| RESEARCH ARTICLE

What to Wear? Black and Brown Interpreters' Perspective on Professional Attire and Appearance

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| ABSTRACT

This study explores how Black and Brown ASL-English interpreters navigate their presentation of professionalism and how they handle hyper-criticism with respect to attire. This qualitative case study of 10 participants was designed to collect the lived experiences of Black and Brown interpreters, specifically focusing on how they dress for interpreting assignments. Identifying the similarities and differences of perspectives on this topic, the researcher conducted two focus group discussions to uncover the unique experiences of Black and Brown interpreters in the interpreting community and shed light on a topic which has not received much attention outside private circles of Black and Brown communities. Coding of themes occurred through inductive and deductive design.

1. Introduction

A hot topic of conversation among ASL-English interpreters is what constitutes professional attire. "Appropriate" attire is important for one's occupation. The same is true for the interpreting field. However, our work as interpreters involves working in a variety of places (from college classrooms to construction sites) widely, and the expectations of how we dress in each of these settings are different. Consequently, the process of selecting appropriate attire can be daunting.

Because of the explicit and implicit expectations that are established by many white women who dominate our field, an interpreter of color's decision about what to wear can be fraught with no-win choices/non-choices. For example, wearing contrasting clothes is explicit, however, but attire too flashy is subjective and implicitly clear. In this paper, I will delve deeper into the unique narratives of Black interpreters and Black professionals' lived experiences in the ASL -English interpreting field to learn more about how these choices about what to wear are navigated. For example, interpreters often share stories about the expectation that they wear all black. However, this assumes that the interpreter is white or of a light enough skin tone that black would be considered contrasting.

Now I begin discussing stereotypes and how the negative depiction of Black and Brown people in the media, in addition to our lived experiences, have affected our choice of attire. Media and film aren't solely responsible for this age-old racial tension but have influenced the attitudes, perceptions, and perpetuation of many who view themselves as superior to minority groups. The attitude of superiority toward Black interpreters also shows up explicitly and implicitly in interpreting education classrooms as well as professional working environments. Second, this literature review also explores the experiences of Black students, and interpreters in predominantly white institutions (PWI), then finally, how appearance/clothing can be used to weaponize minority groups that do not present in the white woman/man mold.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Stereotypes and Attitudes in the Media

Film and television have contributed to negative attitudes toward African Americans tremendously. The adverse portrayals on the big and small screens have long-lasting effects that still proliferate at alarming rates in modern society. With respect to attire Gurung (2020) shares that "media representation teaches us to associate certain characteristics with specific types of clothing." As early as 1903, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Negro inferiority appeared on film. Fun was poked at the American Negro by presenting him as either a nitwit or a childlike "lackey" (Bogle, 2016, p. 19). Pilgrim, (2012) suggests that "the coon caricature is one of the most insulting of all anti-black caricatures" (Pilgrim, 2012, p.1). White people saw the "coon" as defiant, referring to people they enslaved. Free Blacks and the enslaved who were docile and obedient were often labeled "Uncle Tom, or "Sambo."

These stereotypical characters were prevalent throughout American film and T.V, and their effects on American culture remain powerful today. In recent years, Strunk (2018) conducted a study where they interviewed Black students on their racialized experiences at a southern predominately white institution (PWI). One student described "being portrayed as a stereotypical "angry black [person]" for questioning why he was treated differently than another student," Another participant in the same study described being accepted by others via acting like "the nice Black people that smile all the time" (like the Uncle Tom archetype) but treated more poorly when "challenging" White colleagues and university personnel. (Strunk, 2018, p.9) (like the term "coon" described above).

Obviously, television and film are not the root cause of racism or discrimination in the U.S., but these media platforms were the primary drivers of culture for most of the last half of the 20th century. Until the spread of the internet, film and TV were the primary way that Americans consumed information about the world. And given the fact that most Americans lived (and still live) in segregated communities, these were the media through which they "learned" about people who didn't look like them. The media is a huge part of what individuals see, hear, and read daily, thereby shaping what people believe to be true, regardless of if it is or not. In the 1930s, educational institutions and society at large in the US were desegrated. It was illegal for Blacks and whites to co-habitat, marry, go to school, or even share the same water fountain. Katz and Braly (1933) A study was conducted where they surveyed 100 students from Princeton University about prevailing stereotypes of racial and ethnic groups. They found that these white students consistently described [Black people] as "superstitious,' 'happy-go-lucky,' and 'lazy. ".

