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Capturing the Stories of Deaf BIPOC on College/Aspiration Experiences to Improve Advising and Mentoring

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ABSTRACT

The experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in university vary widely depending on their backgrounds and the intersection of color with other marginalized identities such as disabilities, class, immigration, and gender. Also, the geographic location of the university, which determines the demographics, and the university's commitment to diversity and inclusion can have an impact on advising and mentoring students who are BIPOC. The current study used a narrative research design to examine the college and career experiences of Deaf BIPOC because although few Deaf individuals join and graduate college with degrees, the number is even lower for Deaf BIPOC. Hence, higher education institutions must intentionally recruit Deaf BIPOC and ensure their advising and mentoring guidelines focus on Deaf BIPOC to ensure they increase the retention and graduation rate. Understanding the complexities of intersecting race and d/Deaf identities creates a need for a qualitative narrative study that focuses on the career narratives of Deaf BIPOC to facilitate their voices to be heard and included in college recruitment, academic advising, and mentoring guidelines.

Keywords: Deaf, Deaf BIPOC, College Deaf, BIPOC, Mentoring, Advising.

INTRODUCTION

College education can contribute to individual success, including career opportunities (Muhammad & Hina, 2018; Pages & Stampini, 2007; Robst, 2007), higher earning potential (Stryzhak, 2020; Wanru, 2023), and personal fulfillment (Stryzhak, 2020). Previous research reports that adults with a disability are less likely to graduate from high school and obtain college degrees than adults without a disability (Belch, 2004; Fleming et al., 2017; Ryan & Bauman, 2016; Wessel et al., 2009; Knight et al., 2016). For instance, most high school graduates with a disability enrolled in a Texas two-year college did not attain a credential or degree within four years (Miller et al., 2020). Similar findings across the United States indicate that college students with disabilities took longer to graduate due to the complexity of transition issues (Knight et al., 2016).

Previous research on Deaf students indicates there is an increase in the number of deaf graduates with high school diplomas who enroll in college (Cawthon et al., 2014; Garberoglio et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2011; Wagner et al., 2006). However, the number of Deaf students

who complete and graduate from college is still very low (Cawthon et al., 2014; Garberoglio et al., 2019a; Kuh et al., 2010; Newman et al., 2011). According to Garberoglio et al. (2019a), the bachelor's degree completion gap between Deaf and hearing people is 15.2% *(*Garberoglio et al., 2019b). According to Garberoglio and colleagues (2019 a &b), post-secondary training narrows the employment gap between Deaf and hearing individuals. Moreover, the gap widens when considering Deaf students' diversity and the intersection of d/Deaf identities*.*

Despite the diversity in this population, one common thing is that most of them, 90-95%, are from hearing non-signing families and may experience language delays or sometimes language deprivation (Hall et al., 2017; Meek, 2020; Sümer & Özyürek, 2022). Additionally, although the most prevalent K-12 educational placements for the Deaf are special schools, mainstream, and self-contained classrooms (Kluwin et al., 2002), most Deaf students and hearing students attend mainstream classrooms in public schools (Moffatt-Feldman, 2013). Hence, when considering all shared variables by Deaf learner and the intersection of race and d/Deaf identities*,*

Deaf BIPOCs have unique experiences that may influence their college enrolment, retention, and graduation rate. Intentional and tailored recruitment, academic advising, and mentoring guidelines focusing on minority groups are critical in increasing Deaf BIPOC and would reduce the existing gap between Deaf BIPOC and White Deaf or hearing college students. Understanding the complexities of intersecting race and d/Deaf identities created a need for a qualitative narrative study that focuses on the career narratives of Deaf BIPOC to facilitate their voices to be heard and included in college recruitment, academic advising, and mentoring guidelines.

