Resiliency: Experiences of African American/Black Sign Language Interpreters.

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ABSTRACT

There is a growing body of literature on the experiences of African American/Black sign language interpreters (Carpenter, 2017; West Oyedele, 2015), but still many challenges faced by this community in the field. For example, many experience isolation in their interpreter education programs and later in the field, and they described the programs they attended as White-centric and oppressive (Carpenter, 2017; Cokely & Schafer, 2016; West Oyedele, 2015). To better understand their experiences, a qualitative study interviewed ten African American/Black interpreters. The findings indicated many barriers in the field, including racism and discrimination in networking systems. However, researchers noted many aspects of resiliency that kept the participants involved in the field. These included a positive attitude, support from the Black Deaf community and White colleagues, and the willingness to act as a role model and support upcoming peers.

INTRODUCTION

This study looked at the experiences of African America (AA)/Black sign language interpreters on the eastern seaboard of the United States. Their experiences interacting with their Caucasian peers and learning about the AA/Black Deaf community and Black ASL were of interest.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There is a growing body of work on the experience of African American/Black sign language interpreters. Some findings have been anecdotal and personal (Bruce, 1998) or involved informal surveys (Jones, 1985; Lightfoot, 2008). In one of the more extensive studies, Cokely and Schafer (2016) surveyed 80 interpreters of color and followed up with focus group sessions involving 23 participants. Around the same time, West Oyedele (2015) surveyed 116 AA/Black interpreters and conducted three focus groups. Scholars used various theoretical frames to assess the results of these studies, such as Critical Pedagogy (Williams, 2016), Critical Ethnography (West Oyedele, 2015), and Critical Race Theory (Carpenter, 2017). These have identified systemic and overt

racism in the field in various forms (Carpenter, 2017; Cokely & Schafer, 2016; Jones, 1985; West Oyedele, 2015). This study framed the research through the lens of resilience to understand how AA/Black interpreters address the racism they experience and to further the research canon.

RESILIENCE

Researchers have started to look at the concept of resilience in sign language interpreters (Anderson, 2011; Shaw, 2019), which was one of the themes found in the data for this study. Shaw (2019) specifically focused on interpreters in VRS settings. In an autoethnographic study, Chin (2019) looked at the concept of self-efficacy and resilience as a student of interpretation. She argued that higher levels of self-efficacy should relate to increased ability to cope with adversity and resiliency. Chin made the argument for using Strength-Based theory. She wrote, "For example, interpreters can focus on their strengths as a way to further develop confidence and resiliency in their professional work." (Chin, 2019, p. 5).

Resiliency can be defined broadly as an individual's response to a negative experience (Shaw, 2019). It is tied to the belief that individuals can do their job, so they stick with it (Chin, 2019). It could also be related to the concept of self-efficacy, as Chin (2019) defined it, "the belief in this interpreter's ability to overcome the challenges faced professionally and personally" (p. 4). Citing the literature, Hernandez et al. (2007) described resilience as "a pattern of positive adaptation to challenges" (p. 231). It included several personality traits, such as "a tendency to seek healing from pain, ability to draw lessons from experience, openness and spontaneity, humor, creativity, initiative, and compassion" (Hernandez et al., 2007, p. 232)

Resiliency can mitigate burnout (Shaw, 2019) or the impact of occupational stress, such as compassion fatigue or vicarious trauma (Anderson, 2011). Resiliency is enhanced through self-care (Shaw, 2019) and involvement in peer support groups (Anderson, 2011). It can also be strengthened through improved or additional coping strategies (Shaw, 2019).

In her study of VRS interpreters, Shaw (20019) found that 173 out of 200 believed they were either "extremely" or "pretty" resilient (Shaw, 2019, p. 26). For her study, she broke down resiliency into emotional, cognition, spiritual, professional, and physical resilience (Shaw, 2019). In terms of emotional resiliency, she found the "three most used practices were "investing in family relationships," "investing in friendship relationships," and "cultivating gratefulness" (Shaw, 2019, pp. 33-34). When asked about their cognitive resiliency, "reading" was a popular strategy "followed by mindfulness practices with 82 responses, and actively learning something new with 70 responses" (Shaw, 2019, pp. 38-39). Shaw (2019) noted that many interpreters practiced spiritual resiliency by "believing in a greater purpose" and the act of "praying" was also mentioned frequently (p. 47). To enhance their professional resilience, the three most popular practices were "deliberate skill development" (n=78), intentional relationship building with colleagues (n=58) and expanding base knowledge/schema through participation in unfamiliar events (n=52)" (Shaw, 2019, p. 49).

In an earlier article on AA/Black interpreters, Bruce (1998, p. 14) described five personal characteristics or attitudes that could enhance resiliency. They are listed next:

1. Managing other's racial perceptions and reactions,
2. Have the courage to be a "trailblazer" or "pioneer,"

3. Possess a high degree of self-reliance,
4. Give something back to the community,
5. Possess a strong racial identity and an ability to rise above the racial victim perspective.

Two contemporary studies noted similar characteristics in the participants. Carpenter (2017) wrote that the participants in her study "know they have to work harder, be more professional, and dress more professionally to get the respect White interpreters to receive just by showing up" (Carpenter, 2017, p. 33). They needed "a strong inner confidence to be successful in the field" and that they would not "get the support as readily as White interpreters do, but they will get a complaint much faster" (Carpenter, 20176, p. 33). Similarly, West Oyedele (2015) found that only one participant in her study mentioned low self-confidence, suggesting that it was not an issue for the others. Having constantly to work harder and experience less support was described by one participant as "taxing" (Carpenter, 2017, p. 33). Strategies to get support included having a network of peers, involvement in the Black Deaf community, participation in peer social groups, and "access to organizations such as the National Black Deaf Advocates and the National Alliance of Black Interpreters" (West Oyedele, 2015, pp. 58-59).

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Several themes were noted in the literature and the findings of this study concerning AA/Black interpreters, which will be discussed next, including Black ASL, systemic racism, and interpreter education programs.