Almost 20 years later, Gilbert (1951) repeated this study and shared that "the negative stereotyping of blacks persisted." This attitude of Blacks being lazy, although the white enslavers were the epitome of laziness, permeated the U.S. cultural landscape even until the present. Against this backdrop, more research has shown that assumptions are made if a person is trustworthy or lazy "based solely on how they're dressed" (Rosbach, 2020, p.1).

In the early 1990s, the National Opinion Research Center conducted a study finding many of the traditional racist views persisted. The majority of white, Hispanic, and those who don't identify as Black displayed negative attitudes toward Blacks. For example, "78 percent said that blacks were more likely than whites to 'prefer to live off welfare' and 'less likely to prefer to be self-supporting.' Further, 62 percent said blacks were more likely to be lazy; 56 percent said blacks were violence-prone; and 53 percent said that blacks were less intelligent than whites" (Duke, 1991, January 14-20). "Pictures of poor blacks are abundant when poverty coverage is most negative, while pictures of non-blacks dominate the more sympathetic coverage." (Gilens,1999). The media's perspective of information taints the receivers' perceptions.

The racial divide and discriminatory attitudes toward African Americans have negative, long-lasting effects. The U.S. has made efforts to improve the treatment of African Americans through Civil Rights legislation, but the country has yet to be able to close the racial divide fully. In 2016, Pew Research Center conducted a survey centered around this divide between Blacks and whites and the treatment of Blacks in the U.S. with 3,769 adult participants, including 1,799 whites, 1,004 blacks, and 654 Hispanics. One finding was that an- "overwhelming majority of blacks (88%) say the country needs to continue making changes for blacks to have equal rights with whites, but 43% are skeptical that such changes will ever occur" (Pew Research Center, 2016, p. 1). Additionally, a "much lower share of whites (53%) says the country still has work to do for blacks to achieve equal rights with whites, and only 11% express doubt that these changes will come" (Pew Research Center, 2016, p. 1).

2.2 Professional Attire

Dress codes or uniforms allow people to identify and set apart various employees or positions. Dress codes "serve two functions to provide employees with guidelines about what is appropriate to wear for work, and to provide a common in-group identity that separates them from other professions" (Furnham, 2014, p.1). In a study, Elias (2018), a self-identified Black woman lawyer, was interviewed and expressed that "you learn quickly that your body is hyper-visible." When you are the only minority in the room, some non-minorities will criticize "the easiest thing they can find- how you're dressed, and feedback is often coded as "unprofessional, or excessive" (Elias, 2018, p.1.)

Another Black female lawyer participant expressed that she was mistaken for a Spanish interpreter in court on more than one occasion. "I looked like an interpreter rather than a lawyer." (Elias, 2018, p.1). Gurung (2021) completed a survey study: "Are African American male athletes viewed differently when showing competence, dressed formally, and dressed in swagger?" Clothing included a champion ship hoodie, sweatpants and sweatshirt, and more formal button down shorts and slacks. The results of this study showed that "clothing worn by African American models significantly influenced participants' perceptions of the models. Participants rated models wearing formal clothing significantly higher than models wearing swagger clothing on several traits." Formally dressed black men were rated higher, but (Gurung, 2021, p.7) expresses that "dressing well might help an individual avoid negative impacts of stereotypes in a single instance, it is certainly not likely to eliminate stereotypes or prejudices more broadly" Moreover, Gurung (2021) showed that the formal attire of Black men could attenuate prejudice but not extinguish it.

2.3 Black Interpreters and Interpreter Education

The educational system in predominantly white institutions (PWI) is rooted in a hegemonic framework. Hegemony is enacted through a set of vocabulary, language, and ideas in which "both rulers and ruled derive psychological and material rewards during confirming and reconfirming their inequality" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 253). This framework also contributes to how educators disseminate knowledge and what information they teach. More specifically, in predominately white institution spaces, Black and Brown interpreters are aware of these biases when entering non-Black and Brown spaces and must consider them when dressing appropriately for an assignment to avoid the labels and stigmas associated with being Black. Many Blacks are first exposed to these biases about professional attire in interpreter education programs. Inevitably, these attitudes impact Black students in interpreter education programs. Williams (2016) declared, "while most white students have not had to address issues of race within their educational setting, this is not the case for many Black students." Furthermore, interpreting education students are often predominately white women. The lack of diversity in these classes harms the Black students that attend these programs. (Williams, 2016, p.95-98) says, "One of the major challenges experienced by Black students in the IEP classroom is the isolation and stress associated with 'being the only one' in this setting". She continues, "this sometimes exposes these students to a hostile environment in which white students and teachers covertly or overtly engage in acts of racism that go unaddressed within the classroom" Negative attitudes toward Black students in interpreting classes can leave detrimental effects.

