) solution to cognitive disequilibrium, they are inherently biased and often fall along a binary.[106]

As a result, while most hearing have never encountered Deaf people nor Deaf culture and thus cannot conceive of the world through the lens of Deaf or hearing, Deaf people who have experienced centuries of oppression and discrimination at the hands (or rather the tongues) of hearing individuals readily see this Deaf/hearing binary in their daily lives as they traverse the Deaf and hearing worlds. This perception is reinforced by daily encounters of oppression, audism, lack of accessibility, etc. in the move from Deaf spaces into hearing spaces. In this way perceptions of us against them remold themselves into concepts of Deaf and Hearing.

Black/white Binary

Of course, hearing people also participate in binary thinking and see the world through dichotomist lenses. Perhaps one of the most prominent examples of this is the Black/white binary. It has long been said that the United States of America[107] has its own brand of racism, seared into American social structure and culture.[108] The scorch marks of racism are present within American socio-cultural structures and ideas, yielding (in part) the heuristic cognitive classification of the Black/white binary.

Paradigms of race function as tools to sculpt society's and individuals' conception, definition, and understanding of race. Thinking in terms of the Black/white

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[106]ibid, 11.

[107] In this section the labels of hearing transfer into American. American culture and Americanness as a nationality encompass both Deaf and hearing individuals.

[108] Fields and Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life, passim.*

binary creates a socio-cognitive paradigm that conceptualizes race in America as entirely or at least primarily composed of two separate racial groups, Black and white. This binary, burrows into most American interactions, and has been called "the most pervasive and powerful paradigm of race in the United States."[109] The Black/white binary not only defines America's shared understanding of race and racism, but it also limits this same understanding.

While the Black/white binary has been increasingly scrutinized by both academia (for example, with the rise in Critical Race Studies) and the general public (with the increasing awareness of the fight for Black civil rights, and more recently Black Lives Matter), it nevertheless remains seeped into the social and psychological cognition of the American people. Derrick Bell's theory of racial permanence[110] explains that racism is a permanent feature and structure of society, and that while resistance is necessary, racism will never cease to exist. In the push against racism, race activists and scholars can and have continued to fall into binary thinking themselves, reproducing "this paradigm when they write and act as though only the Black and the White races matter for purposes of discussing race and social policy with regard to race."[111] In fact,

> the mere recognition that "other people of color" exist, without careful attention to their voices, their histories, and their real presence, is merely a reassertion of the Black/White paradigm. If one conceives of race and racism as primarily of concern only to Blacks and Whites and understands "other people of color" only through some unclear analogy to the "real"

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[109] Perea, "The Black/White Binary Paradigm of Race: The 'Normal Science' of American Racial Thought," 1219.

[110] For more information on racial permanence see Derrick Bell, *Faces At The Bottom Of The Well: The Permanence Of Racism*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1993)

[111] Perea, "The Black/White Binary Paradigm of Race: The 'Normal Science' of American Racial Thought," 1219.

races, this just restates the binary paradigm with a slight concession to demographics.[112]

While the Black/white binary is harmful for Black people, it also forces other minority groups into exceptionalism, the idea that "one's group is, in fact, so unusual as to justify special treatment, as well as nationalism, the belief that the primary business of a minority group should be to look after its own interests."[113] In this same line of thought, white society often tokenizes a particular minority group which is singled out as preferred, through tropes like "model minority" or to defer accusations of racist intentions. Calling the Black/white binary a siren's song, critical race and legal scholar Juan F. Perea explains that minority groups often invoke this binary as they try to "identify with whites in hopes of gaining status or benefits under specific statutes, such as the naturalization statute, that limit benefits to whites."[114]

The Question of Black First/Deaf First

Deaf consider their culture collectivist in nature.[115] Collectivist cultural[116] ideals center on meeting the obligations and responsibilities of individuals' social roles in order

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[112] Ibid.

[113] ibid, 291.

[114] ibid, 299.

[115] Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood*, 167.