BLACK ASL

Authors have recognized Black ASL (BASL) (McCaskill et al., 2011) or "Black Deaf signs" (Aramburo & McAllister, 1985, p. 77) as the sign language of the Black Deaf community. Aramburo and McAllister (1985) surveyed Black Deaf individuals in Louisiana and found that AA/Black Deaf students were educated in segregated schools up until 1978. During this time, they had created some signs that they shared with other AA/Black Deaf students through interchanges at sporting events. McCaskill et al. (2011) later conducted a study of two groups of AA/Black Deaf signers, those under 35 years of age and those over 55. The authors noted several differences in their signs as compared to White signers in terms of the citation forms of the same signs commonly found in ASL dictionaries or taught in ASL classes. For example, it was noted that AA/Black signers might use a larger signing space while signing than White signers (McCaskill et al., 2011). AA/Black signers produced more formal or two-handed signs, which could be higher on their forehead than White signers (McCaskill, 2011). Phrases from AA English, such as "stop trippin'," may be incorporated in BASL, as well as different signs for similar concepts (McCaskill et al., 2011).

Aramburo and McAllister (1985) were concerned with the ability of interpreters to understand older AA/Black Deaf signers due to their unique vocabulary and wrote, "In New Orleans, for example, we do not have a single interpreter (Hearing) who knows enough of the signs used by older AA/Black Deaf to communicate fluently with them" (p. 79). They argued for using Deaf intermediary interpreters instead, who understood the language used by older AA/Black Deaf signers (Aramburo & McAllister, 1985).

Several authors have written with concern about White interpreters working with BASL users. Lightfoot (2008) and Shambourger (2015) noted how there were cultural miscues in a White interpreter's work. Lightfoot (2008) wrote, "An interviewee talked about experiencing an interpretation of GIRL to mean a 'female child' when in fact she was using it as a 'term of endearment used between good friends.'" (p. 23). In Carpenter's (2017) study, one of the White participants worried about how to interpret Black events and was "constantly second-guessing if the signs she [was] using or the way she [was] interpreting [was] appropriate" (p. 46). In another example, Carpenter (2017) noted: "Beverly further explained how uncomfortable she becomes when a White team interpreter tries to 'sound' Black. She feels the person is mocking the Black Deaf consumer and possibly not realizing how it comes across." (p. 31). In a study of interpreters working from BASL into spoken English, Shambourger (2015) noted three strategies used to deal with Black ASL including the omission of a sign or signs, a description to the audience of what occurred (referred to as external processing), or the use of a summary and resulting omission (described as discourse chunking) (Shambourger, 2015).

SYSTEMIC RACISM

In America, there is a preponderance of White interpreters and a lack of diversity in the field, with findings ranging from 2.0% AA/Black interpreters and 2.5% Hispanic interpreters (Stauffer, Burch & Boone, 1999). In a recent report of its membership, the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (2019) noted only 4% AA/Black membership (592 of 14,452 members total). Hill (2016) suggests that this lack of representation is not due to the abilities or interests of Black interpreters but instead to systemic oppression.

This lack of peers has led to a sense of isolation (Carpenter, 2017; Cokely & Schafer, 2016). It has also resulted in a lack of peer mentors (Carpenter, 2017; Cokely & Schafer, 2016). According to some participants in a study done by Cokely and Schafer (2016), the lack of mentors from a similar cultural background "plants a seed of doubt regarding the potential for success in the field since they do not see anyone like them doing the work" (p. 7). On the other hand, when working with peers and other people of color, "All of the participants that have had this experience described it as positive, authentic, empowering, and enriching." (Cokely & Schafer, 2016, p. 8). In her study, West Oyedele (2015) reaffirmed the need for a critical mass of AA/ Black interpreters.

Decades ago, Jones (1985) identified a lack of concern for Black interpreters and minorities in the field of sign language interpreting. A recent study noted this has continued, as West Oyedele (2015) noted how "Nine of the 13 (69%) focus group and interview participants shared at least one example of having to deal with overtly racist remarks from consumers and colleagues." (p. 49-50). Of the overall findings of her study, she wrote that they "suggest that overt racism is still a significant factor in the lives of AA/Black interpreters and that White interpreters maintain these systems of oppression in both subtle and obvious ways" (West Oyedele, 2015, p. 86). Obasi (2013) noted a similar experience in the United Kingdom and found evidence of systemic oppression in the responses of 12 interpreters.

An example of racism was the assumption that Black interpreters were less competent than White interpreters (Carpenter, 2017; Cokely & Schafer, 2016; Jones, 1985). Again, Obasi (2013) found a similar phenomenon in the UK, where the participants of that study found their qualifications questioned more often than their White peers (Obasi, 2013). This manifested in a

perception that the White interpreters were "in charge" (Carpenter, 2017, p. 31) and a differentiation in the type of assignments given to Black interpreters (Obasi, 2013).

In the United Kingdom, the interpreters expressed concerns about the reaction of clients, both Deaf and hearing, when working with Black interpreters (Obasi, 2013). In the United States and in VRS settings, it was reported that Deaf clients hung up on Black interpreters or asked to be transferred to a White interpreter (Carpenter, 2017; Cokely & Schafer, 2016).

Overall working with White colleagues was described positively or as a good experience (Carpenter, 2017). In her survey of interpreters, West Oyedele (2015) noted how 61 percent had experienced racism "slightly to not at all frequently" on the job (p. 50). However, one interpreter noted how White interpreters would over-feed or over-correct her, and another found some dismissive (Carpenter, 2017). It was also noted that White mentors tended to focus on skills but not cultural information (Carpenter, 2017).

INTERPRETER EDUCATION

Another critical theme in the literature review was interpreter education for AA/Black interpreters. In the United States, a curriculum was designed to infuse multiculturalism into sign language interpreter education programs. This was entitled the National Multicultural Interpreter Project (NMIP) and was created through the work of El Paso Community College (Aramburo et al., 2000; Mooney, 2006). Its inclusion has been recommended in interpreter education programs to better serve AA/Black students (West Oyedele, 2015). In addition, West Oyedele (2015) suggested the free modules by the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers on social justice.

The development of the NMIP included creating videos and curriculum resources related to multiculturalism and the Deaf community. These became part of modules, freely available to interpreter education programs (Mooney, 2006). The goals of that curriculum included teaching students to analyze the values of American majority and minority cultures in how they approach ethical behavior, to match interpreters and consumers, collect and share information on culture with colleagues, establish cross-cultural partnerships and mentoring, and to "promote the appreciation and value of interpreters from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds" (Aramburo et al., 2000, p. 70).

