

TERC – STEM Roundtable Discussion – Transcript

Audio Description [00:00]:

Welcome to our roundtable discussion titled, “Structural and Systemic Racism in STEM,” presented by Bridge Multimedia and TERC. Our moderator for today’s discussion is Djenne-amal Morris. Our guests are Dominic Harrison, K. Renee Horton, Charity Jackson, Jeanine Pollard, Adebowale Ogunjirin, and Kristie Medeiros.

Djenne-amal Morris [00:25]:

Well, hello everyone. And welcome to our virtual round table discussion about advancing racial equity in STEM education. I'm so happy to welcome all of our participants here, and we really hope that this is going to be an educational opportunity. The objective today is to facilitate a discussion centered around racial and disability equity and inclusion among people who are Deaf, deafblind, who are of color, Black, Hispanic, or the term we use these days is BIPOC, individuals with a K-12 STEM education and within the workforce. Today we want to inspire advocacy and policy changes from people, as you see on this video, who can influence legislation, influence policymaking as well as infrastructural change.

Participants of this conversation have ranging levels of communication, such as SimCom, ASL, verbal. And so I'm very glad that we have this opportunity to hear from people that are serving in the STEM education world from different perspectives.

Allow me to introduce myself and then I will introduce my distinguished guests. My name is Djenne-amal Morris. I grew up in New York City and have been a part of the Deaf, hard of hearing and deafblind world for the last, probably about 35 years. I worked in college with Deaf adults and as well as in high school, and then about 10 years later, I was given or gifted a son, Malik Asante Lamar Morris, who is deafblind. He has CHARGE syndrome. And so he is deafblind with other co-occurring challenges, but he is the heart of our family. And that just helped me and my family to continue the work serving families who have children who are Deaf, hard of hearing and deafblind, also with co-occurring conditions. Sometimes we call that deaf-plus. I have served in many capacities as a deafblind family specialist for both the Boston, New England, as well as North Carolina Deaf-Blind Projects. I am currently the statewide outreach coordinator for the Texas School for the Deaf and I am the president of Hands and Voices International. And so I am a Black woman. I am wearing a black shirt,

glasses and a pink sweater. The role that I have in today is being the facilitator, but I am also a professional as well as a parent who has raised a young man successfully with many challenges to live his best life, as well as two other children and my husband. And so I really, as professionally and personally believe that education is very, very important. However, within the STEM world, there is an under-representation and some inequality for people of color. And so that's what we're gonna do today is open up and talk about what are some of the challenges, what are the experiences of the people that are here and what can we do as a community to help give access to our young people who are Deaf, hard of hearing, as well as how can we also be the change? Thank you so much, and I'm going to start with Kristie. If you can introduce yourself and describe yourself visually, and just tell us about your background and your role in STEM and what led you to the career in this field. Thank you.

Kristie Medeiros [04:30]:

So to describe myself, I am wearing locks. I have a sweater on, I have hoop earrings. I am a Black woman, I am Deaf, I'm straight, and, my name is Kristie Medeiros. And I'm showing my sign name right now. I'm from Massachusetts, where I currently am and where I work, is in Framingham. I

have two offices, I have one here in Framingham, and then I work out of another office in Springfield, Massachusetts. And I work at the Walden School which is under the Learning Center for the Deaf. And I work as a therapeutic mentor, which is kind of like a big brother, big sister. And then I also wear another hat, which is called TSS, a training support specialist. And in that capacity, I work with youth and with parents and my other capacity is focused on youth only. And I have worked here for six years and in the youth focused work that I do, I kind of have the background of that work is in mental health, but kind of focusing on helping them achieve their goals, working on communication skills, empowerment, identity development and I do home visits every week. And then with the other hat that I wear, working between youth and with families. I kind serve a similar capacity, but different duties. And I have a bachelor's degree and also a master's degree, in moderate disability education. That's the field that I'm in. And that applies to both of the kind of duties that I have both are related to education and also to working with youth. And I work with Deaf, hard of hearing and also children of Deaf adults. That's the kind of student population that I work with. Many of whom are BIPOC students.

I have three children, myself. Two of them are stepchildren and one of them is my own. And the biological child that I have is special needs and is a teen, as well. All of them are CODA's. So I think that more or less does it. I'm really grateful to be here and thanks you for inviting me. I'm looking forward to the conversation.

Djenne-amal Morris [07:29]:

Thank you, Kristie. That's beautiful. Dominic, can we hear from you?
Please introduce yourself.

Dominic Harrison [07:35]:

Certainly. Good morning, everyone. My name is Dominic Harrison, and I'm showing my sign name. I was born and raised in New Jersey and Texas, and now I live in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I have been a teacher for eight years and counting now. I also, I have a graduate degree in secondary education with a specialization in teaching social studies. I'm also currently doing my PhD studies in language literacy and cultural studies with a focus on educational and cultural studies. My goal is to really support all Deaf students of color, pursue their passions, their identities, and really participate in the world. And at the same time, empower them in their

participation and their place in the community. I do a lot of social justice work in the classroom. And what that looks like is really incorporating all experiences and perspectives of different racial groups within the social studies context. So I do that in the classroom and then also outside the classroom whether it be in English or science or any other field. I have traveled the world a lot. I like to see different cultures and different languages, and learn information that I can come back and share with my students here in America. So thank you for inviting me, and I'm looking forward to this conversation about STEM and how we can include our people in this field.

Djenne-amal Morris [09:24]:

Thank you so much. Debo? Would you like to introduce yourself?

Adebowale Ogunjirin [09:31]:

Good morning, everyone. It is almost noon. So good morning slash good afternoon. My name is Debo. I have a black skin tone. My background is a solid blue. I'm wearing a long sleeve sweater that is purple. I also have a white shirt underneath. And part of the collar is showing. My full name is Adebowale Ogunjirin. I was born in the northwestern region of Africa, in a

country called Nigeria. I was born hearing and then later became deaf. I then attended a Deaf school for my primary learning, and elementary school is where I learned ASL. And then high school, I was in a predominantly hearing environment or a mainstream environment. There was no interpreter available at that time in that school, I then attended college and studied pharmaceuticals. And that was the first time that I was really recognized and I identified as a Deaf person and the only Deaf person at that time in the pharmaceutical industry.

And so I recognized that there was more support needed for the Deaf community to be successful in this field. In Nigeria, I had various roles. I was a researcher and a tester for different pharmaceuticals. I also worked to create, SERPs. And then I transitioned into the governmental field and, my job there in the government was to research various pharmaceutical companies. I then decided to pursue a Ph.D. in developing different medicines because Nigeria does not have various equipment and the tools and the resources to do so. So I began to do so in 2005. And, then I was in the US in 2005 because Nigeria did not have those resources. So I could start to develop medicines. Then I became a professor. And more in the research development side of the medical field. And developing medicines,

researching them, biology and chemistry side of medicines. I'm still learning about the culture and the environment for the Deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing and their needs and what supports are needed for them to thrive in the field. And so I'm still learning about that. I'm sure if there are any additional questions you wanted to pose, Djenne?

Djenne-amal Morris [14:08]:

No. Dominic, you had your hand raised. Thank you, Debo. Dominic, go ahead?