Diversity among Deaf Learners

Diversity among deaf students is a multifaceted aspect of the Deaf community. The deaf community is a diverse population including racial, ethnic, linguistic, communication, and additional disabilities (Anderson & Grace, 1991; Cannon & Luckner, 2016; Garbergolio et al., 2019; Guardino & Cannon, 2016; Holcomb, 2013; Musyoka, 2023, 2022, 2021; Musyoka et al., 2023,2021, 2020, 2016). It is essential to understand the nature of diversity within the Deaf student population, as it informs the experiences and needs of Deaf learners and promotes inclusivity, accessibility, and cultural sensitivity. The diversity may affect various development areas, including social, emotional, and cognitive skills. The intersectionality of diverse variables adds layers of diversity to their experiences and identities. Also, individual Deaf students may embrace Deaf culture as central to their identity. In contrast, others may have a more fluid or blended identity, incorporating Deaf hearing cultural elements and additional disabilities.

When examining the diversity among Deaf students' language and communication is a vital component. Deaf students have different language and communication preferences and abilities because of varying degrees of hearing loss, from mild to profound. Their hearing status can influence their communication needs and the types of assistive technology or accommodations required. Some may use American Sign Language (ASL). In contrast, others may prefer other sign communication systems such as Signed Exact English (SEE), Cued Speech, or even spoken language (Allen & Anderson, 2010; Karas & Laud, 2014; Moore, 2012; Rahmah & Kosim, 2018). Although there is limited research on the intersection between language, communication, and race, Black Deaf signers use different ways of communicating with

White Deaf (Myers et al., 2010), and Black Deaf frequently use spoken words, hand gestures, and written communication (Creamer, 2019). Additionally, Some Deaf learners are multilingual from families that use a language other than English or American Sign Language (Guardino & Cannon, 2016; Musyoka, 2023, 2022, 2021; Musyoka et al., 2023,2021, 2020, 2016). Hence, it is essential to understand the effect of diverse language and communication experiences on Deaf students who join college and provide advising and mentoring that attend to their needs. Besides language and communication, some Deaf learners have additional disabilities. (Garbergolio et al., 2019; Guardino & Cannon, 2016). For instance, research shows that 61 percent of Black Deaf individuals also have additional disabilities (cite, Garbergolio et al., 2019; Deaf BIPOC individuals with disabilities represent a unique intersection of identities and experiences. They face distinct challenges and barriers related to their race, deafness, and disabilities, and hence, their college experiences are shaped by the interactions of these multiple identities. Educational institutions must recognize and address this population's specific needs and concerns when designing advising and mentoring programs to meet their college needs and ensure equity and inclusion.

Language, Literacy and Deaf Education

Language and communication are critical in Deaf education. The communication and language options among deaf individuals vary because some deaf individuals can use spoken language with/without a hearing assistant device, while other Deaf individuals use sign language (Karas & Laud, 2014). Among the most prevalent modes of communication that Deaf individuals use include total communication, simultaneous communication, ASL, manual coded English sign language systems, spoken language, and cued speech (Marschark et al., 2020; Moore, 2012). Parents always make decisions about the communication systems for their children (Ching et al.; Scott, 2018). Communication choices determine educational placement (Allen & Anderson, 2010); consequently, different schools have different language and communication philosophies (Tomasuolo et al., 2012).

Historically, the three most used educational placements for the Deaf in the US include special schools, mainstream, and self-contained classrooms (Kluwin et al., 2002). Research shows that most Deaf and hearing students attend mainstream classrooms in public schools (cite). Many deaf students in the mainstream program feel isolated due to their peers' and teachers' lack of understanding of Deaf culture and barriers in communication (cite). Hence, the educational and social-emotional experiences of Deaf learners graduating from K-12 programs vary depending on their educational placement and the language access in the educational setting (Kluwin et al., 2002).