[116] Some scholars see collectivist and individualistic cultures as being limiting categories. However, other scholars see these terms as broad-brush strokes in the painting of society. This paper uses the perspectives and interpretations of the disciplines Deaf Studies and Sociology which view collectivist cultures as generalizations about commonalities between cultures that value the acts of individuals in relation to the benefit of the group.

to sustain group harmony. In this way collectivist cultures place value on the self in relation to the group and cultural norms, implicit or explicit standards of behavior, and center around cultural harmony as a result of individual action. Because of the importance of maintaining harmony, collectivist cultures place high value on adherence to cultural norms and obligations, as well as individual compromise for the sake of the group. Because norm violation poses disruption to social harmony, norm violators are seen to "defy their duties and obligations as group members, and this may reduce their status in collectivistic societies."[117] In the same way those who adhere to cultural norms are supported by the group and even may gain higher social status because they are seen to be committed group members. In collectivism encouragement of norm adherence and discouragement of norm deviance, is often communicated indirectly and

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As an example of the perspective of collectivism and individualism as being limiting categories, see: Y. Joel Wong, Shu-Yi Wang, and Elyssa M. Klann, "The Emperor With No Clothes: A Critique of Collectivism and Individualism," *Archives of Scientific Psychology* 6, no. 1, (2018): 251-260; as well as Hervé Varenne, *Americans Together: Structured Diversity in a Midwestern Town,* New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 1977.

As an example of the perspective of collectivism and individualism being useful categories, see Harry Triandis, "Collectivism v. Individualism: A Reconceptualization of a Basic Concept in Cross-cultural Social Psychology," In C. Bagley and G. K. Verma (eds) *Personality, Cognition and Values: Cross-cultural Perspectives of Childhood and Adolescence*, (London: Macmillan, 1986).

[117]Eftychia Stamkou, Gerben A. van Kleef, Astrid C. Homan, Michele J. Gelfand, Fons J. R. van de Vijver, Marieke C. van Egmond, Diana Boer, Natasha Phiri Nailah Ayub, Zoe Kinias, Katarzyna Cantarero, Dorit Efrat Treister Ana Figueiredo, Hirofumi Hashimoto, Eva B. Hofmann, Renata P. Lima, and I-Ching Lee, "Cultural Collectivism and Tightness Moderate Responses to Norm Violators: Effects on Power Perception, Moral Emotions, and Leader Support," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 45, no. 6, (2019): 948.

vigilance and mindfulness of adherence and deviance is prevalent.[118] Conversely, individualistic cultural ideals center around the uniqueness of the self and the self as a free agent independent of strict normative behavior. Because individualistic cultures value freedom, privacy, self-determination and actualization, norm violation "adheres to the individualistic cultural ideal of autonomy and as such may enhance [norm violators] status in individualistic societies."[119] In this way individualistic cultures have a broad range of non-normative behaviors and characteristics deemed socially acceptable. This is not to say that norm violation is standard or even valued within individualistic cultures, for norm and taboo breaking are enforced within all cultures; rather, there is more leniency towards violations of lesser social value in individualistic societies.

Collectivism is further fostered within Deaf culture given that cultural norms are not shared generationally. The majority of Deaf people have hearing families,[120] because of this cultural transmission occurs within the peer group, often at Deaf schools. Linguistic colonialism, forced assimilation, and auditory technology, further

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[118]Shi S. Liu, Michael W. Morris, Thomas Talhelm, and Qian Yang, "Ingroup Vigilance in Collectivistic Cultures," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 116, no. 29 (2019): 14538-14546. and Stamkou et al., "Cultural Collectivism and Tightness Moderate Responses to Norm Violators: Effects on Power Perception, Moral Emotions, and Leader Support."

[119]Stamkou et al., "Cultural Collectivism and Tightness Moderate Responses to Norm Violators: Effects on Power Perception, Moral Emotions, and Leader Support," 948.