Dominic Harrison [14:16]:

It's really nice to meet you, Debo. I look forward to speaking with you. I don't have a question, but one other important piece of information I wanted to include in this conversation, just as my background, which is that I'm sitting against a beige background. I am a Deaf, black or brown skinned, and I'm kind of wearing a purple-ish whitish mixed long sleeve shirt. And also I should mention that I was born and raised Deaf. I used American Sign Language the whole way, and I picked up English along the way at the same time.

Djenne-amal Morris [14:57]:

Thank you, Dominic. Alright, Charity. I'm gonna let Charity go. And then Kristie, I'll come back to you.

Charity Jackson [15:06]:

Hello everyone. My name is Charity Jackson. This is how you sign my name, CJ, I'm a Black Deaf woman. I'm using ASL. I was born in Texas and as a military child, I moved around quite a bit with my family. I did live in Germany for a time, particularly in the city of Frankfurt. And then my parents realized that I was deaf, and decided to make an investment in my education by placing me into a Deaf school. I was then in a mainstream school. I was the only Deaf person in that program. And after graduation, I got my BA in deaf education. And then I pursued my master's, which was in public administration. And I worked at the deaf school. I currently, I am in Maryland in the deaf school. I am the chief diversity officer or a CDL for the School for the Deaf. There are in fact, two campuses for the School for the Deaf, one is in Frederick, the other is in Columbia. So I oversee the K through 12 in both of those campuses as a CDL. And I'm thrilled to share my experiences. This is really my passion. And my passion is particularly

investing in the BIPOC community and ensuring that deaf education can grow and thrive. And I'm looking forward to the day when that can happen.

Djenne-amal Morris [16:56]:

Thank you, Charity. Jeanine?

Jeanine Pollard [16:58]:

Hi, my name's Jeanine, and this is my sign name. I'm here, you can see behind me, my room at home. And you might notice behind me, there's a TV and a plant. I'm a Black woman with natural hair that I wear in a short fro. I'm wearing pink glasses, pink and purple shirt. And I have on gold hoop earrings with black beads. I'm really excited to be here and to be a part of this conversation focused on STEM. I wanna share my experience, both as a STEM teacher, and also a student of STEM myself.

Dr. K. Renee Horton [17:53]:

Hi, I am Dr. K. Renee Horton and I am hard of hearing; late-stage, hard of hearing diagnosed at 17.

My description. I am a bald Black woman and I stand 5'2". I've got on gold hoop earrings and I'm sitting in my kitchen, with my kitchen cabinets and my stove behind me and my bay window to my right.

And so my first major experience was that at 17 or 18, I had gone in to do the Air Force ROTC exam. And I found out then that I had a significant hearing loss and it was enough to disqualify me for the military at that time, and I had had this dream. I wanted to become a pilot and then go work for NASA as an astronaut. And right then everything was over and I didn't really know how to regroup from that.

I had been high functioning all my life. I graduated at 16, graduated high school at 16 and had started college. And so when that happened, I didn't really understand how to deal with that type of rejection because I watched the X being marked on my paper for reject. And it was very profound to be rejected knowing that you are intellectually capable of achieving.

And so I ended up getting pregnant and dropping out of college and traveling with my husband, who was military at the time and ignoring the fact that I had a hearing loss and that I should have been doing something

to be able to be functional and just chose not to I worked at a, like a reduced limit for a very long time and was OK with that.

And then ten years later, I went back to college and decided I wanted to be a functioning adult in society, one. Two, I wanted to live up to what my purpose was like being in situations I knew I was so much more than people around me sometimes and I had more to give and I wasn't doing that. So I went back to college, and when I went back to college, I went back with the attitude I was going to own my disability this time around and be bigger than it.

And I had an amazing center. I had gone through the speech and hearing foundation at LSU at the time, and they were the ones who really taught me what type of hearing loss I had, what were the best situations to be in, which weren't the best situations to be in, how to overcome some of the obstacles I was being faced.

And after graduating undergrad... For graduate school, I had decided to start and I could not understand anything the professor was telling me, even with hearing aids. It always sounded like wawk, wawk, wawk like the

Peanuts guy teacher, but nothing ever came in clear and I was totally confused and didn't understand. And so those who don't speak English as a first language present a lot more difficulty for me. And I wasn't understanding, and my hearing at the time was progressively getting worse. And so I was losing more than I was able to get in front of to be able to understand. And even though I could read lips, foreigners, I could not.

And so the professor told me I was one of the dumbest students he had ever taught, and it was a very disheartening situation at the time because my best friend was also going through all of these courses with me. We were taking the same exact schedule so that he could be my note taker. And we were recording and doing all of that, and I just could not understand.

Fast forward, ended up switching my major to physics, and even though not everyone spoke English as a first language, they adopted more of the, you kind of do it on your own. And so with anything that's kind of a do it on your own, I tend to be able to grasp that, enable to learn that, and I can kind of excel at it a lot better.

Djenne-amal Morris [22:06]:

I think we're gonna jump into our discussion, as I was listening to all of you, first of all I just want to say as a moderator, I'm so proud to be a part of this, have this opportunity. I also want to say as a woman of color, as a parent, as someone that has been in the field on a different side, this is rare that we are all coming to the table to talk about things that affect us personally, as well as professionally.

One of the hats that I wear is I am on faculty with UNC Chapel Hill in the LEND program. I don't know if anyone has heard of LEND, Learning and Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities. And so I serve as the family faculty and represent in the graduate program for the Carolina Center at UNC. And we train and work with graduate students in different fields such as audiology, psychology, SLP, any type of therapeutic field that will support children who are with other disabilities, but primarily who are deaf and hard of hearing.

And so in that role, and I also focus on the multicultural aspect of that. I have a certification in DI, as well as a bachelor's in psychology. And so one of the things that I have noticed in the field is the lack of representation of

people of color. And one of the things that I really focus on is helping the students who are going to be the future doctors and researchers and clinicians to understand, first of all, to look at themselves, we all have a culture. We all operate in different ways. According to our backgrounds, how we were raised, where we were raised, our culture, but also to look at families of children who are deaf and hard of hearing and recognize and validate that the way we may operate with families may not be within their cultural norm, or we have to also understand that they come from different backgrounds and different experiences with parents, as well as the young people, different experiences, racially and ethnically within the United States.

And so to that end, I'm always curious if any of you could share what degree has structural and systemic racism been a factor in your pursuit of the STEM education, maybe it's personally during your early years or college while pursuing your education or even in the work that you're doing right now. So at this point, I just would invite you to maybe share some experiences that you've been through as a person of color within your field. Charity?

Charity Jackson [25:38]:

And so my experience, I'll start with my high school experience. I have been in a mainstream school as well as a deaf school. And I recall particularly when I was a senior in high school and then graduated, I went straight to college, which was in Oklahoma. They had a program that I was interested in, and I will never forget this experience. There was an interpreter there, and I recall the professor, I recall the professor stating that it was important to have access. And so of course the interpreter was there in the class, so I could have access to the education, and the interpreter was sitting in the front of the room, but I noticed that, it was important for the interpreter to be seated at the front of the classroom, close to where the board was, so that I could access the information that was being presented on the board by the professor, as well as the interpreter.