Examining literacy of Deaf learners, researchers and educators report the literacy levels of Deaf students as significantly lower than those of their hearing peers (cite). Also, research continues to argue that Deaf students graduate high school with a fourth-grade reading level (Cawthon, 2004; Traxler, 2000; Wilbur, 2000). Writing is an even more significant challenge for Deaf individuals who use ASL as their first language is unwritten, and the linguistic structures do not match that of English (Nugroho & Lintangsari, 2022). Therefore, learning a spoken majority language, such as English usage and grammar standards, is crucial because most learning projects require writing, especially academic writing. Unfortunately, the academic English writing skills of many Deaf learners are subpar compared to their hearing peers. As a result, most prefer to express themselves in ASL rather than writing in order in English (Ernst, 2020).

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The challenges in both reading and writing for Deaf learners affect some of them in understanding content in various subjects (Albertini, 2016).

Furthermore, among Deaf students, academic performance varies with students' degree of hearing loss, age, race and ethnicity, and gender (Antia et al., 2009; Higgins & Lieberman, 2016; Marschark et al., 2015; Moeller et al., 2007). Deaf students of color tend to lag even further behind (Marschark et al., 2015). Marschark and colleagues (2015) noted that White students performed better than African American and Hispanic students in Comprehension, Social Science, and Science.

Deaf and College Education

The likelihood of Deaf students completing high school and college has increased in recent years, but still, the numbers are lower than their hearing peers (Garbergolio et al., 2022, 2019; Kelly et al., 2016; Lang, 2002). Although the rate of college education completion among Deaf individuals has increased since 2008, fewer deaf complete university compared to postsecondary (King, 2021). A low graduation rate reported for deaf with bachelor's continues a gap between deaf and hearing individuals (Garbergolio et al., 2019, 2021). When examining completion rates across races and ethnicities, Deaf Asians are more likely to have completed college in terms of race and ethnicity (Garbergolio et al., 2019, 2021).

Challenges experienced by Deaf college students include a lack of crucial learning content and exam preparation (cite). In addition, previous studies showed concern about their study habits, reduced verbal confidence levels, decreased willingness to finish college, and less than favorable assessments of their teachers compared to hearing peers first-year college students (Albertini et al., 2011). Also, research show that Deaf college students experience anxiety that affects their motivation and attitude toward college, hence (Mishra et al., 2022).

In the case of Deaf BIPOC, previous studies show that Deaf first-generation Latino college graduates had similar upbringings, high school experiences, and college experiences as hearing peers first-generation Latino college students. However, language impacted their continuing college education (Torres, 2006). Factors that affected their college experiences included their parents' educational backgrounds, the linguistic climate at home, relationships between parents and teachers, college preparation, and minority-related stress (Torres, 2019). Additionally, most Deaf BIPOCs expressed a lack of support that focused on their Deaf and racial identities ((Parasnis et al., 2005; Stapleton, 2015, 2016; Stapleton & Croom, 2017).

Mentoring and Advising College Students

Higher education researchers, policymakers, and practitioners are concerned about the exodus of racial and ethnic minority students (Bailey & Bishop, 2021; Hanson, 2021; Musu-Gillette et al., 2018). Continuing research indicates that the college retention and graduation gap between students of color and white Americans has always been bad, but it is getting worse (Bishop & Bailey, 2021; Chen et al., 2014; Hanson, 2021; Keenan, 2015; Jones & Reddick, 2017; Musu-Gillette et al., 2018; Wong, 2016). Previous research shows College students of color present numerous accounts of feelings of lack of belongingness, alienation, unwelcoming/hostile environments, and fighting against stereotypes, which result in students making decisions to stay or leave (Chen et al., 2014; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Gray et al., 2017; Havlik et al., 2017). According to Hanson (2021), the highest dropout rate among ethno-racial demographics was

American Indian/Alaska Native (45.1%), followed by Black students (33.8%), and the lowest was White students (7.9%). Musu-Gillette and colleagues (2018) reported that from data from across the country in the US, 42% of Black and 56% of Hispanic students graduated college within six years. Hence, this indicates that the graduation rate of college students of color is lower than their white peers (66%) and even lower at the national level (63%). Students with disabilities are 58.7% more likely to drop out than students without disabilities (Hanson, 2021).

