



## **ONE OF ONE: ADDRESSING FEELINGS OF ISOLATION AMONG BLACK STUDENTS IN CSD**

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Black speech-language pathologists (SLP) often join the profession for reasons rooted in community and connectedness, such as having a family member with a speech or hearing disorder or after shadowing a Black SLP from their community. Yet, for many Black SLP students at predominantly white institutions (PWI), community is often absent from their educational experience. We write this commentary as two Black students, one graduate and one undergraduate, attending a PWI, Miami University of Ohio.

Data from Miami University's Office of Institutional Research revealed that in the five years spanning from 2014 to 2018, only two Black students (0.76%) earned a B.S. in Speech Pathology and Audiology. These statistics are a reflection of our reality, and a numeric demonstration of the isolation we often experience within our major. Since the beginning of our academic careers, we have each experienced being the only Black student in a classroom, one of one. We have experienced microaggressions during our attempts to find partners for projects. Sometimes, our ideas for assignments and/or our discussion points have been ignored or not taken seriously by peers. These microaggressions, further contribute to feelings of isolation and lack of success in higher education (Hubain et al., 2016). We believe that being more intentional in the recruitment of students of color and providing mentorship and counterspaces for students will direct the field of CSD to become more inclusive.

### **Community Engagement and Recruitment**

Universities and professional institutions must work collaboratively to provide educational planning, job shadowing and career fair opportunities, and to support guidance counselors in communities of color. This provision would not only introduce students of color to the CSD profession, but also promote the interaction of individuals established in their career, and those emerging in the profession, with communities of color. To further promote these interactions and establish rapport between communities of color and the CSD profession, universities and professional institutions should support involvement of CSD professionals in community-based activities such as volunteering for back to school initiatives, cleaning up neighborhoods, painting, planting a community garden, and tutoring. These interactions are imperative in exposing people of color to the profession. Conversely, these programs expose those in the CSD profession to people of color, which could aid in the deconstruction of implicit biases about people of color. Lastly, universities and professional institutions must be intentional in not only recruiting traditional students but, rather, in promoting programs that provide a path for non-traditional students of color. Such programs could provide scholarships and other educational needs to extend opportunities to persons of color. These suggestions will assist in improving recruitment and hence, decrease feelings of isolation experienced by people of color within the SLP profession.

## Mentorship and Counterspaces

The implementation of department-level mentorship programs that allow undergraduate students of color to be connected with graduate students and/or professionals of color will help retain students of color at PWIs as they move forward in their academic programs. Additionally, establishing counterspaces that allow students of color to build community within and outside of their department will help foster an environment that is both nurturing and validating. Solórzano and his colleagues (Solórzano, 2000, Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998 as cited in Ong, 2017) define counterspaces as, “academic and social safe spaces that allow underrepresented students to: promote their own learning wherein their experiences are validated and viewed as critical knowledge; vent frustrations by sharing stories of isolation, microaggressions, and/or overt discrimination; and challenge deficit notions of people of color (and other marginalized groups) and establish and maintain a positive collegiate racial climate for themselves.” Ong et al. (2017) found that counterspaces, specifically for women of color in STEM, provided social, academic, and emotional support to women of color. Furthermore, they provided women of color with insights and advice on departments, careers, and education; helped people navigate the profession and advance professional skills; and broadened participation of women in underrepresented groups (Ong et al., 2017). Faculty must help establish and support these departmental and inter-departmental counterspaces as an additional form of mentorship.

Finally, academic and professional institutions must leverage support networks that currently exist

in national organizations, such as ASHA’s Minority Student Leadership Program and NBASLH’s Power to Empower Mentorship Program. We believe that the solutions discussed above would both recruit and retain students of color in the CSD profession. Implementing these solutions would create an environment where students emerging in the profession do not feel as lonely and complete their programs with a level of satisfaction that encourages more students of color to enroll in CSD programs.

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## References

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