Unfortunately, the professor was walking around during the lecture, and it was difficult to really capture the information that was being shared on the board, as well as the interpreter, while trying to catch the nuances of the professor and how they were expressing themselves and seeing their facial expressions, for example. And that's really... the professor said, look at me,

don't look at the interpreter. And that was depriving me of access to what was being taught in the language. And that was just one example of a challenge that I had faced during my college time.

Djenne-amal Morris [27:56]:

Charity. What did you do in that case? Did you feel comfortable enough to advocate for yourself at that point? Or can you just share what the outcome of that was, or just some things that went in your mind?

Charity Jackson [28:15]:

All the students were shocked, but I chose to advocate for myself in that moment. I spoke directly to the professor—the interpreter offered to interpret for me. And I said, I wanted to look the professor in their eye and tell them, "This is what I need." So I need to be able to access the interpreter visually, and I need to also be able to see you, and the information that's being presented on the board. They were resistant to that.

And I still fought for my rights, even though this professor was very much an advocate for the audiological learning, learning through hearing, and

didn't really understand my visual needs and fought back a little bit. So I continued to advocate for myself and eventually gained the respect of that professor. And that professor did acquiesce to my requests, but it did take quite a bit of effort.

So I learned that I needed to speak up for myself. And again, it really depends on the individual. Some individuals may prefer to be more, more vocal in a sense, and really share their voice about their needs and some may not. So, I personally decided to speak up in that instance and not just deal with or accept whatever they were trying to impose upon me and restricting my access.

Jeanine Pollard [30:00]:

When I think about racism and my experience growing up, I automatically jump to my experience as an undergraduate student. I had just studied neuroscience in college and in my junior/senior year... wait, I should say, I went to Brown University in Rhode Island. And in my junior and senior year, I mean I was really struggling to be honest. Physics and chemistry classes were really hard for me and so I reached out to my advisor to try to see what kind of supports were available or what I could do. And it was hard for

me to admit and say that I wasn't doing well, but I was able to admit it, let my advisor know what was going on.

And looking back on, it's hard to remember the details but anyway, what happened was, I told my advisor that I was struggling in several classes and he said that maybe if you're struggling in these classes, this major isn't for you. And wow that moment, I was really depressed, I didn't know what to do, and I agreed that maybe this wasn't for me but through my network of friends and mentors, they really helped and supported me through that and help me to realize that struggling is okay. I had to search and find other advisors that weren't assigned to me by my college or university to really help me get through that experience.

Looking back I wonder what if the student that had come to my advisor was a man or a white man. And if he had shared the same experience that I had shared, would the advice from that advisor been different? Maybe that advisor had lower expectations of me because I am Black and because I'm a Black woman and I'm not really sure. So that's one experience related to racism that I remember from my undergraduate days.

If you kind of jump ahead in time to my time as a teacher. So I taught high school science at a school for the deaf for six years. And during that time I was a lot younger so I probably didn't have the same mindfulness and experience that I have today, but like the first week of teaching one of my students came up to me and he said, "I have never had a Black teacher in my whole life. Are you sure you're a teacher?" In that moment that experience's one I'll remember forever. But as I was a little bit defensive and like wanting to say, "Excuse me, I am a teacher." But I had to pause and reflect for a moment, that in that student's experience he had never had a Black teacher before. So we had a discussion about the multiple barriers that many educators in STEM fields exist related to being Black and in my situation also being a woman and the layers of others who might be Black and Deaf, who are navigating through the education field and getting a job in STEM.

So those are two experiences related to racism, both in my teaching days and in my undergraduate research days.

Dr. K. Renee Horton [33:54]:

I also dealt with racism. And so I watched, just like everybody else was saying, you immediately start seeing that... You would think you start to think, are they treating me different because of, is it, A I'm a woman, B because I'm Black or C, is it because they have to make accommodations for me? And I went through that the six years I was at the University of Alabama, just trying to figure out when things would be bad. Like, I would take the onus of trying to figure out why they were bad and all of them are bad, right? Any one of them, it should have been easier for me to say I'm being treated like this and I shouldn't be.

It doesn't matter which one you've picked to hone in on. You know, I've heard people say, well, she needs the classes recorded, that gives her a leg up. I'm not really sure how it gives me a leg up, though, because I've got to now take this recording and take my notes and take somebody else's notes and then merge all of that together to be able to learn what you've just said in the classroom and learn. And so I was constantly dealing with things like that.

Leaving from the university when people would question if I really was a Ph.D. rocket scientist, I would say, if I don't know anything else, I know I'm

a doctor because the racist institution wasn't handing away degrees to Black people. And so that became my shield to walk behind to say I earned this. Like, I knew. And it was my constant reminder that I also was capable intellectually of doing the things that I was doing because the university itself was not just going to let a bald Black woman walk out.

I work for one of the biggest companies for the government in aerospace. And you would think that with everything that happens there, that they would be better at diversity or dealing with accommodations or disabilities. And I've had my biggest crying moments with them.

I mean, being in there. So I do research in self-reacting friction stir welding, which is the type of metal joining that we are going to send the next rocket into space with for NASA. I am probably the only Black woman who does this research. My dissertation was the first of its kind being published in the area and others have followed. Thank goodness.

And when I'm working on a team, I'm usually the only Black woman and I'm usually the only person who is hard of hearing or with a disability being in that area. 95% of my team is white male, and there's always a few white

females because for most companies, white females fit the diversity realm or that diversity number.

Being in that space, I'm kind of—and I work in a factory, and so I have been blessed. My audiologist is a mobile audiologist and has gone into the factory with me, and we've adjusted my hearing aids to four different programs to be able to accommodate my space inside of the factory. My space inside of my office or into a conference room wearing masks. And what that looks like. And then a general program. So I'm truly blessed in having that.

Outside of that, though, it can be difficult because I don't present with a deaf accent and because I don't have a deaf accent, people often forget that I have a disability. And so a lot of times I'm treated as normal and then I'm placed under a lot of anxiety and stress to have to constantly reiterate that there has to be accommodations or that we have to function as a team as a certain way so that I'm on the same playing field as everyone else . So that in itself creates a level of anxiety for me that I have to function with every single day. On whether or not I've heard everybody on whether or not I'm making the right intellectual decision or whether or not

I'm making the right call in a split second, we make split second decisions. Not split second, but they have to be made within ten minutes or 15 minutes. And sometimes I'm second guessing whether or not I even heard what I thought I heard, or if my brain picked up a different word and then processed the whole sentence or the whole structure as something else. And so I constantly deal with that. Being tele-work right now and being able to have closed captions has definitely helped a whole lot with a lot of things. For me, being able to be on the same playing field and feeling intellectually responsible as everybody else. We're making our decisions.

I am currently working with a group out of California right now. And for them, they are very aware of what it is for me to have an—need an accommodation. They are always checking to make sure that I heard what I heard or if I needed something additional. So it's a it's a very different climate that I'm working in right now, which has been great because they're more accommodating, one and two, more just a little bit more sensitive to the fact that even though I'm not presenting with a deaf accent that I still need my accommodations to be able to be functional and forward moving like everybody else.