Recent studies have shown, however, that the curricula used to teach the participants lacked diversity (Carpenter, 2017; Cokey & Schafer, 2016; West Oyedele, 2015). Instead, graduates considered the curriculum and culture of their programs to be predominately White culture (Carpenter, 2017; Cokely & Schafer, 2016; Jones, 1985). Thus, these programs may be part of what West Oyedele (2015) referred to as "systems of oppression" (p. 41). She went on to say,

> Participants reported that their programs made broad generalizations about their cultures, expected them to be the experts on their cultures, and stated that their programs looked superficially at racial issues and no other historical contexts. Overwhelmingly, though, the vast majority of participants shared that their programs did not broach these subjects at all. (West Oyedele, 2015, p. 45)

In a recent study of three interpreter education programs in the United States, Williams (2016) interviewed 20 administrators, faculty, and students. She found no tenured or tenure-track

faculty members and only two adjuncts who identified as Black or African American. All three groups, administrators, faculty, and students, identified the lack of AA/Black instructors. In another recent study, Carpenter (2017) noted how one out of five African American sign language interpreters interviewed had only one Black instructor. In a third, West Oyedele (2015) surveyed 116 AA/Black interpreters and found that "Most (76%) had no access to AA/Black educators in their interpreting programs, and 72% had no access to mentors while in their interpreting programs or their programs did not offer mentoring at all." (p. 60). As a result of their survey, Cokely and Schafer (2016) recommended hiring more faculty of color. Williams (2016) suggested steps to do this, such as establishing visiting lecture positions for AA/Black instructors. There are, of course, limitations to these suggestions, such as the need for AA/Black instructors to relocate without guarantee of permanent employment.

Concerns have been raised about the recruitment (Bruce, 1998) and the retention of AA/Black students (Bruce, 1998; Carpenter, 2017; Williams, 2016). Cokely and Schafer (2016) noted in a study of 23 interpreters of color that most were the only student of color in their programs. West Oyedele (2015) wrote how in her survey of 116 interpreters, "85% of survey respondents were in classrooms with three or fewer African American/Black classmates" (p. 60).

Decades earlier, Bruce (1998, pp. 3-4) listed 16 activities to recruit Black students, summarized below:

1. Send out recruiters to schools
2. Contact radio stations
3. Include interpreters of color in promotional materials
4. Contact churches
5. Invite speakers who are AA/Black
6. Hire teachers who are AA/Black
7. Discuss benefits/salary with students (to entice them back)
8. Target ads to Black magazines
9. Connect with "high visibility events" (p. 4) and colleges as well
10. Provide info to NAOBI, NBDA, etc.
11. Host conferences
12. Collect videos
13. Create a contact list for students
14. Explain the lack of AA Black interpreters in the field with students
15. Invite in AA Black interpreters, and trainers who may be in the area for other events
16. Network with interpreters of color

To this list, Williams (2016) would add an internship for African American/Black students who were currently in graduate programs.

Upon recruitment, retention was also identified as a problem. West Oyedele (2015), in a recent survey of 116 AA/Black interpreters, noted, "66% reported that their African American/Black classmates did not persist" (p. 61). Bruce (1998, p. 5) outlined 13 activities for retention. These included:

a. have interpreting students mentor beginning students;
b. be sure funds are available for students;

c. encourage all students to attend group study;
d. provide names of outside mentors whom students can call for support;
e. provide tutors;
f. provide dormation (sic) or sponsor students to attend National Black Deaf Advocates, National Alliance of Black Interpreters, or other minority conferences;
g. provide assistance and contacts to students who, after completing a two-year ASL/interpreting program, may be interested in becoming educators or rehabilitation counselors, and will transfer to a four-year university;
h. bring in speakers from diverse cultural groups to present;
i. have a panel of diverse speakers discussing how they began their career in the field of sign language interpretation;
j. e-mail and/or communicate with others in ITP or professional interpreters;
k. set up a chat room for beginning African American / Black students with each other, and/or with professional interpreters/transliterators;
l. get all students on the mailing list for the National Multicultural Interpreter Project; and
m. be sure students are aware of organizations (i.e., NAOBI, Asian Pacific Conference).

The authors noted several other aspects of the programs that signaled a lack of representation. There were few videos with Black signers (Carpenter, 2017) and graduates reported a lack of preparation for Blacking signing styles (Carpenter, 2017; Jones, 1985). The AA/Black students were uncomfortable asking White teachers about Black/Black Deaf culture (Carpenter, 2017). Students faced racism; where in one survey, the authors noted how "These individuals were repeatedly told that their English was not appropriate for interpreting and that their signs were too big, or too expressive." (Cokely & Schafer, 2016, p. 6). There was a call for more attention to Black culture, more visible Black interpreters, more training for professors on the needs of Black students and cultural competency (Cokely & Schafer, 2016; West Oyedele, 2015), and the need to bring in people to talk about Black culture (Carpenter, 2017).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study was to further look at the current experiences of African American/Black interpreters and to gather their experiences as former students of sign language interpreter education programs. The research questions were:

1. What has been the experience of the participants while working with peers and consumers?
2. How much information about Black ASL was taught or is known by the participants of this study?
3. What supports or strategies for success have they developed as a sign language interpreter?

METHOD

The methodological framework for this study was qualitative interviews, as the participants were asked to share stories of their lives and reflect on their experiences. As much as possible, their stories were then included in this retelling in what has become known as providing a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973), thus allowing their voices to be heard.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants for this study were recruited through a combination of emailing interpreters from the online database maintained by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (n.d.) and through purposive and convenience sampling. In total, there were ten individuals. Pseudonyms were created to ensure anonymity, beginning with "Alicia" to "Janet," and personal information was removed from the interview transcripts to de-identify the data.

Table 1 outlines their characteristics. All identified as female, and eight as Black or African American. One identified as aboriginal American/Black and one as Black American/ mixed race. Three were interpreter educators, seven held either RID or NAD national certification, one the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment, one state licensure, and one reported no certification or licensure. Nine reported English as their first language, while one reported ASL. Seven reported ASL as their second language, while one reported English and another reported Spanish as their second language. Four worked predominately in post-secondary settings, two in community settings, one in K-12 educational settings, one in video relay services, and two in "other, not mentioned" settings.

Table 1. *Demographics*

Participant	Age Learned ASL	ITP Type	Highest Degree
Alicia	16	BA/BS	MA or MS
Beverly	after birth	BA/BS	BA/BS
Carol	8	--	BA/BS
Denise	18	BA/BS	BA/BS
Evelyn	18	BA/BS	BA/BS
Francis	20-21	BA/BS	BA/BS
Gayle	13	BA/BS	BA/BS
Helen	3	BA/BS	MA or MS
Ilene	18	AA/AS	BA/BS
Janet	19	--	MA or MS

Their ages ranged from 30 to 64, and most started learning ASL in their late teens. Two did not attend an interpreter education program. All had a bachelor's degree, and three had a master's degree as well.