[120]Ross and Karchmer, "Chasing the Mythical Ten Percent: Parental Hearing Status of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students in the United States," *passim.*

foster group tightness, "the importance that is assigned to maintaining social order."[121]

Collectivism and group tightness are closely related but different phenomena,

collectivism emphasizes individual's completion of roles in relation to society, tightness

however emphasizes the importance of social order. Because of this, collectivist and

tight cultures are traditionally intolerant of norm deviance. In tight cultures, individuals

"have psychological qualities that promote social order, such as higher need for

structure and self-monitoring ability."[122] Because of this norm violators are considered a

threat to a society's social order, so much so that individuals from tight cultures have

been shown to have strong neurobiological reactions to norm deviance.[123] The tightness

and collectivist nature of Deaf culture places high value on norm conformance, self-

monitoring, and boundary-policing. Boundary-policing or norm-policing are the ways in

which actors stigmatize individuals who and behaviors that deviate from social norms

and cross social boundaries. Boundary-policing can occur through "overt tactics such as

distasteful comments," "physical aggression," or "hostile looks and uncomfortable

stares."[124] Additionally boundary-policing can take the form of covert tactics such as

masked or nuanced language, mockery, and projection and manipulation of emotions.

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[121]Stamkou et al., "Cultural Collectivism and Tightness Moderate Responses to Norm Violators: Effects on Power Perception, Moral Emotions, and Leader Support: 949.

[122]Ibid.

[123]Ibid.

[124]Chinyere K. Osuji, "Racial 'Boundary-Policing': Perceptions of Black-White Interracial Couples in Los Angeles and Rio de Janeiro," *Du Boise Review* 10, no. 1 (2013): 180.

In this way norm deviance such as listening to music, talking or Sim-Comming,[125] incorporation of S.E.E.[126] signs into ASL, is strictly policed within Deaf culture as these behaviors are seen to cross the boundaries of Deaf and Hearing spaces.

America's culture is individualistic in nature. The United States of America's long history of colonialism and immigration, have generated within the national boundaries different cultures in an overarching American culture. The hybrid aspects of American culture are visible in American cuisine, dress, music, dance, etc. Industrialization, capitalism, postmodernism, and racism all scaffold the patterns of inequality and hierarchy in American culture. The majority of those who have the highest social standing within American culture embody White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP)[127] values. Because of this striving for higher social stranding can take the form of reproducing and adopting WASP norms. Because of America's individualism there is cultural value attributed to individuals' actions towards social mobility, consistent with individualisms' drive for self-actualization and the premium placed on of individual

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[125] For more information on Sim Com see Gemma Matheson, "What's The Deal With SimCom?" *Access Innovation Media*, (2017) retrieved from https://blog.ai-media.tv/blog/what-is-simcom.

[126] For more information on S.E.E. see Andrew Hoffman, "Signing Exact English," *Lifeprint* (2008) retrieved from https://www.lifeprint.com/asl101/topics/signedenglish02.htm

[127] The term WASP needs to be unpacked and analyzed; however, it is outside the scope of this thesis. For more information, see Nancy Isenberg, *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America*, New York, NY: Viking, 2017 and Heather C. McGhee, *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together,* New York, NY: One World, 2021. For more on the origin of the term WASP, see Maria Panaritise, "Digby Baltzell, Sociologist Who Coined Term 'WASP,' Dies at 80," *Associated Press News*, August 19, 1996.

action. Because of the conflict between the perceived American cultural ideal and America's system of social stratification, many see "the flexibility of U.S. culture and its highly symbolic nature. . . [to mean that] American culture [h]as a mythic identity, while others recognize it as American exceptionalism."[128] But regardless of the nuances of American culture, an extreme value is often placed on social mobility and moving upwards through levels of stratification. Because power and wealth are situated in the top layer of stratification, those situated in that strata maintain their position in the societal hierarchy by policing liminal boundaries and social structures; this is most evident in America's conceptions of and interactions with race.