College advising plays a crucial role in the success of college students because effective advising can help students make informed decisions, set academic and career goals, and navigate the complexities of higher education, increasing resilience, retention, and student success (Al-Khafaji, 2017**;** Brye, Kerns 2019; Drake, 2011; Hawthorne et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2019). According to Al-Khafaji (2017), college advisors assist students in creating academic plans that align with their goals. Previous research has shown a relationship between academic advising and maintaining majors, indicating that advisors can help students select the right courses and majors, ensuring they graduate on time (Jaradat & Mustafa, 2017; Mustafa, 2015).

A few previous research examined the academic advisors supporting college students of color (Blake-Beard et al., 2006; Museus & Ravello, 2010). First, it is crucial to understand how connections and social networks influence individuals of color's opportunities to access mentorship. According to Blake-Beard and colleagues (2006), individuals of color often form two parallel networks: one with white people who can open doors to opportunities and funding and another with people of color who can provide psychological and emotional support. On the other hand, white individuals do not need to accept or include racially different individuals in their network. Hence, it is vital to know how to intentionally create successful mentoring relationships across racial lines (Blake-Beard et al., 2006). In Museus and Ravello's (2010) study, academic advising of Black male students at a significant urban college where White students are predominant emphasized the significance of race and culture in academic advising. He argued that when advising college students of color, it is crucial to focus on advising and mentoring non-academic related challenges and difficulties that students of color may be experiencing that may be affecting their academic experiences (Museus & Ravello, 2010).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study aligned with three theories, namely the narrative career theory (Savickas, 2011), the Deaf critical theory (Gertz, 2003), and the theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). According to Savickas (2005), "Career stories …tell how the self of yesterday became the self of today and will become the self of tomorrow" (pp. 58). The Deaf critical theory (Gertz, 2003) will provide the lens to understand the stories from a Deaf perspective. On the other hand, the theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) will guide the study in examining the intersectional of people of color identity and d/Deaf identity in the career stories.

Based on the double framework of Deaf Critical Theory and intersectionality, the present study focused on the co-constructed experiences of deaf BIPOC in college. These students' intersectional identities were analyzed as an interaction of being Deaf on one hand and their racial identity and on the other hand. The assumption that these two identities Deaf and race can either coexist or conflict with each other is worth questioning in the institute of higher

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education context. The double framework allowed the researchers to understand how Deaf BIPOC college student perceive their mentoring experience.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The central research question guiding this study is “What are the career and mentoring experiences of Deaf BIPOC college students?"

The sub questions include:

- RQ 1: How do Deaf BIPOC make decisions about college goals?
- RQ 2: What are the experiences of students who are Deaf BIPOC in college?
- RQ.3: What is the nature of the advising and mentoring experience of students who are Deaf BIPOC in college?
- RQ.4: How can college advising and mentoring transform to meet the needs of students who are Deaf BIPOC?

RESEARCH METHODS

The current qualitative narrative study aimed to collect and document Deaf BIPOC career journey stories. Narrative inquiry involves people telling their stories and narrative researchers collecting, documenting, and interpreting the experiences (Creswell, 2014; Mueller, 2019). Patton, 2002). Participants are storytellers who tell the story of their life experiences in a natural context (Mueller, 2019). In the current study, the participants are storytellers who told stories of their career journey by sharing specifically the story of their career interest development. While focusing on their career stories, the storytellers shared their college experiences with the advising and mentoring they received.