INSTRUMENTS

The interview questions were drafted to explore issues identified in the literature, such as their experience in interpreter education programs and the retention of AA/Black students (Williams, 2016), the types of assignments given to AA/Black interpreters (Obasi, 2013), and the reaction of clients both Deaf and hearing when working with an AA/Black interpreter (Carpenter, 2017; Cokely & Schafer, 2016; Obasi, 2013). In total, there were 16 questions.

PROCESS/DATA COLLECTION

Participants were recruited using a non-random convenience sampling approach via email and through both the RID database and personal contacts. Each was sent a copy of the informed consent to sign and a link to a demographic questionnaire. Then individual interviews were booked, which followed a semi-structured interview format. All were done in person and video recorded with a tablet or laptop computer.

ANALYSIS

The researchers worked together to code one of the interviews with Atlas TI and to establish a codebook for the remaining analysis. The goal was first to identify concepts and then, when done, group those concepts into codes. Another goal was to ascertain data saturation so that the participants' comments fit within an existing code (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2018). Then each researcher was assigned three or four interviews to code independently.

A process of grounded coding was utilized as the researchers looked for topics that emerged in the analysis of the interviews. In some cases, in vivo coding was used, for example, with the code "Networking and Reputation." The codes were then grouped under superordinate or broad terms, axial coding or categories, that tried to capture common relationships or contexts (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). Then selective coding was done to find an overarching theory that captured the axial coding (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019).

RELIABILITY / TRIANGULATION

Triangulation was achieved in this study in several ways. There were multiple analysts involved in the design and implementation of this study. Two researchers met to review the codes and discuss differences and come to an agreement. Intercoder concordance for the ten interviews ranged from 89.5 percent to 95.3 percent on the Holsti Index, according to Atlas TI. The findings of the analysis were also then compared to the literature review. Similar themes were noted in other studies. These multiple steps ensured no one perspective dominated or biased the results, such as the findings of the literature review or an individual analyst's perspective, and this process strengthened the credibility of the findings.

FINDINGS

Table 2 below outlines the result of the coding process, including the overall selective coding or overarching theory, the themes, and the unique codes that made up each of the themes. Five themes were identified, including "Barriers in the Profession," "Lack of Representation in Education,"

"Language Fluency," and "Resiliency." From these five themes, the overarching selective code of "Resiliency" was found.

Table 2. *Overarching Theory, Themes, and Codes*

Overall Coding	Themes	Individual Codes
Resiliency	Barriers in the Profession	Isolation
		Colleagues' Personality
		Perceived Lack of Fluency in ASL
		Race Shouldn't Matter
		Networking and Reputation
	Lack of Representation in Education	Lack of Peers
		Lack of Role Models
	Language Fluency	African American English
		Black ASL
	Resiliency	Deaf Community Support
		White Colleagues Support
		Giving Back
		Positive Attitude

BARRIERS IN THE PROFESSION

ISOLATION

In the first theme, "Barriers in the Profession," several codes were identified that created barriers for the participants in the field. One of those codes was "Isolation," and an example was noted in Helen's comments. As she described a peer group, she said, "If I didn't have that, then I think the isolation would be enough to drive me out of the field." (Helen). Eight of the other ten participants also talked about being alone in the field (Alicia, Beverly, Denise, Francis, Gayle, Helen, Ilene, Janet). Comments from the participants grouped under the code "Isolation" included "there are so few of us" (Beverly), "people of color are still the minority" (Denise), and when Gayle met another AA/Black interpreter, she said, "It's like Black unicorns (chuckles)." Evelyn, on the other hand, shared how, "No, I've never felt …. Isolated or…different or…," and she followed this up by saying, "I have a lot of Black….um…interpreter friends. That socialize."

Alicia gave an example of the result of being alone in the field. She said, "Here in [a city with a large Black community] ironically enough I did an event, and everybody else on the team was White" "or fair-skinned cause we did have another African American woman, except she was like the color of this table [which was white]." Ilene mused, "We only see each other, three or four

times a year, you know, so it's just kind of like 'Where y'all at?' you know." This has also led to a lack of interpreters to "match the client" and to work with AA/Black Deaf consumers (Denise).

Having peers was significant to the participants. Denise appreciated working with another Black interpreter and said, "And you want people to understand you without having to give the whole past history." Ilene explained how she believed other Black interpreters would support her and shared, "I just… there's a sense of being able to relax, and there's a sense of being able…. Okay, I got your back." Gayle talked about the importance of "camaraderie of when you finally like... get a Black team" and followed up by saying, "… that's not a diversity thing" and "We are here together, and we are just being interpreters. We are not just being Black interpreters, but we are Black. Like… it's great. It's great!" In a discussion of working with a peer, Carol explained how she had learned a lot from a Black role model and said, "…and she's a Black female interpreter. And we ended up doing a lot of stuff together and just being able to watch someone and how they approach stuff and then take that on when it's your turn."

COLLEAGUES' PERSONALITY

Another potential barrier in the field was coded as "Colleagues' Personality." This included several concerns from the participants about the behaviors or attitudes of White colleagues. For example, Gayle thought some ignored issues of race, which she characterized by using the sign for "cover-up" and said, "Which is more um... [COVER-UP]" (see Lapiak, n.d.) and went on to say some White interpreters said, "Oh we don't see color." (Gayle). Helen was upset about "micro-aggressions" and aggressive behaviors like "you know the hair touching" or comments about her hair. She later shared, "They just have no clue what our experience is." (Helen). She added, "Um...definitely sometimes feel like I have to put in more effort to make connections with them. Um ... it can be a lot of like...emotional work (chuckles) to work with the majority of White peers." (Helen). Alicia shared how, "Some are, 'I don't know you. I'm not talking to you.'" Some of the negativity could be due to a sense of "competition" for work (Alicia, Janet). As Janet said, "A lot of times... the White person here... is not really... supporting you ...for whatever reason. It could be because your skill is better than theirs. And you know, hey, if you get in their place, then they don't have a job…" Ilene believed that the work of Black interpreters was not seen as equal, "And I do think that a lot of times that people leave the profession, for those same reasons, for …um… undervalued, you know, not being valued."