Racial stratification allows for structured inequality and determines access to resources based on ethnic background and skin color. While race is a social construction, it is the core tenet of racism, "the theory and the practice of applying a social, civic, or legal double standard based on ancestry, and to the ideology surrounding such a double standard."[129] Racism is both a social practice and the rationale behind that practice. This social practice and rationale are both indicative of the two ways in which stratification systems operate: ideologically and structurally. Dependent on group interest, ideologies justify stratification because they are essentially the ideas that inform and are informed by social norms, mores, values, theories and folkways. Structural mechanisms center around the continual unequal

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[128]Lumen Learning, "Culture and the Dominant Ideology in the U.S." *Boundless Sociology*, accessed March 24, 2021,retrieved from https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-sociology/chapter/culture-and-the-dominant-ideology-in-the-u-s/

[129] Fields and Fields, *Racecraft,,* 17.

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treatment of members of society and can be broken into two categories, physical and behavioral. Physical mechanisms revolve around institutional, geographical, and tangible oppression, whereas behavioral mechanisms are the actual actions of oppression, justified by stratification norms. Structural and ideological stratification methods:

> not only reinforce one another, but they also serve to justify and maintain social order. There is a built-in tautology to their relationship: an ideology justifies differential treatment or structural separation, and a given structure, in turn, perpetuates and reinforces an ideology (e.g., group norms, values, and stereotypes).[130]

In this way, racial stratification consists of society's "action[s] and imagining[s which] are collective yet individual, day-to-day yet historical, and consequential even though nested in mundane routine."[131] Through racial stratification, boundary-policing and the conservation of social wealth and power in America is enforced in relation to skin color, namely in relation to the Black/white binary.

The implementation of ideologies and practices of the Black/white binary seem contradictory to the core tenant[132] of Deaf culture, shared Deafness. Because Deafness is predominantly non-genetic, the unifying factor in the Deaf community is communal Deafness and shared Deafhood. It seems contrary, then, to superimpose the Black/white binary over core Deaf cultural values. Case in point, a Black Deaf man

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[130]"Richard R. Verdugo, "Racial Stratification, Social Consciousness, and the Education of Mexican Americans in Fabens, Texas: A Socio-Historical Case Study," *UC Santa Barbara Spaces for Difference: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1, no. 2 (2008): 71.

[131]Fields and Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*, 28.

[132] For more information on core cultural tenants, see Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood*.

recounts his experience going to a local Deaf club with friends and is ignored because of his Blackness. The man explains that his white Deaf friend was instantly able to connect and start chatting with other white Deaf people at the club. He and his other Black Deaf friend tried to start conversations with others, even with some people that they knew, and they were ignored. His response to the frustrating situation is telling: "I thought that Deaf people bonded no matter what our race is? Like, that's where it got to me … I had mixed feelings about it all, and I never went back to that Deaf club again."[133] Black Deaf scholar David A. Player writes that "one of the tenets of Deaf Culture is that having a cultural Deaf identity supposedly transcends race in Deaf communities."[134] Yet, Player[135] argues this logic is faulty and is a mirror image of the ideology of colorblindness in American society, which the society promises but does not actually practice. In fact, many Black Deaf see Deaf colorblindness as a reflection of hearing society and are angry:

> I feel sorry for them because, to me, I see that white Deaf people are still being brainwashed … White Deaf people are still brainwashed by white hearing people. Because hearing white people have already been racist first. Before Deaf people... White people always get their way. You have to understand white Deaf people always get away with something. You know it's the same concept of "getting away with murder." But to me, to me, it's not just quote "getting away with murder" it's getting away with privilege…. Come on white Deaf people, you should know better… I am mad at white Deaf people right now. I mean, I'm mad at white hearing people too, but that's not the point. I'm mad at all of you Deaf people who are white. I'm calling you out… You fucking know better. Period. That's it. You are Deaf.

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[133]Melmira, "I DISCUSSING WHITE DEAF PRIVILEGE," 55:12, 2020, retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzYxPXBgLXQ

[134]David A. Player, "White Deaf Privilege is a Cousin of White Privilege." *Deaf White Deaf People*, 2020.

[135] Ibid.

