

BRG – TERC – STEM Roundtable Discussion Part 3 – Transcript

Narrator:

Welcome to our accessible video podcast, *Advancing Racial Equity in the Deaf STEM Community*. Part 3: *The Power of Mentorship* is brought to you by Bridge Multimedia, TERC, and the National Science Foundation. In this part, Djenne-amal Morris, the President of the Board of Directors of Hands and Voices explores the importance of mentorship with Deaf BIPOC STEM professionals, including: Dominic Harrison, K. Renee Horton, Charity Jackson, Adebowale Ogunjirin, Kristie Medeiros, and Jeanine Pollard. So, let's begin Part 3: *The Power of Mentorship*, with Djenne-amal Morris.

Djenne-amal Morris:

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, is 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 with 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:

This is Kristie speaking. So Charity just reminded me of something, the experience of being alone. So I went to American International College, which is 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 this classroom And... it was a pathology, 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:

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:

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

Jeanine Pollard:

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 really achieve that goal of equity in STEM.

Dr. K. Renee Horton:

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:

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 can not 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:

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:

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.

Narrator:

Thank you for joining us for *The Power of Mentorship*, Part 3 of our video podcast series: *Advancing Racial Equity in the Deaf STEM Community*. Continuing parts include: Part 4: BIPOC in the STEM Landscape: Where are We?; and Part 5: *Creating a Positive Cycle of Representation*. Also, in this series: Part 1: *Introductions & Aspirations*; and Part 2: *Challenges*:

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Credits:

Participants: Djene-amal Morris, Moderator and Speaker.

Guest Speakers: Dominic Harrison; K. Renee Horton; Charity Jackson; Adebowale Ogunjirin; Kristie Medeiros; and Jeanine Pollard.

Project Team: Judy Vesel, Principal Investigator; Tara Robillard, Lead Researcher; Matt Kaplowitz, Production Executive; Manny Minaya, Senior Producer; Ruth Acevedo, Podcast Series Production Coordinator.

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