Obasi's (2013) study in the UK on the topic of race and representation in sign language interpreting education provided rich qualitative data. Through questionnaires, telephone interviews, and in depth interviews, the researcher set out to explore Black interpreters' experiences in their interpreting education programs. The researcher identified themes: visibility, stereotyping, invisibility, and lack of representation. (Obasi, 2013, p.61) mentions, "participants could recount a time where they were subjected to negative racial stereotypes (i.e., assumptions that they were less qualified than white colleagues)" White interpreters may project a similar superior mindset toward Black colleagues. In a different study, Oyedele (2015) research question was "whether African American/Black interpreters perceive cultural competence to be lacking in the field." This mixed method approach collected powerful data. For example, (Oyedele, 2015, p.86) shared thoughts from one participant in the study, who felt "overt racism is still a significant factor in the lives of African American/Black interpreters and White interpreters maintain these systems of oppression in both subtle and obvious ways" Fighting for equality in the classroom, the lack of networks and the use of derogatory words against Blacks in their presence were some of the findings Oyedele came across in their study. One participant in the study felt overall that interpreting education programs lack cultural competency, which fosters more separation. In short, "being confronted with systems of oppression may help to explain why the numbers of African American/Black interpreters in the field are so low" (Oyedele, 2015, p.67).

Racism also influences the curriculum within interpreting education programs. "White students and teachers covertly or overtly engage in acts of racism that go unaddressed within the classroom." (Williams, 2016, p.98). Curriculum rarely includes discussions on Black Deaf people or Black interpreters, and oftentimes, these groups are omitted altogether. Often time, education programs position is that "culture and ethnicity should not be a factor in developing classroom curriculum" (Williams, 2016, p.85).

Representation should be considered when preparing students. With no examples of classmates, professors, or curriculum featuring people with similar cultural backgrounds, Black students in academia can feel feelings of "isolation and hypervisibility" (Ford, 2021, p.46)

Practicing a diversity, equity and inclusion framework can help address the isolation of black students in PWI environments. "The lack of representation of Blacks as practitioners and faculty members on these websites send a clear message that this is not a field in which Blacks have a valued presence" (Williams, 2016, p.115)

Jones (1986) contends, "without centering the importance of cultural diversity within the interpreting profession, Black interpreters are not discussed, researched, or addressed in the research landscape" (Jones,1986, p. 58). Bruce, a participant in a published 1998 proceeding Conference of Interpreters (CIT), shared her experience as the only African American in her Interpreter Preparation Program (IPP) and provided suggestions for improvement based on her lived experiences as a student matriculating through the

program. While Bruce recognized that "IPPs are not always equipped to address the needs of African American students" and shared that to "create a welcoming environment for African American students, faculty, and administrators, IPP's must demonstrate cultural humility and cultural flexibility" (p. 59).

To survive as a minority in an institution that is predominantly white, many Black students aim for conformity to achieve success. Jenkins (2009) states that "African Americans learn that to not conform is to run the risk of being disenfranchised from the rights and privileges that members of majority culture can easily take for granted (e.g., access to education, employment, health care, housing)" (Jenkins, 2009, p. 50). To conform to these systems, Black students have adjusted their speech styles, their language use, their clothing, their hair, and signing style. Essentially code-switching must be applied to gain success in those predominately white spaces.

2.4 Professional Environment and Interpreters

Exploring how Black interpreters navigate stereotypes as professionals in the field is crucial to understanding and minimizing potential harm. Ford (2021) conducted a study where five African American interpreters of different ages were interviewed and shared their lived experiences. From that study, seven emerging themes were identified (the "other", race as a liability, race as an asset, social group identities, the NAOBI experience, African American interpreters, African American Deaf community). I will only discuss two of the themes. All five of the participants in the study could recall experiences where they were faced with racism as an adult. When leaving the comfort of a safe space and working in a professional environment, "they immediately became subject to scrutiny and judgment" (Ford, 2021, p.78). Ford frames the theme of "*the other*" as implications that point towards the continued socio-historical implications of race in America." (Ford, 2021, p.82). Delgado and Stefancic (2017) Critical race theory explains "other" as "a boundary between privilege and its opposite." Relative to professional black interpreters, there is a common sentiment shared by the participants in the study where each felt they were made to feel that "their race was less than ideal while on an interpreting assignment." (Ford, 2021, p.83). Black interpreters are only approximately five percent of the interpreting field and are consequently often teamed with white colleagues who fortify the concept of being superior and more skilled than a black team Ford (2021). Exploring deeper, participants in the study discussed "race as a liability" with experiences where they felt they were penalized because of their race Ford (2021).