> You are white. You have privilege. There is no excuse. Shame on you... I
> am trying to understand why you still practice racism. I don't get it.[136]

White Deaf's imposing of the Black/white binary within Deaf cultural values functions

mainly in two ways: to advance white Deaf's social strata and as a method of boundary-

policing to ensure Deaf cultural loyalty. In essence, America's system of racial

stratification supersedes Deaf cultural values of unity and oneness.

The two functions of the Black/white binary in Deaf culture contradict each other.

While using the Black/white binary to advance their upward mobility to higher social

strata, white Deaf individuals simultaneously participate in boundary-policing in order to

ensure Black Deaf individuals' loyalty to the cultural group. While aligning with

whiteness has long been seen as a coping strategy that minority groups use to counter

social stratification, this alignment with and implementation of the Black/white binary by

white Deaf people is interesting taking into consideration the Deaf/hearing binary which

is so prominent in Deaf culture. Where alignment with hearing people and hearingness

is seen as taboo in Deaf culture, white Deaf's alignment with white hearing people and

white hearingness is seemingly okay.

By default, then, Blackness and any suggestion of Black Deaf aligning with Black

hearing or Black hearingness is seen as cultural boundary crossing. Take for example

this Black Deaf student's experience at Gallaudet University, the world's only university

for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing. After three years of attending college, without

learning to sign until he arrived at the university as a freshman, the student explained

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[136]Shad Eight Black, "Hey White Deafies, Why Y'all Still Racist If You've Been
Discriminated By Ableists?" YouTube video, Oct 29, 2020, retrieved from
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJsiMJFcxdE. Accessed March 12, 2021.

his frustrations with identity, or rather with white Deaf individuals' identification of him. He explained how on the sports teams or in the cafeteria the Black Deaf students would congregate together, specifically those Black Deaf students who were newer at sign. He expressed his frustration at not knowing all the signs all the time; "Sometimes I just want to talk, ya know?" he exclaimed, trying to explain why he would speak a word when he got stuck in the middle of a sentence. This student felt like classes were hard enough in a second language that he was still learning, but the socialization aspect of school was the worst for him. When he would talk or if he would listen to music, white Deaf students would call him hearing, deliberately using the term as a way to be offensive and derogatory. The student explained that it was not just him, most of the Black hard-of-hearing or Black Deaf students would also be termed hearing by their white Deaf peers. This caused the student to be disillusioned in his excitement for attending Gallaudet; he became depressed and his grades started slipping. "I want to be Deaf," he said as he shrugged, "But I'm Black."[137] A telling and troubling statement indeed.

If Blackness signals an individual's perceived hearingness (as opposed to Deafness), it is not a stretch to assume that Blackness also signals an individual's perceived disabledness (as opposed to Deafness). In fact, disability has long been racialized. In an attempt to justify racial stratification, white individuals have used

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[137] Author's conversation with a confidential source May 23, 2018. The source is confidential (at the source's request) to prevent the social stigmatization of this individual. All the other first-hand accounts in this thesis are taken from social media sites and are public domain. Their names are not mentioned, excepting their YouTube account names in the footnotes, to provide a level of anonymity. However, because these accounts are accessible via the URL provided in the footnotes, the identity of these individuals is available.

attributions of disability to discredit, disenfranchise, and dehumanize Black individuals.

The eugenics movement constantly intertwined race and disability, as "nonwhite races

were routinely connected to people with disabilities, both of whom were depicted as

evolutionary laggards or throwbacks."[138] Deaf historian Douglas Baynton states that "not

only has it been considered justifiable to treat disabled people unequally, but the

concept of disability has been used to justify discrimination against other groups by

attributing disability to them" [emphasis in original].[139] It is in this way that "the continued

association of race and disability in debilitating ways" replicates "eugenic practices [and]

continue[s] to reconstitute social hierarchies in contemporary contexts."[140] Racialization

of disability is due in large part to the use of damage imagery: connotations of the idea

that Black people "are and historically have been psychologically damaged."[141] Damage

imagery indicates perceived innate inferiority in the same way that the damaged body

trope signifies disability, which propagates narratives that race is a signifier of

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[138]Douglas, C. Baynton, "Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History," in *The New Disability History: American Perspectives,* eds. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 36.