Participants

The current study involved seven participants, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Participants Demographics

Demographics n=7	
Gender	Female: 4 Male: 3
Age	25-35=**3** 36-45=2 Above 45=1 Decline to State=1
Race/Ethnicity	African America/black:4 Hispanic:3
Hearing status	Deaf:5 HH:2
Type of K-12 school attended	ASL school=3 Oral school=0 Mainstream=6 Self-contained=1 Self-Contained=1 * More than one choice
Highest education level	MS.- 6 Ph.D-1

The sampling procedure used was purposive and snowballing. Purposive sampling was used to find participants who have detailed stories about their college experience. Snowballing sampling assisted in identifying more Deaf BIPOCs, so we asked participants to help us by informing other Deaf BIPOCs about the study. The seven participants include four females, three males, four African American/Black, and three Hispanic. Only one participant did not have a K-12 mainstream experience. The sample size for a narrative inquiry is small, between one and six participants purposely selected to capture an in-depth story that includes the unique, nuanced experiences studied (Creswell, 2015; Vasileiou et al., 2018).

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection involves individual interviews using interview protocol developed by the researchers to ensure all the participants were asked the same questions. All the interviews were conducted using ASL. The interview data was recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed using the MAXQDA qualitative analysis program and followed Radiker and Kuckartz's (2020) six data analysis steps. Thematic analysis examined participants' narratives' uniqueness and compare similarities and differences across participants by identifying, organizing, analyzing, and discussing the significant patterns of story content within the dataset (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The data analysis process will involve reading the data, creating initial codes, categorizing the codes, and reviewing emerging themes (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

FINDINGS

Three themes emerged from the study include:

Theme 1: Factors Influencing College Experiences

The participants shared two main factors that influenced their college experiences related to their K-12 experience. The participants shared that they needed mentoring to assist them in their transition and what to expect.

The first factor concerned their transition from one education setting in K-12 to a different education setting in college. Participants identified how their previous and current educational setting influenced their college experience. The participants attended various K-12 academic settings including special schools for the Deaf, mainstream programs, or self-contained classrooms for the Deaf. Teachers in K-12 schools for the Deaf are trained and experienced to work with deaf learners. Also, the participants shared that the nature of quality interaction with their peers and teachers using sign language in K-12 schools differed from that in the university. The class sizes in schools for deaf students are small, which makes it possible for the student's teacher ratio to be low and allows more support to the students. Disability-related resources for deaf students, such as speech therapy and audiologists, are easily available in schools for the Deaf.

Participants shared that several interconnected factors influenced their college experiences. They identified how differences between their previous and current educational settings influenced their college experience. Some participants attended various K-12 academic settings, including special schools for the Deaf, mainstream programs, or self-contained classrooms for the Deaf. Participants who attended schools for the Deaf in K-12 schools reported that several teachers were trained and experienced in working with deaf learners. They also had quality interactions with their peers and teachers using sign language. The small

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class sizes in schools for deaf students allowed for a low student-teacher ratio, providing more support to the students. Additionally, disability-related resources for deaf students, such as speech therapy and audiologists, were readily available in these schools, contributing to a more conducive learning environment.

In mainstream programs, deaf students relied on sign language interpreters during class sessions but had to navigate social interactions outside classrooms on their own without interpreters. Hence, it often left some deaf students feeling isolated, with no deaf friends to interact with or peers who understood and used sign language. Furthermore, some deaf students in high school had to advocate for the services they needed, while others relied on their parents and educators. This disparity in advocacy led to varying access to the special education services they required.

Universities often do not offer the same learning environment as schools for the Deaf. University instructors typically teach in mainstream education, and Deaf learners use interpreters and notetakers in the classroom. Some participants expressed that they experienced conflicts due to their previous K-12 school experiences. These conflicts were associated with the quality of accessible language used by instructors, class sizes, availability of disability-related resources, school culture, and peer interactions. For instance, some D/HH students who attended Deaf schools and later joined hearing mainstream universities found the transition challenging. In contrast, others who attended mainstream schools and enrolled in Deaf universities faced different challenges.