Janet described a work situation where the Deaf person did not want her to interpret and disparaged her skills. Her colleague, a White interpreter, did not stick up for her. She shared, "Later, my team person said, 'Oh, they ...they didn't like you. So, they kept trying to get me to switch with you.'" Janet later added, "It is rare that when that happens ...when the White, the non... African American interpreter will speak up and say, 'Hey, this [the AA/Black interpreter] is a good interpreter. Stop. Don't do that. No, this is a good interpreter.'"

PERCEIVED LACK OF FLUENCY IN ASL

Another barrier in the field was mentioned by three of the participants and coded as "Perceived Lack of Fluency in ASL." As Gayle described it, "People expect White interpreters to be able to have the skills." In one example, Alicia described how a White colleague kept trying to tell her how to sign things. This White colleague believed they knew the correct and only way to interpret something, but as Alicia said in an example, she shared, "Well, you know ... there's three different

ways that I can sign that." She also shared that some may have had the attitude of "Oh I don't know if she can sign. Especially those who never met me." (Alicia). Janet said, "Well, no, it's because … .you're Black and they already have ...you know...an idea of what you're going to sign and what your sign is going to be like." She noted how when she worked with another skilled interpreter, "And I could tell that the Deaf person was acting like they didn't understand me." (Janet).

RACE SHOULDN'T MATTER

In their experiences as interpreters, the participants talked about how race had an impact on how they were treated, and this was coded as "Race Shouldn't Matter," another barrier in the field. Carol noted in some assignments how the clients "they're going to look to the White counterpart" as the lead interpreter. Alicia noted how some White Deaf people would not work with a Black interpreter and shared "… some negative coming from white Deaf who just, 'Nah I don't want you.'" Alicia went on to say she would deal with it by leaving and said, "And I'm not going to argue with people. I'm going to leave."

Helen thought White interpreters benefitted from connecting with the consumers quickly due to race and said, "So I think my White peers have the advantage in that...in that they all look the same and connect more so than you know a Black interpreter walking into a room." Ilene talked about how the White interpreters interacted more informally with each other and maybe looked more "laid back" than she was. She added, "I'm not stiff but we just don't behave the same you know in the same environment. We can't." (Ilene). Janet shared her philosophy that "Regardless of color, we can all learn from each other," and Denise said, "Well I believe that the world needs diversity."

NETWORKING AND REPUTATION

The final theme that was coded under barriers was "Networking and Reputation." As Beverly explained, "I'm also in the area where... reputation means a lot… And my name may precede me." Alicia talked about the power of networking and said, "and so if one person says, 'Okay this person is good enough' then you can be used."

Gayle gave an example of how she valued her reputation. She was worried about being so visible as one of the few Black interpreters and shared, "Yeah...So there's only ...so... many of us, right. So ...our name is all we have for ourselves." Later she added, "So there is a real fear that like …if I do stage work, everyone knows who I am if I really blow it. And I think that holds …like, I don't have the privilege of being anonymous."

Francis had been taken aside by people in the network and told what work she could do or what assignments she could observe earlier on in her career. She explained how some interpreters had told her, "Maybe you shouldn't be here." But she went on to say that she continued to take on assignments or look for observation experiences and shared how what she was told: "didn't stop [her]… 'cause God had a way to open up a door for me." Helen explained how in her experience, "I think that is one thing that I've also taken away is that ... often times my White peers will end up achieving things at a quicker rate than my POC peers because they have the right networks."

Various strategies were used to avoid causing harm to their reputation. Ilene shared, "So my interaction oftentimes is typically professional. Unless I really really really really know you."

Gayle said, "I waited until I had enough ...um….I guess 'political flexibility' in the department. Where I had the skills, and I had the reputation that if I were to be put in these assignments my skills wouldn't be questioned. I waited until that point."

Some participants were far enough along in their careers to not have to worry anymore about their reputation or the negative impact of networking. Beverly shared, "They probably don't say anything because of my skill and my name." In a similar vein, Carol was not too worried at this point as "people know my reputation for being strongly professional."

Three participants suggested that White interpreters should use their privilege to support Black interpreters. Ilene and Janet both talked about the need for someone who is already established to "lead the way for you." Carol agreed and shared, "So if we walk in and you know someone, or they start talking to you, that it's really important that you include me in the conversation and that you guide me into that."

LACK OF REPRESENTATION IN EDUCATION

The next theme that arose in the codes was comments related to the participants' education. When asked about their experiences in interpreter education programs, specifically as African American students, most noted a lack of any form of representation. The first code noted in this theme was a "Lack of Peers."

LACK OF PEERS

Carol and Helen explained that they were the only African American/Black interpreting students in their programs.   Gayle, Ilene, and Janet remembered seeing one other Black student. Ilene said that the woman she knew of, "She had just…she just didn't make it." In a discussion of the other Black student in her program, Gayle shared, "I am not sure if she is still in the field anymore." Francis talked about how she had one peer, a male student, who graduated, and after that she was on her own in her program. As a working interpreter, she noted a recent experience when AA/Black students approached her after an event, and "They said 'We've never seen Black interpreters before.'" She went on to say, "This is 2000….2020 this year!" (Francis).

Even when there were others, the numbers were meager in comparison to the White students. Alicia had "three African American women" in her cohort but "no African American men." She added, though, "I know there has been many many who are the only." Beverly talked about recently visiting a program and noting three Black students together. She described it as "A room full of students and the three Black students. All three sat in the same row." Denise had a larger group, "Maybe 5 or 6 African American interpreting students, but I bonded with like three of them."

Even when they had Black peers, some participants noted how they didn't complete the program. Gayle shared, "If you know the statistics of… you know people of color, specifically Black people graduating in post-secondary education, it's abysmal. It's unbelievably low." Alicia noted how, "There were a few that were in and out of the program. Some that took a little longer." Ilene remembered one program that had a more significant number of students but said, "I don't know what happened next year, but…it dwindles. And I am hoping, that with your research, you can help us understand why."

The participants described how having peers meant, "So, we'd look to each other for support." (Alicia). Without them, Janet explained, "I spent my whole life being the token Black person. (Shrugs)."

LACK OF ROLE MODELS

Many of the participants talked about a lack of role models in the programs, either AA/Black teachers, interpreters, or Deaf Black signers. When asked if she had seen any, Francis said, "Absolutely not…absolutely not." Alicia remembered one student who was Black, "The student that was in class with us (smiles)…signed very quickly and very Black." She added, "and the other was a Deaf community member that came to a few events or whatnot." Gayle shared, "I don't even think they had a Black Deaf person come in. They didn't even have a hearing Black person come in." Denise and Ilene had no role models for Black ASL either and Beverly lamented, "If everybody they bring in as a presenter is White, where are the Black students going to feel that connection at?"