Djenne-amal Morris [39:40]:

Debo?

Adebowale Ogunjirin [39:46]:

You know, I have experienced that situation myself, not here in the USA, but in Africa, I did experience that. And, I also had this kind of, I was met with this astonishment that other people had, and people were mystified. Like they had never seen someone like me before, how rare it was. And, it was almost like in this negative kind of view. And for them it was this really novel experience and how amazing it was that I had achieved, and kind of looking at this, okay, here's a Deaf person who has achieved and who has been successful.

And here, what kind of, the shock that I have is like seeing, when there's shock, like, oh, this person's from this place or that place, there's a little bit of negative association with that. So I think it's important to, when someone is shocked, like if they see me, if I experience that here, and I tell people that I'm in the pharmaceutical field and that I do research in chemistry and stuff like that and people are shocked to hear that, to me, it's very normal. And sometimes my friends will say, well, why is that person so surprised?

Is it because you're Deaf, or because you're Black, you know what I mean?
So it's like people have those different kind of reactions.

Charity Jackson [41:17]:

I would like to add to Debo's comments as well. From my hometown, I was the first Deaf person in college. And there were none that were in college prior to my entering the college. And so when I entered into that space, which was not used to having a person with my identity there, it was very oppressive. And, I had to really delve into that by myself. And I was really, I was really passionate about literacy and math and ASL, and I wanted to expose myself to those subjects and those fields because I was very passionate about it. And that really took me on the path to lead me to where I was today in the field, in my role.

Djenne-amal Morris [42:43]:

Thank you for sharing that. Dominic, would you like to share?

Dominic Harrison [42:47]:

This is Dominic speaking. So Charity, thank you for sharing your experience. And I think that's something that a lot of people could

recognize and it's important to take the floor and take your space and recognize that people have those different kinds of experiences. For me, kind of through my educational journey through college, if I'm reflecting on that, what I've noticed by way of a pattern that has emerged is that I meet teachers who have never had a Black Deaf student in their class ever.

And so there's dealing with some racist attitudes and for example, in high school, in my senior year, I took this economics class and I had a Black Deaf teacher. And it was the first time, even though I had had Black Deaf coaches and people involved in sports or assistants, or like dorm staff, but to have a teacher and work with this person, was totally new. I still have not had a Black Deaf woman teacher, to this day, I still haven't had that experience.

I knew I wanted to become a teacher one day, maybe since I was six years old, I had known that. Yet there were no role models around me. So I would go to school and I would see sometimes during the day or sometimes with sports, I would see people who looked like me, but not a lot. And so I would really like to change that. And that was one of the things that kind of wanted me to become a teacher.

When I was in undergrad at Gallaudet, I majored in history and it was the same thing. I had not a single Black teacher. So I had to have some Latino teachers, which was great. So these are other people of color, which was great. And in my PhD program here in New Mexico, there is one Deaf Black woman that I have, finally. And she's an incredible woman. I mean, her knowledge, her expertise, her advocacy with me, her knowledge of African-American children and kind of her views on education and her knowledge in the field of anthropology as well.

And I think that's a discussion that needs to happen in the Deaf community because there are these kind of role models that exist in the hearing community, but not for us. So for me and for my colleagues, we kind of sometimes wonder like, well, what would it have been like if we had had some of these Black role models or people who have same gender identity or, what that would have done, but now it's kind of like, there's this certain barrier that we had. And I mean, to see Kristie and Debo and Charity, I mean, it's incredible to see that, especially Kristie and CJ as Black Deaf women, and also men as well, but it's great to see more of that. And it

leaves us with the question of, not just in STEM, but really in a lot of professional fields.

What can we attribute this lack of representation to? Like, why are there so few people of color who are visible in these fields, here in this year that we are, in 2021, maybe those people are hiding. So this is something that I would really like to see change, and I know it's not gonna happen overnight, but I think really it comes down to how we grow up and kind of our educational experiences growing up.

And I feel like I'm saying things over and over to teachers where it's like, there's me and there's one other student maybe, who are people of color deaf in the class. And that's been through many, many years. I was the only one. Occasionally there would be someone else who looked like me in class, which would be great, and that's really a problem, I don't know how we can improve that. I mean, especially in STEM fields, especially in that field, I think it would be hard, we would be hard pressed to find a mentor or someone who was in one of those fields who was looking to advance. I mean, I'm just thinking, I'm admitting to myself right now, I can't even think, a name doesn't come to mind.

Djenne-amal Morris [47:27]:

So this is Djenne. Dominic, you bring up an amazing point. One of the things I have been thinking about, just even in my career, is that, and I'd love to hear comments from the rest of you, but we often are the only ones, and we can raise through the ranks, get the promotions, take on different titles and different opportunities for leadership, and kind of feel good that we are advancing, that we're representing our people, but then we look at the table and that we're still the only one at the table.

And I think that conversation, Dominic, is not, I mean all of us has really not had in terms of what is it like to be the only one at that table, whether it's, our color, our communication, our culture, it's often lonely and we're seen as accomplished and we're patted on the back. And folks don't realize oftentimes that when we come off the table, there's not someone we can really relate to.

So I agree that mentorship is something that's so, so important, where I work, we're really working on Deaf mentors for young people who are Deaf and hard of hearing to provide someone like themselves. But even in that,

it's a hard place to find someone to have a diversity even in that. And so I would love to hear from any of you that would like to share about mentorship, did you have someone that mentored you? Even now, as an adult in your field, Kristie, I think you're jumping out of your seat to share.

Kristie Medeiros [49:26]:

This is Kristie speaking. So Charity just shared reminded me of something, experience in being alone. So I went to American International College, that's here in Massachusetts. I was the only Deaf person and the only person of color in the program.

And I can remember there being some diversity in the classroom. And, it was a speech language pathology class that was required for the master's degree that I was in. So again, I had an interpreter who was there in the front of the room, and I would sit there and watch the interpreter.

And somehow, so I had a white teacher, a hearing woman, and she was talking about something like in the future, there's not gonna be as many deaf people as there are now. And it really bothered me. And so I raised my hand and I asked her why she had said that, because I said, there's still

genetic components to deafness, and there's still, depending on the genetic sequence, how that works. And we kind of got into this discussion and she didn't really believe what I was saying. And I explained that I had research that I could show and kind of evidence, and I'd be willing to share. And she really dismissed me and doubted what I was saying. And after class, I went up to her and I continued the conversation and she, again, just didn't want to hear it. And I just decided to kind of leave it alone.

And then two weeks later there was a different topic that was being brought up. And it was something that I didn't understand. And so I decided with the interpreter after class, to approach her and look at the book, and this white teacher backed away, like it didn't want to get close to me, which really puzzled me because I was leaning in because I wanted to show her something in the book. And I got this like really weird vibe. Like, I don't want to get close to you. I mean, the behavior was definitely racist. And I was trying to get her to look at something. And the interpreter who was there was actually really put off and kind of jarred by the behavior of this person.