A Deaf participant who previously attended a school for deaf students and later joined a mainstream university with most of the students hearing said:

> *When I entered xxxx university interpreters were already provided because I had an IEP that indicated I was deaf and I needed interpreting services. The university had a disability service center but it meant that I have to tell them for them to take care of it. Honestly, I didn't have anyone to help me because with high school I had finished with IEP they knew what I needed. … I didn't get any other information on how to navigate the university and ask for the resources that I needed. I wish I had somebody that could have educated me on that because I didn't have that experience and I think it's similar for many other deaf adults who finish high school and go to college but then it comes I have to advocate for myself I have to ask for it in and I didn't know how to do that.*

Another participant who attended mainstream school and later joined mainstream university talked of her experience as follows:

> *I met the people that exposed me to deaf culture and the students were signing and that it gave me the inspiration to learn and to even go to college. I became so attracted to the culture and the language and that's where I became even more interested in going to college. Unfortunately, I could not afford it was very expensive. I decided to join a XXX using an interpreter.*

Also, some shared the frustration of using support services such as notetakers and interpreters, which are available in class but absent in other activities on campus. One participant said,

> *I could understand some interpreters better than other. Some activities there were no interpreters and I had to lip read.*

The second factor was the need for mentoring to prepare them psychologically to understand the need for a university education and make them ready for it. Some Deaf participants reported their unpreparedness to attend college because they had no plans to attend college but decided to attend because of peer pressure. As they shared how they found themselves in college, we noted that a student's peers and friends could profoundly impact their college choices and experience because peers can influence individual social activities, academic choices of significant life events, study habits, and overall well-being.

One participant said,

> "*I didn't think about college until later when all my friends you know started talking about college. They put their names on the school notice board. So, I decided to put my name on the board and chose XXX university. I just wanted to fit in, but I wasn't thinking about going to the university. So, I found myself attending university without planning.*

Another participants said,

> *I saw all my friends left, and they've gone to college, and now I'm the only one who has not. I decided to go to college.*

A third participant shared.

> *I saw all my friends on the notice board where they're going to college. You know noticed all my close friends you know started talking about the different colleges they are planning to go. I felt like what about me, so I decided to go to the university like my friend, but it wasn't my plan to go to the university.*

The universities that welcomed these unprepared Deaf students were not aware that not only were these students Deaf, but they did not know why they were in the university and lacked and needed mentoring to understand and navigate university education. Possibly, the academic advisors who met with these new students assumed them to have chosen to join the university willing and ready for school. Having a mentor would have changed their college experience as one participant said:

One participant said,

> *"I needed a Big Brother big sister thing. I wish I had that like a peer, just somebody to mentor me through the process to take me understand and through the process, particularly in my freshman college years. A big brother to guide me in supporting me. I would have done more activities, been more involved in the university, and perhaps joined a sorority or any events. I would have had fun in college."*

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Theme 2: Nature of Mentoring.

The participants shared that they had different mentoring experiences, including self-mentoring, peer mentors, friends, roommates, classmates, parents or specific family members, K-12 teachers, and assigned university interpreters as mentors. Those who attended Deaf schools recognized their Deaf teachers as mentors, while those in mainstream schools identified interpreters as mentors. All the participants discussed the importance of self-mentoring and motivation as the most critical form of mentoring that helped them graduate. Also, all the participants mentioned having an academic advisor as their only form of mentor to assist them in following their degree plan.

When sharing about academic advisors as mentors, participants made comments as follows:

> *My mentors had a checklist of all the courses for my degree plan and to make sure that I meet all the degree plan requirements. I wouldn't know what I'm supposed to do in my academic so they would advise me what next to do. If I've already taken math classes for example, they would be like OK you've taken math but now you need to take advanced math like statistics. I just accept based on the regulation and what is described in the checklist.*

Mentoring did not focus on non-academic. No personal life. I chose not to share personal things with academic advisor and my academic advisor did not ask. (INTERVIEW 006, Pos. 24)

My mentors and advise are only focused on academic non-academic. For non-academic I was able to talk with interpreting staff and sometimes I could ask them about my challenges, and they share their experience and so the interpreters were available sometimes to help.