[139] Ibid, 33.

[140] Alfredo J. Artiles, "Untangling the Racialization of Disabilities: An Intersectionality Critique Across Disability Models" *Du Bois Review* 10, no. 2 (2013): 339.

[141] Daryl M. Scott, *Contempt & Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black Psyche, 1889–1996*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 1.

disability.[142] Because race, "racism, and racialization are social processes,"[143] the

racialization of disability serves as what disability and race scholar Alfredo J. Artiles

calls a "double bind" of oppression.[144] Just as disability has been racialized historically,

it is still being racialized within the twenty-first century, for example, currently, Black

students:

> have substantially higher probabilities than their counterparts to be
> diagnosed with high incidence disabilities. At the national level, these
> students are three times more likely to be diagnosed as intellectually
> disabled and over 200% more likely to be diagnosed with emotional
> behavioral disorders.[145]

While there could be many reasons for these statistics and there is no one-size-fits all

answer to the problem of the racialization of disability, there can be no doubt that the

social classifications of race and disability lead to negative social stratification of those

so classified.

Some scholars even go as far as to say that blackness is a disability.[146] Although

legal scholar Kimani Paul-Emile, is arguing for blackness as disability (via the social

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[142]Artiles, "Untangling the Racialization of Disabilities: An Intersectionality Critique Across Disability Models:" 334.

[143] Parin Dossa, "Creating Alternative and Demedicalized Spaces: Testimonial Narrative on Disability, Culture, and Racialization, *"Journal of International Women's Studies* 9, no. 3 (2008): 82-83.

[144] Artiles, "Untangling the Racialization of Disabilities:" 331.

[145]Ibid, 331.

[146]Kimani Paul-Emile, "Blackness as Disability," *Georgetown Law Journal* 106 (2017): 293-365.

model of disability[147]) to gain legal protections,[148] her argument could be phrased as an offshoot of Barbara J. Fields and Karen Elise Fields' discussion of identity versus identification.[149] In fact visual identification of disability has long been used for social stratification, although probably most notably through the "ugly laws." The ugly laws, also called the unsightly beggar ordinances, began in the nineteenth century as a means of visually cleansing public spaces of what were deemed ugly bodies. Often called sighting/citing the ugly, these laws prohibited the showing of unsightly bodily aesthetics. The identification process that spurred the ugly laws not-so-coincidentally "emerged with intensity at the moment of statutory Jim Crow,"[150] proving that "skin is the principal medium that has carried the past into the present."[151] The racialization of disability essentially equates able-bodied white society's view of disability with their view of Blackness.

So, while an individual's Blackness calls into question their hearingness to white Deaf individuals, it also calls into question their cultural Deafness. The identification of Blackness in Black Deaf individuals by white Deaf immediately calls into question their belonging to Deaf culture, whose cultural ideal revolves around normalized white

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[147] For more on the social model of disability see Artiles, "Untangling the Racialization of Disabilities: An Intersectionality Critique Across Disability Models:" 331.

[148] For more on Paul-Emile's argument see Paul-Emile, "Blackness as Disability."

[149]Fields and Fields, *Racecraft*, Chapter 3.

[150] Susan M. Schweik, *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009), 189

[151] ibid, 187.

Deafness. Take for example this man's story about an interaction between his white

Deaf high school teacher and his Black Deaf peers:

> He asked the Black students, "Do you feel like you are Black first, or Deaf first?" Um what?[152] Another Black student asked the teacher, "Why are you asking us this?" the teacher responded with a shrug "Oh well every year I ask the Black students this."... [The students shared] and when it was my turn I paused and thought and then said, "My question for you is are you white first, or Deaf first?" And the teacher was shocked… I flipped the question. [He] couldn't answer that, just like me: I can't answer that question. My point in telling this story is that there is no list of firsts in who you are as a person.[153]

The cognitive dissonance shown in this story by inverting the question, implying that

whiteness and Deafness are separate categories, shows how whiteness is conflated

with Deafness. The question the student asks the teacher marks whiteness, which

causes cognitive dissonance in the teacher's mind. Once the student marked

whiteness, then the teacher had to recognize whiteness as another possible state of

being instead of continuing in the assumption that whiteness is "normal." In order to

avoid changing their epistemologies, white Deaf use the question of Black first/ Deaf

first to maintain racial stratification within Deaf culture. This boundary-policing occurs

when white Deaf identify Blackness.