And I went ahead and reached out to the disability office about the situation and the disability office suggested that I reach out to the person who was above that professor. So I did have someone come to the class to observe the following week. And I noticed that this teacher's behavior changed when there was an observer in the room and it didn't feel right. And they, this person who was observing, who was the superior asked me if was this the behavior the same, or was it different? And I said, no, this is different today. They seem to have changed their behavior. And I explained to them what happened. We ended up meeting, the three of us, and we talked about some of the issues, like saying there's not gonna be as many deaf people in the future. And this person who was the superior agreed with me, with my point.

And then I asked her, "Why is it that you backed up from me, like when I went up to talk to you?" And they talked about their personal space, and I said, well, "I've observed you, when other hearing students come up to you after class, you don't do that same thing." And they kind of didn't know what to say. I mean, it was very clearly racist, and I'm surprised that I actually passed that class.

But again, it's like being the only person in that graduate level class. I'm just thinking in our cohort, there were other Black students, but they were hearing. So I was the only one who was Deaf and Black and the way I was interacted with was completely different. I mean, I'll never forget that happening. And I'm the kind of person who like, I have to speak up similar to you, Charity. I wasn't just kind of gonna let it slide, it was like, I have to be assertive and speak up for myself. And so I did.

Djenne-amal Morris [53:47]:

This is Djenne. Wow, Kristie, that is a story. Thank you so much for sharing that. It kind of talks to the intersectionality of being Black, Deaf, and everything else that is part of our personality, individually. And so I'd love to just kind of explore that a little bit more, how do you all navigate the many parts of your who you are and also, and how do you separate that? If at all?

Kristie Medeiros [54:34]:

You know, it's just something you go through every day.

Jeanine Pollard [54:41]:

So I love the topic of mentorship. Now that I'm in my middle age time, you can call it that, I still enjoy searching for and identifying people to be mentors. It's an important part of my career journey.

When I was an undergrad studying STEM, specifically studying neuroscience, many of my peers were actually my mentors, and I connected with peers in a lot of different ways. Sometimes through social opportunities, sometimes meeting them because we were on the same floor in my dorm.

I'm also part of a scholarship program called Ron Brown Scholarship program, RBS for short. And I encourage any high school students currently thinking about applying for college to apply for that scholar program. Again, it's Ron Brown Scholarship program. That opportunity was really cool because there were other students my age all over the US. So not only on my college campus, but on college campuses across the US. Plus, there were also older students who had already graduated from college or who were in their careers. And that network benefited me so much then, and it still benefits me today.

Back when I was curious about what is an MD PhD. What do you do as a researcher and doctor together? What does that career look like? I was able to identify someone from RBS who had that job. So it was nice to know that network really benefited me then and continues to benefit me today.

When I think about representation, I think a lot about role models. There's this phrase that I like to borrow from K through 12 education. And it talks about wanting students to have both mirrors and windows. And the idea or the concept of a mirror is that you see yourself reflected, similar experiences, and similar identities between you and that story. And the idea of windows is that you can see through them, right? We see through windows. So it's not the exact same experience or identity there, but instead an experience or identity that's different from my own.

So when I think about role models, I think it's important to emphasize that we need to increase representation of BIPOC, Deaf role models. It's really critical, both for BIPOC students to see themselves reflected. So that's the mirror side of things. But at the same time we need windows, so that white students also see and learn from the experiences that are different from

their own. And that's important to me because there's this idea that we're all in it, if we're gonna transform or shift the STEM field in different ways that we want to to really achieve that goal of equity in STEM.

Dr. K. Renee Horton [58:44]:

So for me, dealing with the mentors, I was a part of the National Society of Black Physicists when I was in graduate school, and that's where I pulled a lot of mentors from. And one of the things they never— I never had the pleasure of was having a mentor that was either Deaf and hard of hearing. And so they always mentored me from the aspect of being a powerful Black woman in the field of STEM or in the field of physics and how to move that way, whether they were Black or white. And so I've always had mentors that either looked like me or didn't look like me, and I've had that advantage sometimes over others to be able to have that.

I really believe in mentors. And so when I went through undergraduate, I did not have any mentors or anyone that was kind of helping me through that. But when I got to graduate school, when it was needed the most is when I got a lot of those mentors.

And then even now in my career, I still have mentors that most of them do not look like me now, just simply because of the field that I'm in, and that there's not a whole lot of other Blacks that look like, you know, they're not at a lot of blacks in the actual area. I do feel privileged, though, to be able to have mentors that look like me, and they have definitely made a huge impact on my life. Just to be able to understand how sometimes we need to be able to be in a space. Like what we should be doing in that space once we get in that space and then how to maneuver that space and how to keep going or advance through that space.

And so mentorship has been huge in my life, especially during graduate school and then early career.

I think it's important for people to understand that sometimes somebody came before us, right, and that door is opening... may not be completely open, but they're there. And so once you're in these spaces, a lot of times if you went to a predominately white institution or a PWI, you were the only.

For me, I was the first person to receive my degree in the area that I received it in. I was the only Black at the time at the university. So when

you see other people who look like you, you already know that they've been through something, you know, somewhat of some things that you've been through and it makes it so it makes you— And it makes it such that you're not alone, like you're not standing in that space alone when you see those other people and you can have those conversations with them behind closed doors like this is happening to me. This is happening to me. What do you think we should be doing or how should I go about actually doing this or how to move? Well, seeing people that look like you gives you a sense of security that you're not alone, one. And that two, you may have some— you may end up having an ally if you have to fight.

Dominic Harrison [01:01:45]:

And this is Dominic speaking. I do have some of my PhD studies have been in that area of intersectional identity. And it really is impossible to separate those different aspects. You can try to kind of parse them out based on experience and there's things that happen with Deaf people and there's things that happen because of one's racial identity.

And then there are things that happen because of the confluence of both your deafness and the color of your skin. And also in gender identity,

whether someone presents as male or female, there's kind of like these double or triple impacts that can happen. So I'm really grateful to Kimberlé Crenshaw, who is the person who developed the idea of intersectionality back in 1989. And I wanted to just make sure that we acknowledge her as an African-American woman, who had obviously examined different identities, and the idea that these different pieces of identities cannot be ignored. And so that this is such a powerful idea that has really become widespread now. And it's also something that's taken a foothold in the Deaf community too, that more deaf people are recognizing. And there is something to the primacy of Deaf identity, and to the detriment of other aspects of one's identity. You know, sometimes people put those identities second, and they really focus on things like the Americans with Disabilities Act and Right to Access and Deaf President Now. If you remember at Gallaudet University, I think it was in 1986, if I have my history correct, sorry, 1988. So, there was this really big focus on Deaf identity. And I think sometimes what gets lost is the other aspects of the identity. And so now there is more awareness of, I am more than just a Deaf person and really talking about that and acknowledging that. And I think especially in the STEM field, that's something is important to bring up because it is so predominantly white and there is a lot of stuff related to education and a

college degrees. And I think especially for Deaf people, there are so few in those fields and the growth has been very slow in increasing participation in that. And so we need to really not ignore those people and kind of unpack some of those identities as we look to kind of addressing these attitudinal issues. And really looking to have people be whole with all the different components to their identity.