> *There was no mentoring at UX. I had an advisor for class but there was no like interaction but there wasn't any like intense mentoring it was more of routine class registration. but I still talk to her, and I use her as my reference. In UX really there is not any advising or mentoring as such and again you know it's a hearing white predominant, so it had its own challenges.*

Even one international student talked about the mentoring experience of an assigned academic advisor as follows:

> *When I arrived first in the US, I joined XXX university I was assigned an advisor to discuss my degree program plan and guide me to register courses so I can graduate on time. There was no nonacademic mentoring. I don't remember sitting a lot with my advisor in my program. there wasn't much interaction. After graduating XXX university I enrolled in VVV University it was pretty much the same I had an academic advisor but there was nothing like non-academic. I don't remember them asking anything concerning myself. mentoring was just strictly on academic. ….*

Besides academic advisors who played the role of mentors, participants talked about peer mentoring or help they received from a friend, roommate, or classmate. Peer mentors were at a similar academic level as the Deaf participants and provided support, advice, and companionship. While not necessarily more experienced, they offered motivation and a

different perspective and understanding of their academic situation. A common experience shared by the Deaf in the mainstream universities is what one participant shared saying.

> *Other than having interpreters in class, I didn't get any other information on navigating the university and asking for the resources I needed. I depend on friends, roommates, or classmates. I wish I had somebody who could have educated me on that because I didn't have that experience, and I think it's similar for many other deaf adults who finish high school and go to college, but then it comes to advocating for myself. I had to ask for it, and I didn't know how. I didn't have a mentor to show me how, to counsel or advise me on how to do that.*

Theme 3: Mentoring Gaps Experiences

All the participants shared various gaps in mentoring that, if addressed, could reduce the challenges DeafBIPOC experienced in college. The gaps include a lack of cross-cultural mentoring, which focuses on the Deaf and other cultures, such as Hispanic and African American cultures. Another gap was the need for mentors to personalize students' experiences by attending to non-academic student experience issues because assigned advisors focused on a class checklist on a degree plan. In addition, most Deaf BIPOC lacked mentoring in self-advocating to get the needed services, so they just struggled without sharing. Finally, Deaf individuals experienced mentoring gaps related to transitioning from K-12 institutions to universities. The mentoring gap impacted the Deaf college students if they had graduated from a Deaf school and enrolled in a mainstream college or graduated from a mainstream school and enrolled in a Deaf college. One participant said,

> *"Transitioning from high school college was a big challenge. I didn't feel deaf enough; I didn't feel like I was fitting. So, I was sitting alone in the cafeteria, crying and calling my mom ... I wanted to leave... Luckily, Dr. XXX saw and decided to assign me a mentor who helped me stay."*

Another participant shared the challenge in mentoring and the importance of Deaf culture and ASL in Deaf college students mentoring:

> *I think Deaf students need to be supported on how to develop a closer relationship and open with their mentors so they can share their concerns and their fears. It would have helped me particularly instead of just speaking about classes to graduate if I had somebody I could talk to and you know have an open mind to discuss. Also I would prefer as a deaf students matched with a mentor or advisor who understands deaf culture deaf language. Someone proficient in ASL to scaffold a deaf person to share more and support them more as opposed to just checking the course registration list. A mentor that would provoke a deaf person by asking questions, checking what they need or want do, get their perspective instead of just telling them what is in a list.*

Talking of peer mentoring one students shared;

> *When I first entered a university with Deaf students and sign language, it was a culture shock. I was coming from the mainstream program. I always had my phone with me, so the students were like, stop using the phone. You are not deaf. Stop using*

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> *the phone. So, I didn't feel accepted, but I felt my peers accepted my identity of hearing loss. When I joined the university, I had already earned credits from Community College, so I wasn't considered a freshman and did not live in the freshman dorm. I didn't have a dorm experience because my roommate was a hearing student. So, I didn't have a Deaf freshman experience with my hearing roommate. It wasn't until a year later, after my hearing roommate left that I got a roommate who was hard of hearing like me and who now mentored me. So, I missed having a college mentor or peer mentor to assist with the transition from hearing K-12 to college.*