The question, "Are you Black first or Deaf first?" is an example of discursive

boundary-policing; put in another way, this question is an example of discursive racism.

Discursive racism is a tool to reinforce and perpetuate hierarchical racializing practices

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[152] Connotated by facial expressions.

[153] Openmindedtalk, *Which you think first Black or Deaf?* (2009), YouTube, retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNj3gO2_JQc. Accessed March 24, 2021.

and racial stratification. As scholar Christopher Blake Lee says, "understanding racial politics is not simply possessing an awareness of the respective issues but also comprehending the discursive context that frames those issues."[154] Taking this discursive framework into consideration, it becomes apparent that the Black/white binary is deployed within the Deaf community as "a discursive practice whereby the ideas that people express fulfill a specific ritual of how to properly conceptualize race."[155] The mixing of binary thinking (Deaf/disabled, Deaf/hearing, and Black/white) creates a unique social conception where white Deaf take the racial conceptualization of Black and white and convert it to mean either white and Deaf or Black and Other (hearing/disabled).[156] The racism and racialization reflected in the question of Black first/Deaf first may be unconscious on the part of the white Deaf questioner, yet this unconsciousness is what makes racism such a taken-for-granted, integral part of racial ideology. Racial ideology comprises of "the ideas and 'common sense' opinions that people hold over race."[157] Therefore, this commonsense racism is an unconscious behavior that presents itself as language that discursively reinforces racial stratification within America and within the Deaf community. So prevalent is the juxtaposition of

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[154]Christopher Blake Lee, "Language as Power: The "Black-White" Binary and the Discourse of Racial Hierarchy," Doctoral diss. (University of California, 2011): 2.

[155] Ibid.

[156] The ways in which racial conceptualization morph into actions of degradation within the Deaf community is outside the scope of this thesis. For more on racial conception and degradation, see Harold Garfinkel, "Conditions of Successful Degradation Ceremonies," *American Journal of Sociology* 61, no. 5 (1956): 420-424.

[157] ibid, 3.

Blackness and whiteness within American culture that cultures within the borders of the American nation state, like the Deaf community, propagate discursive boundary-policing, reinforcing and perpetuating racial stratification.

Conclusion[158]

"I've noticed that in Deaf Institutes--or at least most Deaf Institutes--white Deaf people tend to be pretty aggressive in telling you that you're Deaf. Deaf. You are Deaf! To a point where I lost my own true Black identity. I mean sure, yes, I'm Deaf, that's fine. I'm Deaf whatever . . . Don't let white Deaf people tell you that you're only Deaf. No. Think about your own identity."[159]

The question of "Are you Black first or Deaf first?" is unique in that it simultaneously subdivides a culture whose core tenet is shared Deafness while at the same time acts as a discursive method of boundary-policing for that same shared Deafness. The Deaf community has long propagated the polemic that prioritizes Deafness over race. Scholar David A. Player calls this a response of white fragility, stating that:

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[158] The formatting of this conclusion is untraditional. The reason for the spacing of these italicized quotes is to have the narratives of Black Deaf people conclude this paper, rather than the author's thoughts. The lived experience of these Black individuals signs for itself.

[159] Bodega Tete, JC Smith, Yolanda Ford, and Delresea Mornes, "NBDA Live Dialogue on Systemic Racism: Black Deaf Post-secondary Education: What's next?" (panel discussion, National Black Deaf Advocates, online, June 23, 2020), retrieved from https://youtu.be/PM2bezYRQes.