Djenne-amal Morris [1:04:21]:

Yes. Dominic. Thank you so much for sharing that and for giving credit to Kimberlé Crenshaw in that. And I think one of the things that she gifted us is the ability to have different identities and to be proud to have the different identities so that when we come into a space where not just the one identity that other people may see us, that we carry the pride of being multi-generational, multiethnic, multi-identified. And so I think that's something that within the STEM field, we need to push more in that we're proud to be who we are.

Kristie, I think you wanted to add some more. And Kristie, can I just, I wanted to say something. I noticed when I asked the last question, you're like, well, that's just how it is. And I wanted just to note that on our video,

and then Dominic shared even more about his experience, but your response, Kristie, is very, and tell me if I'm wrong, it can be very characteristic of people of color, when you're asked a question, it's like, oh, that's just how it is. And we often don't feel the space or the brave space to go into detail because we're not sure how that's being accepted. And so is that a little bit of what was in your mind when you said that? The freedom to just express yourself? Can you talk a little bit more about that and feel free to comment?

Kristie Medeiros [01:06:19]:

So, I mean, remember, I grew up in a hearing family, Just a little more about my background. I went to an oral only school, speaking and lipreading in Michigan. And then I went to MSSD, where I learned American Sign Language when I was 15 years old. But going back to your question about this concept of bravery, my parents always told me to keep my chin up. They always taught me to speak up. And they said, basically until the grave, you have to keep speaking up. So this is what I've kind of carried with me, and I think that's where I get some of my assertiveness from. And my parents are very proud to be beautiful Black people. And I think that's something that I've carried with me until today.

Djenne-amal Morris [01:07:13]:

Thank you, Kristie. I'd love to, we've talked about some of the challenges, I would invite our panelists today to share how you have seen progress in the field of STEM. Have you been a part of that progress or maybe the one that's pushing the progress?

Dr. K. Renee Horton [01:07:38]:

Racial equity and representation in STEM still hasn't changed a whole lot. We're still seeing first, one only, one of. And so when you're still having that, this year makes 20 years from my undergraduate and last year made ten years from my Ph.D. And so being in this now almost 20 years, I'm still seeing first. I'm still mentoring students who are the only at their university, or there's only three women at the university, whether they're white, Latino or Black. And so to have those numbers still the way that they are says we're still not doing something right. We're still not doing it right at the elementary level, right? And even though there are more young girls who see us and see those who are public, you know, who are out there, we're still not making enough of those strides in our country to be able to make that change the way I would really like to be able to see that change. I

would love to be able to see that the students come to me because they want me to mentor a group or a class because that class is a 5050 right and we can teach our guys how they're supposed to treat our ladies later on, when they're their bosses or things like that.

And so for me, it's still a little disheartening that we just don't have that advancement just yet.

Jeanine Pollard [01:09:16]:

So I think I agree with others that not much has changed since my time as an undergrad, specifically related to representation within STEM.

But what I am noticing is a shift. And when I say representation, I mean, people graduating from undergrad, with STEM careers, folks continuing on to get masters, going to technical school, other programs, getting a PhD, really folks continuing their education in STEM beyond high school.

So what I notice is a change in the stories that are out there. Social media has so many different creators. You know, I don't know, I feel like back 10 years ago when I was an undergrad, there wasn't the same variety of

different places to go to find stories of people. Specifically people who had similar experiences to mine. And I wonder if I've been able to grab my phone and pull up a TikTok video and there was a Black women in STEM there and seeing some of my own experiences from them learning how to navigate the challenges that I was experiencing in school. I wonder how that would've maybe changed my own experience and kinda persisting in STEM.

So I encourage folk to go on social media find hashtags of folks related to your majors, and like learn what other stories are out there. Because I think that's where we're gonna see more representation. So mainstream or ... not mainstream, but not big news stories, but thinking about social media as a community where stories are gonna show up.

Adebowale Ogunjirin [01:11:58]:

I just want to clarify your question, Djenne. You talked about seeing progress in the STEM field. Are you talking about progress for BIPOC people in STEM fields? Okay, and I see that you're saying yes. Okay. Well, I'm not sure if I can say much, but when I got to the United States, I noticed a very few people, very few BIPOC people in the STEM fields. And at that

time I was an international student, and I was able to enter some of these spaces because there were so few BIPOC people in that field.

Because I was so knowledgeable in this field and I already had a lot of education and everything, I think I was able to get close to getting into some of those fields. And so if I compare that to now, and I kind of look at, I kind of look around at the field that I'm in now, I do see a modest increase. I think that is in some respects due to Gallaudet University and Gallaudet's push to include, pull enrollment in for BIPOC students, and also for BIPOC faculty and staff at Gallaudet. And I think that is something that has been pushed for by BIPOC people. And what I have noticed is this sense of community and partnership within the BIPOC community, people working together.

For example, when I got my job, there was really no mentorship available to me. I kind of wasn't really sure who I could go and talk to. And I wasn't really clear how to navigate. And I had my boss, who was telling me when I did something wrong, and I was really alone. I had the feeling of really being alone and the way it is now on campus is that if I have an issue, there are other people that I feel free that I can go to and ask for help.

Whereas before, I didn't feel like I could do that, I felt like if I asked for help, maybe it would be documented, so I had to kind of keep things to myself. So that's one thing I can speak just for being on Gallaudet University campus. And then also I have seen more increased enrollment of BIPOC students. Certainly we have a long way to go, and as a professor, I do mentor BIPOC students frequently.

You know, I do have a lot of students who approach me and come up to me because they feel this freedom to talk to me and, they'll share with me some of the struggles that they're having academically. And it kind of makes me wonder if we can look to elementary school and high school as kind of the root of that. And then they ended up coming to university with the residual problems and kind of the challenges that didn't get met earlier on.

And I had one BIPOC student, who told me that in high school, they would still be promoted to the next grade, even though they weren't really academically ready, but it was just kind of like, okay, they're aged out, they're ready for the next grade. And what the result of that is, is that

there's a lot of attrition and people end up dropping out. So I think that's where that high kind of dropout rate, there is a high rate of students who drop out before they graduate.

So there is progress and yes, there's also more work that needs to be done as far as increasing opportunities, making more training and support available for BIPOC students in college. And as far as those students that I mentor, who are doing summer research there are very few mentors available for those people where they can go across the country. There are very few. So, I think there is a need for more opportunities for people to be able to come to faculty and express themselves when they need to.

Djenne-amal Morris [01:16:08]:

Debo, thank you, that was beautifully said.

So many things that everyone has communicated. I feel that we could spend the rest of the day until Christmas unpacking and working and dealing with. Debo, you brought up a wonderful point of students bringing some of those experiences, the positive and the challenging experiences into higher education. And that's something I feel like we do need to

explore and talk more about, because they don't just show up in high school or campus without former experiences.

So I'm gonna ask for each one of you for our last question, last but not least, and hopefully we have an opportunity to continue this discussion, is to dream a little bit. If all of a sudden you were given the magical wand and you were in charge of all of STEM in the United States. If you could share briefly one piece of influence that you believe you, or we as a group, could have to influence racial equity within STEM, what would that look like?

Charity?