Only two people mentioned Black role models throughout their programs. Beverly did have one instructor who was male and Black and a CODA. Carol had one Black Deaf instructor. Evelyn and Francis found role models in their church and, as Evelyn said, with "older Black people." Gayle also shared, "It would be out in like the multi-cultural center on campus. Or faculty and staff of color. That's who I would talk with rather than actual in the ITP."

Most talked about having no lessons on Black ASL of AA/Black culture. Carol also talked about the community and said, "And then when I was in the interpreting program there wasn't a Black community in my area." Beverly and Carol used the word "none" to describe the resources they saw. Alicia clarified, "because there was not a formalized lesson about Black ASL in either of my programs" and Denise shared, "No, they really didn't teach us that." Janet felt that "So back then, it was just … American Sign Language." As a result, and according to Beverly, "it's not until I really got into working in the field that I met Black Deaf professional people."

LANGUAGE FLUENCY

The participants were asked to describe their language fluency in terms of African American English and Black ASL. Next are their comments about both, grouped under the theme of "Language Fluency."

AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH

Most believed African American English (AAE) was different from the English of their White peers. Alicia said she has seen and related to "Talking Black in America," for example. She also shared, "Um so AAE I have/will typically use if I'm voicing in a setting that is predominantly Black" like "for large conferences like the BDA conference." Beverly makes use of it when in VRS settings with Black consumers and described it as "It's like "Oh, I can just ...be me. Okay. Here we go." She also believes it is used in "more casual, intimate…settings." (Beverly). Evelyn gave examples of AAE. She remembered, "My sisters and I were talking the other day. And she said, "I'm going witchu," I said," How do you spell witchu? Spell it for me."

Gayle and Helen talked about not using it, or as Helen said, "But in my typical everyday language, I don't use it that often." Gayle went on to say, "And that is perfectly acceptable. Because there is no right or wrong way to be Black, right."

Some participants described code-switching between the different forms of English (Alicia, Evelyn, Helen, Ilene). Alicia explained, "So our word choices and what we produce will be much different at a Black cookout then it would be if we were at a CEO office." She also shared, "I use it [AAE] with my daughter because young people like to use all the slang words and all the new things that are out." Alicia went on to say, "but White interpreters don't necessarily code switch like Black interpreters do." In a discussion of working into Black ASL, she noted, "We have to be able to be wit' our folks and voice accurately for culturally-based events (whispers) Black ASL… and then also be able to turn and be 'appropriate' for mainstream audiences." (Alicia).

Beverly switches to AAE "When I'm comfortable. When I'm with my people. When I'm with my girlfriends." Ilene talked about her use of AAE and said,

> I'm very, very well...well versed in that. Like that's, that's easy to me, you know. That's how we talk at home. That's how we talk …you know… at gatherings and things like that you know. Even the things that I tend to watch, a lot of times, it has a lot of Black people in it, so you know I'm constantly exposed to that. (Beverly).

In a discussion of code-switching, Carol added, "I think it's important that, um, we know and remember that we are fluent in White English because we have to assimilate."

BLACK ASL

Most of the participants said they did not learn about BASL in their interpreting programs, and several had a similar experience to Beverly, who said, "I don't know if I knew there was such thing as Black ASL until I became older of course." Ilene shared, "Black Deaf ASL was nothing that I even heard of until after I graduated."

Beverly and Evelyn, and Janet described it as the sign language used by the older Black Deaf community. Janet went on to say, "Older Deaf people who've gone through their school system, their signing is...is very... unique. Yeah, so...so it took me a while to... kind of get my eye used to... signs." Beverly went on to share, "I do know it's a two-handed sign most of them… and it's mainly, honestly, it's more standard ASL than what we consider the standard ASL is." Beverly then added, "Most Black Deaf people …or Black ASL is more expressive" and "More body language" "I said body language, facial expressions, signing big, two-handed." Denise said something similar and explained "that the signs are different, some of them" and "The placement is slightly different." Carol added, "…we use a lot of the vocabulary in general that we use in the Black community."

Alicia and Evelyn had seen the "Signing Black in America" video and Beverly talked about "there's the book, you know, Hidden Treasure." Nine of the ten participants talked about how the work of Dr. Joseph Hill impacted their knowledge of Black ASL. Beverly also recognized Dr. Carolyn McCaskill's contributions, and Ilene discussed the videos done by Dr. Nathie Marbury. Evelyn was "shocked" when she first saw the findings and described the research as "really good."

When asked about their fluency in Black ASL, only Alicia seemed to think she was fluent and shared, "So...I would say I'm pretty good at it, umm, (snaps fingers) period." Francis said she could switch into BASL and shared, "And then... if I am in a different setting and it is Black ASL I try to use, you know, to the best of my ability and my knowledge of Black ASL…" Carol described her fluency as this: "I would say definitely my ... expressive skills are far better than my receptive skills when it comes to Black ASL. Um, which is the opposite for White ASL." Evelyn concurred and believed her receptive skills were weaker as well.

On the other hand, some participants believed they were not fluent at all in BASL. Denise said, "I don't really know about the Black ASL" and she and Ilene said they were "not proficient." Evelyn described her proficiency as "lousy."

RESILIENCY

Even with the many barriers faced by the participants, they described several actions they had taken or attitudes they had adopted to keep themselves going and to succeed in the field. These were grouped under the theme of "Resiliency." They included the codes "Black Deaf Community Support," "White Colleagues Support," "Giving Back," and "Positive Attitude."

BLACK DEAF COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The interpreters in this study were aware of their relationship with their local Black Deaf communities, and this relationship was one reason given for staying in the field. This was summed up by Alicia. She shared, "And if we leave because of the barriers, they are not receiving the services that they want." (Alicia).

Many participants found the local Black Deaf community supportive. Evelyn described how she had made many Deaf friends and maintained them over the years. Alicia shared how the Black Deaf community was "on my side… helped me face those barriers and get through them." Alicia also shared, "So if it was not for my community, and their insistence of their preferences [for a Black interpreter], I would… I would not continue in the profession, I'll say." Beverly found Black Deaf people supportive because "when they see a Black interpreter, they're like 'Ahhh.' You know for the most part…and it's that connection." She added, "This is what makes me keep going." (Beverly). Alicia shared a similar experience and noted that when she worked with Black Deaf individuals, they said things like, "Oh, I've not had a Black interpreter. I'm so happy to see you!" Carol and Helen also talked about making a "connection" with the Black Deaf consumers as well, and Carol described how the Black Deaf community "[took] me under their wing."