White Deaf people constantly remind Black Deaf people that we as Deaf people are also an oppressed group because ableist society continues marginalized Deaf people due to their lack of ability to hear. They succeeded at shifting away from discussing how racism is being overlapped with ableism and/or audism to single issues such as ableism and/or audism. In another saying, there is no way for them to benefit from being white [all sic].[160]

The prioritization of Deafness above all else comes from the Deaf way of seeing the world as two entities: the Deaf world and the Hearing world. Often, white Deaf only see oppression through the lens of a Deaf/hearing binary. When fighting against ableism, these same white Deaf try to gain social mobility in the hearing world by implementing the Deaf/disabled binary, proving their merit as a linguistic group and not a disabled one. Because whiteness is taken-for-granted within the Deaf community, white Deaf considered it the "natural" way of being and cannot conceptualize Black Deafness as belonging to cultural Deafness.

"Deafness does not erase racism. The issue of racism in the deaf community is no different from the issue of racism in the hearing community. While it is true that deaf people are bound by the commonality of hearing loss, we still come from diverse backgrounds that are influenced by the larger society. The deaf community needs to learn to respect cultural differences within its own community and realize that we are not all the same just because we are all deaf."[161]

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[160] Player, "White Deaf Privilege is a Cousin of White Privilege."

[161] P. Stuart and A. Gilchrist, "A Sense of Identity: Deaf Minorities Still Struggle for Acceptance of their Heritage," *Gallaudet Today* 21, no. 2 (1991): 2-4.

White Deaf people's identification of Blackness in Black Deaf people triggers white Deaf people's need to police (white) Deaf cultural boundaries. Faced with the oppression generated by the combination of three binary systems--Deaf/disabled, Deaf/hearing, Black/white--Black Deaf, while inherently belonging to the Deaf community, are still made to justify their Deafness due to white Deaf people's identification of their Blackness. Kimberlé Crenshaw, legal and race scholar, explains that historically situations of racial subordination and subjugation as a result of racial stratification constantly yield "a possibility of challenging either the construction of identity or the system of subordination based on that identity."[162] Crenshaw makes a valid point. When we examine white Deaf's motivations for subordinating Black Deaf, Black Deaf people's identity salience and construction are of little import. What is important is the way that oppressors (white Deaf) use these concepts to subjugate further the oppressed (Black Deaf). Take for example this man's thoughts on his interactions with white Deaf:

> It feels like our responsibility to make sure they are happy. It's our responsibility to be sure they're okay with us. It should not be that way. We should be ok with ourselves and if they're not okay with it, too bad, you know? But the system is already enrooted so deep.[163]

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[162]Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1297.

[163] Lauren Ridloff, Glenn Anderson, Claudia Gordon, and Matthew Bryant, "Episode 12: Racism and Oppression Through The Deaf Black Lens," (panel, The Sound Off Ladies, YouTube, July 2, 2020), retrieved form https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=amn_11PjWD0. Accessed March 30, 2021.

This stigmatization of Blackness within the white Deaf community is indicative of how entrenched white privilege is--that Deafness is somehow equivalent to whiteness while Blackness is somehow equitable to cultural uncertainty.

"As Black and Brown people in society, we often find ourselves in a position where we feel almost like the white dominant Deaf culture expects us to choose and prioritize our identities."[164]

The question of Black first/Deaf first exemplifies the need of white Deaf people to be certain of Black Deaf people's cultural loyalty. Whether or not the motivations behind this question are played off as concerns about identity salience, the important factor is white Deaf people's need to know the salient identity of Black Deaf--their need to prove that Black Deaf are culturally loyal. White Deaf people see blackness in Black Deaf individuals as boundary-crossing and norm violation. They ask Black Deaf "Are you Black first or Deaf first?' as a way of discursively proving cultural loyalty while also maintaining and reenforcing the unspoken (or rather unsigned) racial stratification system within the Deaf community. The first step in dismantling the "power trip" discussed in the narrative at the beginning of this paper is to recognize that these discursive practices are belittling and dehumanizing actions which perpetuate racism and racial stratification within the liminal boundaries of the Deaf Community.

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[164]Ridloff et al. "Episode 12: Racism and Oppression Through The Deaf Black Lens."

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