



## RACISM: COMBATING WAYS TO ERADICATE

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Does racism really exist within our field of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology? Are people of color underrepresented in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology? Are students in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology programs experiencing racism? Racism is rampant across America. Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Micheal Brown, Trayvon Martin, Sandra Bland, and George Floyd are African Americans whose lives were unjustly taken. Racism is a concept that is taught and frames individuals' mindset to exclusive rights to freedom, enjoyment of certain privileges, and the ability to gain advantages from these rights. Racism within institutions and events seem inexorable from acts of individuals and systems across America and it must be challenged (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). The African Americans who unjustly lost their lives have served as tragic reminders of the ongoing need for us to stand against racism and equality. As members of the American Speech Language Hearing Association (ASHA), it is our responsibility to create awareness of cultural diversity, underrepresentation of people of color within our field, and take a stance on bridging the disproportionate gaps. These are steps that should be taken as measures to combat racism.

### Underrepresentation

There is a shortage of diversified professionals within the field of Speech Language Pathology and Audiology. There are relatively 5% of Speech Language Pathologists and 4% of Audiologists that are people of color, which suggests a large disproportionate gap (ASHA, 2015). The limited number of people of color in Speech Language Pathology and Audiology also suggests limited ability to best serve people of diverse cultures (Wright-Harp, Mayo, Martinez, et.al., 2012). To close this disproportionate gap, there are four tasks that Speech Language Pathologists and Audiologists can engage in; such as creating awareness, getting involved, participating in diversity committees and university programs recruitment and retention.

First, create awareness by spreading knowledge about the field of speech language pathology and audiology. Professionals within the field should educate middle and high school students on career day and highlight our field to principals and guidance counselors. ASHA has pamphlets of great detail to illustrate our scope of practice. Our scope of practice is broad. There are surely areas that would catch the attention of these pre-professional students.

Second, get involved! ASHA's Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) has made efforts to increase diversity by implementing diversity and multicultural programs, but has been unsuccessful by not seeing an increase in diversity within the field in over 20 years (Stewart & Gonzales, 2002). Programs such as, Student to Empowered Professionals Program, Special Interest Group 14 (Cultural and Linguistic Diversity), and The ABC's of Empowerment through Volunteering in ASHA are designed to enlighten individuals and their experiences about cultural and linguistic diversity and provide opportunities for individuals to become advocates.

Next, universities that offer Communication Science Disorders Programs should have a Diversity Committee which engages professors with ongoing training with commitment towards diversity. According to Vaught and Castagno (2008) Critical Race Theory (CRT) was adapted as training for teachers to examine their understanding, experiences, and racial structures that formed their thinking. McAllister and Irvine (2000) discussed the Center for Urban Learning/Teaching and Urban Research in Education and Schools (CULTURES) Program. This program is a series of professional development seminars that follows best practices of multicultural professional development. The seminars consist of cultural responses, cultural awareness, and adaptation to culturally diverse students.

Lastly, professors at universities with Communication Science and Disorders Programs should focus on recruitment, retention, and graduating students of diverse backgrounds. Research has indicated that people of color fail to complete undergraduate coursework disproportionately more often than Caucasians (ASHA, 2015), resulting in a lowered representation of people of color in the profession. According to the Communication Science and Disorders Education Survey

National Aggregate Data Report (2014) there were only 14% of people of color who enrolled in Communication Sciences and Disorders Program and universities have expressed the challenges in addressing the low enrollment. Nnedu (2009) discussed several factors that may impede enrollment. These factors may include, but not limited to inadequate preparation in mathematics and science courses, deficits in reading and communication skills, decrease knowledge of admission requirements, lack of finances and resources, and lack of academic support. During early high school years, conversations are warranted at home between a child and their parent(s). These topics are worthy of discussion because what one does in high school can dictate their future of becoming a Speech Language Pathologist or an Audiologist. Also, students would need to incorporate researching Communication Science and Disorders Programs at various universities as part of their study strategy.

According to Rodriguez (2018), 7% of its' members identify themselves as persons of color resulting in an underrepresentation. This marginal percent maybe due to people of color are less likely to display career knowledge, positive attitudes, and meaningful study strategies (Arora, Schneider, Thal, & Meltzer, 2011). Many individuals ignore the underrepresentation; however, if no changes are pursued, there will always be racial disparities within the field of Speech Language Pathology and Audiology. With less than ten percent of minorities representing ASHA, we have failed to meet the diversity of our profession and persons with communication disorders. As professionals, we should work diligently together towards improving diversity of Speech Language Pathologist and Audiologists within the ASHA community.

### Take a Stand

Some universities have publicized their stance on racism. For example, the University of Mississippi in Oxford, Mississippi has plans to relocate the Confederate monument from its campus (Pettus, 2020). At Princeton University's School of Public Policy, Woodrow Wilson's name will be removed from the Public Policy School and Wilson College (Pietsch, 2020). Robert E. Lee High School in Baton Rouge, Louisiana has renamed the school to Liberty High School (Kennedy, 2020). These are small changes and acknowledgements, but there is still work to do! Other universities have developed and publicized a statement against racism and discrimination. For example, the predominantly white University of Puget Sound in Washington has released "University of Puget Sound affirms unequivocally that Black lives matter. We stand against racism and discrimination, and with all who strive to make our campus community and the broader world more just, humane, inclusive, and welcoming" (Pugetsound, 2020). Louisiana State University (LSU) located in Louisiana has released:

LSU is intensifying our ongoing work to foster a campus community that is not only inclusive but antiracist. We will start by listening to and validating the experiences and perspectives of people of color and continue with self-education, fervent action, and transparent humility until equitable responses to these issues are inherent in each of us (Diversity & Inclusion Update, (n.d.).

Some universities have ignored, disregarded, and excused racism with silence, while other universities have taken a stand to address the complex problem. The removal of monuments, publicized statements, and building name changes after people of color who have made contributions to society give students a sense of belongingness (Davis, 2020).

Racism has been amongst us for many years. A child's upbringing and education can play a major part on their beliefs towards other cultural groups. As our profession moves forward, the diversity gap is likely to grow wider and more critical with the anticipated growth of non-White residents of this country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). It is up to us as ASHA members to create awareness of our field, be leaders, be mentors, be advocates, and increase our knowledge by participating in diversity programs. In the words of the Honorable John Lewis, "If you see something that is not right, not fair, not just, you have a moral obligation to do something about it."

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