Participants talked about the need to become involved and stay involved in the Deaf community. Carol explained, "There are tons of Deaf organizations that I am a member of and on the board, um, and it's because I've been in the community." For some, they mentioned how they learned to interpret in the community. Alicia shared, "I would not be an interpreter if it was not for the Black Deaf community." Evelyn said, "But you need to immerse yourself in ...Deaf culture. I think that's important. That's really, really important…to understand their culture." Ilene also shared that involvement is significant "because that's really what helps me to feel more comfortable."

Involvement for some included in their local churches (Beverly, Evelyn, Francis). One shared, "I want to say I started interpreting in church even before I even became certified…" (Evelyn). Some talked about learning sign language from the community and being asked to work (Alicia, Janet). Janet explained, "They got to know who you were. They got to be comfortable with you. They would share things with you. Then they'd get to ask you, 'Hey, come and interpret for me.'"

WHITE COLLEAGUES SUPPORT

Within the code "White Colleagues Support," most of the participants had overall positive experiences with their White peers, which may support resiliency. As Alicia described, "Some are very welcoming, very warm 'Aww you're new here? Let me help you out.'" Beverly shared, "And again, if there's any ill-will or negative feelings, I don't normally see them." Carol characterized her relationship with White colleagues as "positive," and Evelyn explained, "I think we all have a…a camaraderie … you know." Denise said, "So yeah I've... I've had a good...pretty good experience with my peers who are Caucasian."

At the same time, Denise clarified, "It depends on the person." With some, she said, "We're just strictly business or colleagues and that's it." As Alicia shared, "There's some really really weird interpreters out there. Strange… attitudes." Carol talked about the need for lead interpreters, especially if they were White, to always make new interpreters or interpreters of color feel welcomed and part of the introductions and networking.

GIVING BACK

Several codes were noted from the participants' comments that contributed to their resiliency and to the resiliency of future AA/Black interpreters, and these were grouped under the theme "Giving Back."

Alicia explained her view of the need for supporting others and shared, "Where I'm at now, I'm now helping others get through those barriers." Similarly, Beverly talked about the need to support new interpreters and said, "Up and coming interpreters, without support…they lose their way." Carol explained, "I'm going to take - you know - newer POC interpreters under my wing and share with them all that I can because nobody else will." Later she shared, "And then rising up and being one of those interpreters and then being like this is my responsibility. This is how I'm giving back." (Carol).

Beverly talked about being a role model for Black students, for example, when the students attended events where she was interpreting. She explained,

> And I say physically, just when I am tired, and I don't want to, but I say I have to because they need to see us out here…. and if their teachers are Caucasian where else are they going to get that? (Beverly)

She later added, "It really does my heart so good when I see them - I see their eyes and they go - it's like they perk up when they see me." (Beverly). Even when they experienced "explicit bias," she tried to be there for them. One student was trying to decide between school and working, and Beverly told this student, "Do not quit. I was just like, 'No, no, no… we'll figure it out.'" Beverly

also believed she could approach instructors on behalf of students and speak out for them because, as she shared, "They can't say anything because they're students. But I can." At the same time, Beverly felt a bit "guilty" for not being there enough.

Several worked as mentors for students and advocated for that role (Carol, Francis, Gayle, Ilene, Janet) "because they need to know that they're not alone in that other people have experienced this" (Carol). Gayle noted how role models and mentors supported her and said, "So having that...so having some of my feelings and perspectives validated gave me a sense of belonging. Which made me be successful in the field." Alicia talked about how someone had to support others in the field and worried, "You know I...I think about... if there weren't a few of us [providing that support], what would happen."

Helen talked about the need for a cohort and explained, "And I think having a cohort of interpreters of Color and being able to talk through some of the issues is really helpful." Helen also talked about the need for networks and how White interpreters may have better sources of support: "And so I think we have to do better as a POC community and making sure that that happens for us as well."

In addition to role models and mentors, other sources of support were noted by the participants. They included the Randleman Program at the Rochester Institute of Technology (Gayle, Helen), the National Black Deaf Advocates (Beverly, Ilene), the National Association of Black Interpreters (Beverly, Helen, Janet), and an African American/Black listserv for VRI (Janet).

POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Another source of support in terms of resiliency was the theme "Positive Attitude," where participants talked about how they went on to perform their job even when faced with disparaging comments or challenging situations. Carol shared, "so I go in with that positive attitude." Denise, upon reflection, had a similar comment and shared, "So ...yeah if I could go back and do it over, I would be a little more...I would be a little more open minded in that respect." Ilene, after having talked about how "it gets really hard," added, "So, but I mean other than that, it's been, it's been a good ride, good ride. Yeah."

Alicia shared an experience where a colleague challenged her choice of a blue blouse instead of a black blouse like the other interpreters. She remarked that "...no one else had to deal with that," and she explained how she had chosen blue to contrast with her skin color. Alicia then went on stage and interpreted. In a similar way, Carol kept a positive attitude by recognizing "I'm here for the Deaf student," and she would always do her job, even when she was excluded from the introductions or networking that occurred.

Beverly finds support when the Black participants in the events are happy to see an African American interpreter. She noted how some clients were "surprised" to see a Black interpreter and how she felt "connected" and "welcomed" by them. Carol shared a similar experience and explained, "I'm someone that believes that no matter what assignment you go into you gotta make that immediate connection to finding anything like."

Beverly hoped that others would be mature about conflicts and said, "that we were able to be colleagues and be adults and talk about it." She explained, "So, I always treat everybody the

way I want to be treated," and "I'm willing to adapt. I'm willing to work with people and they see that. I'm one of those people that I can get along with anybody." (Beverly). Denise also shared that she believed, "I do get along well with the people that I work with," and she stressed the importance of doing that.