Charity Jackson [01:18:52]:

Charity speaking. So that's a great question. And I would be happy to share my thoughts about that. And that's really something that I have thought about really non-stop since I was really young. And I'm really grateful. I just want to say for the opportunity to have this conversation with all of you here. And so I'm really grateful to you for asking that question. And it's really powerful for us to feel like the community has a voice here, and really we're speaking here for the community, not as ourselves.

Of course, we have these different experiences growing up, like whether we're at mainstream school or at deaf school. I'm really grateful that I had these parents who encouraged my education from a young age and the love of learning and of science. And like one thing I'm just thinking of, that I'll share with you is in one of the mainstream classes I was in, I was put into this like special class, the science class, where they were talking about surgery. And like, hands-on, people thought it was kind of gross, but I loved it. I was just totally fascinated with medical and surgical things. I had exposure to these different kind of things through elementary school.

Unfortunately, I didn't have any teachers who were Black growing up, even any BIPOC teachers. So all my life, I was educated by white people in mainstream school and other schools. I have Black ASL that I use. And then I have the ASL that I got in the classroom. So I was exposed to Black ASL and ASL, but the teachers that I had were not exposed to Black ASL.

So there was a lot of education that I got through my family incidentally, and then through the resources, like the stuff that they exposed me to, like different events and camps and things where I got exposure to. But there was that idea of having a role model, someone you could look up to was

really missing. And I wish that I had had that, like had a role model who was Black that I could look up to and be inspired by, and I didn't have that. And that's unfortunate, you know? And so my going back to my dream or my desire is in response to your question is to have Black people at that level of the National Science Foundation, and not just in a token kind of way, but really have like meaningful community engagement and exposure.

For example, there are people who are there in the STEM fields. And in the capacity of my job where I do education and I meet people and, I mean, it's remarkable the people who are involved in teaching math and teaching these different things. And then I see people stay in their fields like from high school and to college and advanced degrees. And it still remains that there are not a lot of Black people in the workforce. And I think it really starts with having people of color at the top of the organization instead of just at the bottom.

K-12, as was mentioned is really key, from K-12, which is the foundation, of language all the way up until a graduate degree. There's a lot of students who don't have good language access. And so I think working with K-12 schools and post-secondary, there's been strides that have been made, but

the point is there's still not enough Black people in those fields, really, not even nearly enough. And I think a lot of that has gotten lost.

For example, like with captioning, that's something that helps, for example, like when there are certain videos that are not captioned, so there's like language that isn't accessible to me. So there's like lack of access for some of those people in the Deaf community. They're not able to, even if it's in sign language, but they're not able to see what the English words are. And I mean, it's like almost 2022 right now, I would really like to see, I think it's time right now to really see an enhancement of that and to see people's skills increased.

So that's one thing that I would see is that there is also a lot of ought-ism too, and people feeling like they can't do things, and I see some of these students as capable and bright and hardworking, and there's still this attitude that people have where they don't get challenged and they don't move forward. And so, I think there needs to be more resources made available within the Deaf community, especially to BIPOC Deaf people. I mean, so many resources that are shared with the white deaf community.

And there are other people who are in these fields, black people who are in these fields, who just don't have the resources do that, and they come up with these challenges. And so I think there's a need for enhanced awareness and really opening up some of these opportunities and really making a pipeline to bring people from a young age all the way through their education. And there's collaboration that I don't see. And so I think it has happened in the larger Deaf community, but not in the BIPOC Deaf community. So there is a big disparity there, and it's time to address that.

And mentorship too. I think that's also really key, and that's something that I do a great deal, working with young people in high school or some college, even some adults as well and that having that connection and support and again, it's a way to deal with that lack of resources. And I think that at a leadership level it's key to have more BIPOC people there and to increase that mentorship.

Jeanine Pollard [01:25:57]:

So one thing I would love to add to this discussion is that there's a lot of second guessing ourselves that happen for a lot of BIPOC people in STEM that can be a lot to navigate through in the workplace and educational

institutions. There can be a lot of microaggressions. And considering all the different kinds of oppressions that we experience that is so much emotional labor and energy, so I wanna add that to this discussion because... I wanna add to this conversation a focus on healing. I think that's a place where we can find, connect about challenging experiences and think about how we might speak up more in what we're doing. And I don't often see this as part of the discussion around the experiences of BIPOC folks in STEM careers.

So I would love to add that. And hopefully this advice is relevant to students and teachers out there. I think the other thing that I would talk about, one of my biggest pieces of advice is that you gotta find your tribe, your crew, your squad. Who are those people there who support you 100%? If you're an educator who's working to transform education systems and thinking about equity, it can be hard to feel all by yourself in that work. Or if you're a student who is Black and in STEM, you might feel like I'm the only one. And I don't want that. I want everyone to have that network. So find your squad and there are different ways to do that. It might include researching different groups, like Atomic Hands. They actually have different STEMists. You might also look at cultural groups, like NBDA, the National Black Deaf Advocates. They have local chapters. It can be a great way to find a

network. And thinking about student who might identify as Afro-Latinx, there is Council De Manos. That's another organization, specifically a cultural organization where you might find others who have a similar experience to your own.

So those are some ways you might build your squad.

Djenne-amal Morris [01:29:29]:

Kristie?

Kristie Medeiros [01:29:30]:

That reminds me at MSSD when I was there in the nineties, there we're hearing people of color teachers, but there were no Deaf POC teachers.

And that was unfortunate, not to have those teachers there at that time.

And there have been more that have started to join, MSSD has changed a great deal for the better where I work at the Learning Center for the Deaf.

They have a, I'm sure you've heard of this, Charity, Chief Equity and Inclusion Officer, and that has made a huge difference. As far as the diversity, having more Black Deaf teachers there, also there's a male Black

Deaf teacher. So that is kind of one, I dunno, if this answers it, but kind of looking to hire the COIO, is it CEIO? Making those kinds of changes as far as looking to really address and recruit and retain the diversity of the workforce. So I would just add that in as well as my two cents.

Dr. K. Renee Horton [01:30:53]:

I'd actually just like to add, when Jeanine was talking about the changes for a university or academia, those kind of things. one of the things I do want to point out is that these teachers should be giving these students full opportunity to be who they are, to be able to walk in what it is to be able to look like that, code shifting, which is that having to be a certain way when you go to work and then you're another way when you have to go home. That is a very draining process. And I really wish that when we're talking about academia and being in those places that more people were just accepting of who people are and what they bring to the table, and they would allow these students early on to be able to show what their level of what they could actually produce, right? The level that they could actually function at. I just wanted to add that in there for the teachers that are out there just support the students where they are and then to help them to get to where they need to be by supporting the person that they really are.

When you go to— you're the only Black, you're representing your whole Black community all of a sudden. And what people think, what they've learned on television or whatever they've learned videos and things like that immediately. They want to project all of that on you as a Black person or as a Latino person. Or even as an Asian person. And so you want these teachers to be a little bit more open-minded and even their colleagues and their other peers to be a little bit more open-minded that each one of us are individuals and that we all represent the culture very differently.

Dominic Harrison [01:32:41]:

Yes, this is Dominic speaking, just kind of in the same boat as Kristie and Charity. You know, I think it's really top down and bottom up, both, to try to meet in the middle as far as addressing some of these issues from an organizational perspective, because we do need Black people at the top of the organization to really shape.