Talking about peer mentoring a multilingual/multicultural Deaf participants shared the gaps in mentoring she experienced:

> *My challenge was not only having any deaf peers and mentors but generally not even having deaf people as part of my university experience. So, I lacked deaf peer mentors and anyone who could mentor me as a Deaf person in a hearing university. That was my greatest challenge. I was frustrated figuring out what was happening on campus sometimes and what I could do. I wish I had a deaf peer mentor, or I wish I just had enough hearing people who already understood and had some background with deaf people. I wish I had somebody who understood my deaf culture, particularly my ethnic language and culture. I wish my college had full language access. Later in graduate school, when I met Deaf students, I noticed a big difference between myself and my other deaf classmates. I felt we were different; we were not the same in terms of knowledge information because I found myself lacking information even on my ethnic culture. I was the only non-native English deaf throughout my undergraduate years. I felt like, oh, I wish I had a deaf mentor, but I also wish I had a deaf mentor from my ethnic group. I missed a lot in my early college years.*

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings from the study showed that universities and colleges need to develop separate advising and mentoring guidelines to support D/HH students to increase college retention and graduation rates. These findings echo previous research on racial and ethnic minority students who exit college before graduating, showing the need for academic advising and mentoring (Bailey & Bishop, 2021; Hanson, 2021; Musu-Gillette et al., 2018). Studies on hearing students of color showed that most hearing students of color expressed the need for two types of mentors, one for academic support and another for nonacademic support, such as psychological and emotional (Blake-Beard et al., 2006; Museus & Ravello, 2010). In the current study, all Deaf students expressed the need for academic mentors but also nonacademic mentors who were familiar with Deaf student's unique challenges as Deaf students and also as students of color, which creates a double whammy challenge when considering the intersection of being Deaf and race/ethnicity. Hence, current college advising policies for D/HH college students need to attend to nonacademic issues D/HH students experience and are not limited to class registration.

Moreover, the diversity among Deaf students presents an opportunity for growth and learning through cross-cultural mentoring. Deaf students will significantly benefit from this, particularly from a mentor who is Deaf or understands Deaf culture. The Cross Model of Cultural Competence (Cross, 1988) identifies different levels of the mentors' cultural competencies that can positively affect cross-cultural mentoring. These include cultural destructiveness, cultural incapacity, cultural blindness, cultural pre-competence, basic cultural competence, and cultural proficiency. Since most college mentors are hearing faculty or peers, it is important to identify the mentors' level of cultural competencies regarding Deaf culture. Doing so will help institutions facilitate cultural awareness and ensure effective cross-cultural mentoring, fostering a sense of belonging, optimism, and possibility for Deaf college students of diverse backgrounds.

Lastly, the current study highly advocates the power of peer mentoring. Peer mentors significantly enhance the college experience and pave the way for career success for both the mentees and mentors (Connolly, 2017; Hirsch et al., 2021). Most Deaf college students expressed the need for colleges to establish peer mentoring for first-year/freshman and new D/HH college students. This support will help them navigate college life with minimal challenges. The peer mentors would assist the new college students to develop self-advocacy training so they can express and request the support they need. This inspiring approach can transform the college experience for D/HH students.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study participants are Deaf BIPOC who demonstrated resilience and graduated college with either a graduate or a doctoral degree. However, this study needs to continue and collect stories targeting Deaf BIPOC who dropped out of college. Another limitation of the current study is that the participants are African American and Hispanic; hence, the experiences of Asians and indigenous groups, among other groups that comprise BIPOC, are not included. So, future studies should explore mentoring in college as it pertains to these other groups. Finally, there is a methodological limitation because the sample size is small, as only 6-7 Deaf participated in the study. Future studies would need to expand the sample size to widen the understanding of the nature of deaf college students' mentoring experience.

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