DISCUSSION

BARRIERS

Three research questions were posed by this study concerning the participants, and the first was "What has been the experience of the participants while working with peers and consumers?" The participants encountered many barriers in the field. One was isolation from peers due to a low number of African American/Black interpreters in the field. This is triangulated with earlier studies that noted the same (Carpenter, 2017; Cokely & Schafer, 2016). Another barrier was the perception that they were not as qualified as White interpreters, again a perception shared by other AA/Black interpreters (Carpenter, 2017; Cokely & Schafer, 2016; Jones, 1985). A third barrier was how they were treated differently due to their race, a theme coded as "Race Shouldn't Matter." This code included comments about how the White interpreters were looked to as the lead or senior interpreter and how some of the participants had been told by White Deaf individuals that they did not want them to interpret. Unfortunately, other studies have also identified how AA/Black interpreters were rejected by Deaf consumers (Carpenter, 2017; Cokely & Schafer, 2016). Overall, these barriers are substantial, and some of these participants are still experiencing racism in the field. This was also noticed in a recent study (West Oyedele, 2015).

The participants also noted how some of their White colleagues treated them negatively or refused to acknowledge issues of race and racism (Gayle). Helen talked about micro-aggressions from her White peers. Janet did not believe a White interpreter would back a Black interpreter in the same way as an AA/Black peer would and shared an example of where a White interpreter did not support her to a Deaf consumer. Competition for work was also noted as a negative experience (Alicia, Carol).

Another code that emerged as a barrier in this study was that of "Networking and Reputation." Janet believed that interpreters got work if they were liked by others, and Helen felt that the current networks privileged White interpreters. Unlike their White peers, the participants in this study realized they were easily identifiable in the field, and as Gayle explained, "I don't have the privilege of being anonymous."

To address the negative impact of networking, Ilene maintained a very professional demeanor. Others talked about how over time and after having established themselves, they weren't so worried anymore (Beverly, Carol, Gayle). Three participants believed that those who were established should try to help new AA/Black interpreters by making introductions or by "leading the way" (Carol, Ilene, Janet).

As a recommendation, the field, including referral agencies and national associations, should examine the formal and informal systems of networking that exist. Do they privilege likeability over skills and professionalism? Also, the field should discuss how White interpreters can initiate or participate in discussions of race and racism without causing further harm, a concern noted by participants in Carpenter's (2017) study.

LACK OF REPRESENTATION IN EDUCATION

The second research question was, "How much information about Black ASL was taught or is known by the participants?" Within the context of this study, it was noted that empirical research on AA/Black interpreters has frequently not been formally published, and so this may limit access to these resources for educators. Additional support for graduate students who produce a thesis or dissertation who are themselves African American/Black may be warranted to get the information disseminated to students and professionals in the field.

As a result of this study, the researchers noted the codes "Language Fluency" and "Lack of Representation in Education," both of which could be considered barriers but warranted separate themes. The participants who went to an interpreter education program, by and large, all experienced a lack of representation in the curriculum they were taught and again noted a lack of African American/Black peers in their programs. They also noted a lack of AA/Black educators, video resources, mentors, and guest speakers. Recent studies found similar results and triangulated with this finding (Carpenter, 2017; Cokey & Schafer, 2016; West Oyedele, 2015; Williams, 2016). It is not surprising then that none had exposure to Black ASL until after they graduated. Only one considered herself genuinely fluent in the language (Alicia), while at least three believed they were not fluent at all (Denise, Evelyn, Ilene).

As other authors have noted and where it is not happening, a series of recommendations for current interpreter education programs is to create targeted recruitment plans for both students and faculty who are AA/Black (Bruce, 1988). Where they are omitted, programs should consider the National Multicultural Interpreter Project and National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers resources (West Oyedele, 2015). Work should be done on recognizing the privileging of White culture and White ASL over others and the adoption of a multicultural framework (Carpenter, 2017; Cokey & Schafer, 2016; West Oyedele, 2015)

RESILIENCY

For the third research question, "What supports or strategies for success have they developed as a sign language interpreter?" the concept of "resiliency" was identified in the interviews. Several factors were noted that enhanced this. One was the support the participants got from their White colleagues. This was also noted in other studies (Carpenter, 2017; West Oyedele, 2015). As Carpenter (2017) wrote in her study, "All participants felt there were White interpreters they teamed with who showed kindness and support while working together" (p. 33).

A second factor that increased their resiliency was their overall positive relationship with the Black Deaf community and their belief in involvement. As Beverly said when she meets a Black Deaf person, they are happy to work with her, "This is what makes me keep going." This may be similar to what Shaw (2019) referred to as believing in a higher purpose, that the participants wanted to make a significant impact on the lives of Black Deaf people. Also, as noted by Shaw (2019), spiritual resilience was evident in the answers of some of the participants who were involved in their church communities (Beverly, Evelyn, Francis).

Another factor that could have enhanced their resiliency was their willingness to give back to their peers and to create a supportive atmosphere for others. As Carol said, "This is how I'm giving back." Again, this resonates with Shaw's (2019) discussion of resiliency tied to the belief

of doing something for others or a higher purpose. Bruce (1998) may have characterized this as giving something back to the community.

An additional factor that could enhance resiliency was the overall "Positive Attitude" found in the data. Here, it was noted that the participants talked about doing their job regardless of the adversity they met. They described their abilities and success as an interpreter, what Chin (2019) may call a "Strength-Based" approach, instead of dwelling on the mistakes or challenges they faced. Like the findings in West Oyedele's (2015) study, a lack of confidence was not mentioned. Instead, and similar to what Bruce (1998) described as characteristics that would enhance resiliency, the participants had the "courage to be a 'trailblazer' or 'pioneer'" and "possess[ed] a strong racial identity" (p. 14). One aspect of that positive attitude, as described by Beverly, was "I'm one of those people that I can get along with anybody."

CONCLUSION

In summary, the African American/Black sign language interpreters in this study faced many barriers to their success in the field. These included isolation, racism, and an education system that failed to recognize them. In fact, in many cases, it actively discriminated against them. In spite of these challenges, they were able to become confident professionals who worked to give back to their community and described many things that enhanced their resiliency. These included external support from White colleagues and the Deaf community and an internal positive attitude and desire to help others coming up.

LIMITATIONS

As a qualitative study, there are a number of limitations that should be recognized. The sample size included ten African American/Black interpreters who identified as female, so the results may not be generalizable to the field at large. However, the researchers did achieve code saturation and used inter-coder agreement and triangulation with prior research studies to demonstrate how the findings were not unique to this study alone (Patton, 1999). Also, as a qualitative study, the purpose was to explore and generate theories, such as the concept of resiliency. It was not to determine the nature of the reality for all African American/Black interpreters. Instead, it is up to the reader to determine if the findings hold any veracity for them and applicability to their lived experiences, as noted in the literature (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

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