And Charity mentioned the National Science Foundation. I mean, that's a huge place that has extraordinary influence on the field. And then we can also look at it from the bottom up, like expanding the number of BIPOC

Deaf people who are in various domains of the STEM field and increasing that. And then hopefully meeting in the middle somewhere at the college level and having Deaf BIPOC people be interested in that field and developing that interest for the future generation and then kind of cultivating that pipeline and I think that's possible with all of us working together.

Of course it's a huge project, but I think that there's different ways that it can be impacted, like I mentioned, the top-down and bottom-up, and this can be addressed through different domains concurrently and kind of in a coordinated way. And, I do see more and more Deaf scientists out there, which is great, but we don't want to forget about Black Deaf scientists, indigenous Deaf scientists.

And so that's why again, I think we've all mentioned mentorship being really important and having like open spaces for everyone to have a role model and to be able to see themselves and see their future. I mean, like it's really almost 2022, so it's time we, I know we expect it to happen quickly, but I think it's a conversation that we can start and kind of develop this type of education for the future.

And really, it could be very powerful, as far as if you really think about each child's experience and looking at positively impacting that, like Kristie was talking about the diversity of the workforce within this school. And, you know, looking at recognizing the importance of that, looking also at curriculum and materials that have been developed, and from kind of a social justice lens as someone who teaches social studies and history, often I'm working with materials that were written by white people.

So I have to make sure that I consciously bring in perspectives from Black and indigenous historians and really provide that. And I think that comparable things can be done in the STEM fields as well. And there's Maya, there's Inca, Aztec, there's different types of mathematics and technologies that were developed that we can still talk about today. I mean, even in the Egyptian civilization, as far as engineering and science and geometry, there is a lot, so much focus on what white people have done, but there is a need to really acknowledge and shift the understanding to include BIPOC views and contributions in these fields.

Djenne-amal Morris [01:36:29]:

Beautiful, Dominic. Debo, I'm gonna let you wave your magic wand. What would you like to see in the STEM field?

Adebowale Ogunjirin [01:36:43]:

Okay, here comes the magic wand. So for me, because there are so few BIPOC people in the STEM fields, we are spread rather thin. We don't have the opportunity to meet one another and kind of be enlivened by that, we're working in isolation frequently. So if I were to get ahold of that magic wand, what I would do is set up an annual science convention or conference for Deaf BIPOC people in the sciences, and really just get everyone together, exchange ideas, and hopefully what will come out of that is the inspiration and staying in contact with one another.

So I think just even something simple like that, maybe magic is required for that.

Charity Jackson [01:37:51]:

I planned to say something like that, too. I would love to see a conference and see schools and people get together, and see what we're doing. And hopefully that would kind of expand opportunities and access for everyone.

I also am in communication with other Chief Diversity Officers and kind of coordinating to see, maybe 2022 is a time for us to really have a sea change. And I have really enjoyed being able to have this contribution and contribute to this conversation. And certainly you can reach out to us again for any other conversation. And it's really great to have an opportunity to be vulnerable and share this. I think, our stories are really important to share, and for us to be together as a community of one.

Djenne-amal Morris [01:39:06]:

Yes.

Dr. K. Renee Horton [01:39:06]:

One of the things I actually do is work. I sit on the board for Louisiana Lighthouse, which is a self-advocacy— Deaf and blind advocacy group. And so for me, I try to make sure that when I am at the table, regardless of what table it is that we have the proper type of representation, one, but two that these things are actually being thought about when it comes to racism or you know how to make those changes. I'm not afraid to ask the questions, and sometimes it gives me a lot of anxiety there, the questions like, how come I'm the only Black person here? And to make other people

start thinking about it, right? Like, I think people should be thinking if the situation like they been a part of something that created the situation, then that makes one Black people or people of color not want to be there, right?

So sometimes it's not just about them, but it could be that that situation is so that people of color aren't applying or don't want to be there, and that's a reason they don't want to be there, right? I start asking people that question. I always tell people I'm not after NSF money. So when it comes to academia, I'm willing to ask those questions because I'm not going after anybody's money, and whoever I make upset because I just ask the question, they can be upset, right?

And so I use my platform as much as possible to be able to make that impact so that we can have that stride. My little grandson is biracial and I want him to be able to walk into whatever room he wants to walk in and function as a Black man because that's what he is. And I want him to be able to have those things. My little nephew is profoundly deaf. And for him, I want him to be able to walk into a room and for people to be able to respect his intelligence, even though he may not be able to voice the words out of his mouth, for them to be able to hear clearly. And I want to be able

to help him walk and be able to understand that he has rights and that other people have to respect his rights. And so for me, because I have them so close to me, they're just like my little birdies under my wing. They're my nest , and their personal birds in my nest. But I want to be able to see them soar as eagles. Like I don't want them walking on the ground as a chicken. And so because of that, it pushes me each day to be able to make an impact or be able to call people on their stuff so that they can have that space in the world at some time.

Dominic Harrison [01:41:40]:

Just to add onto that. I think maybe we could start paying attention to all these conferences and try to avoid setting up a separate safe space for the BIPOC or LGBTQ class and kind of as a way for people to meet their diversity needs and check off that box, because this is really about diversity and equity, period, for everybody.

And I think these workshops and sharing of ideas is great, but I think sometimes we end up getting kind of partitioned or put to the side or segregated and so I think that's one attitude that we have to address is, and I'm not just talking about the STEM fields, if we talk about school-

related conventions and other kind of issues in higher education in general, there is that kind of like, okay, we're gonna make this diverse and check off this box and put it to the side.

Djenne-amal Morris [01:42:53]:

For the sake of time, I know that there's so much more we want to share. And so my first magic wand would be to have us be invited back again, to really unpack some of the things, our experiences, and to share some more ideas, especially around how we're gonna hit the policymaking. My magic wand honestly, would be in infusion.

I believe that the more exposure, experience and engagement that all of our communities, the BIPOC community, LGBTQ community, indigenous communities, the white community, the more we have with one another, hearing, Deaf, deafblind families, the more we can engage with one another and interact, it starts to peel back the layers of fear, of bias.

And once you open it up, there's so much that we can learn from each other. And I really believe that it's going to take the intersection of all of us. Race, ethnicity, it's not just the responsibility of the BIPOC community and

parents and teachers to educate our children. It is the responsibility of everyone to educate children of color.

So my magic wand would be the validation of the need to raise up the younger generation and expose them to the STEM population, to teach them and show them the need for them going into the field. And again, having the white community that holds more of the power of funding and resources to really see, not to validate us as a community, but to validate the need for our children to have more opportunity and more resource.

And my other magic wand is to get this group in front of the world because wow, I am so impressed. I thought I couldn't be any more proud to be a Black woman to be a Black mother of a Deaf son, to be a Black educator. I have left this even more impacted and changed than I could really imagine. So to be continued. Thank you each for sharing your time and your experiences with us today. Thank you.

Audio Description [01:45:43]:

Thank you for watching our roundtable discussion titled, “Structural and Systemic Racism in STEM.”

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