Exploring deeper, the participants in Ford's study identified representation in interpreter education as a huge factor. There are so few Black interpreters in the field that the burden upon the individual becomes heavy to represent the entire race, even when we are the only ones in the room, so as not to perpetuate negative stereotypes. Many of the participants in Ford's study reported the constant burden to "represent not just themselves but their entire race." (Ford 2021, p.83). One participant in Ford (2021) mentioned the lack of representation on television or access to appropriate hair products in stores was a constant reminder that the society she lives in is "designed to be less accommodating towards those of African descent" (Ford, 2021, p.81). Being the only Black interpreter in the room can create additional stress and hypervigilance. Ford (2021) participants shared that not performing or looking their best in an interpreting assignment "would compromise your standing and reputation in the community" (Ford, 2021, p.95).

For that reason, many Black interpreters must consider their appearance when showing up for an assignment. One Black interpreter in the study explained that when they show up for an assignment, "you're kind of sized up." (Ford, 2021, p. 84). Moreover, the Black interpreter expressed the importance of "looking the part" and, if not, they are " pre-judged". One Black interpreter in Ford's study says rejection and negative feedback on" physical appearance due to her racial identity were emotionally challenging." (Ford, 2021, p.95).

Many interpreters are pressured to conform to white standards of professionalism and appearance. It wasn't unheard of in the Video Relay Interpreting community (VRI) to have a "white client tell an African American interpreter that their lips were too big." One interpreter in the study was advised that she should "consider the repercussions to my career if I retained the natural hairstyles" (Ford, 2021, p.35).

The experiences of Black interpreters and other Black professionals as it relates to appearance and professional presentation are unique in comparison to white interpreters. Black interpreters navigate the field of interpreting much differently than our white colleagues. Navigating a space where interpreters of color are the minority and face many obstacles and barriers can be challenging. Clothing, cultural garments, and overall appearance can be weaponized against Black professionals if he/ she/ they stray too far away from the white woman archetype.

Relevant to signed language interpreters, Quigley (1965) expressed that active interpreters should develop an "interpreting uniform" as part of their wardrobe (p. 12). As early as 1965, training material for interpreters included this notion that interpreters should wear clothes that contrast their skin tone; that year, Quigley (1965) wrote that "If the skin is light, the clothing should be dark; if the skin is dark, the clothing should not blend" (p.12). Years later, Humphrey (2007) also suggested that it is critical to "wear contrasting colors to the interpreter's skin tone to prevent eye strain during interpreting assignments" (p. 64). The Registry of

Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) reported in 2019 that the organization has a total of 9,315 members (85%) who self-identify as European American/white and that African American/Black interpreters make up only 5.4% of their membership with 592 self-identifying this way. In Ford's (2021) dissertation, one female Black interpreter suggested "that if a Black interpreter does not 'look the part', they are pre-judged and not accorded the same latitude that a white interpreter may be granted" (Ford, 2021, p. 99). Black interpreters are often scrutinized about their attire. These sentiments, as shared by this Black interpreter from Ford (2021), never seem to make it to the mainstream discussion about professionalism, where white interpreters, educators, and researchers dominate conversations and overlook experiences dissimilar to their own. Jones (1986) asserts that the signed language interpreting profession is "…overwhelmingly White" (Jones, 1986, p. 61)." Gurung (2021) shares that "there are significant negative consequences to racism-related to clothing." Gurung means how clothing can be used as a tool to stereotype or discriminate an individual. Interpreters of color can find it difficult to blend in among white peers. One participant in the study "holds herself to a higher standard [when it comes to professionalism] because she does not conform to the interpreter archetype (i.e., White female) held by some segments of American society" (Ford, 2021, p. 99).

3. Methodology

Ten self-identified Black and Brown participants aged 25-51+ participated in this study. Eight out of ten interpreters held RID or BEI certification, and two were non-certified. Eight of the participants attended an interpreting education program. They averaged working a minimum of 30 hours weekly as professional interpreters in various areas of the country.

Participants	Age	Sex	Race	Experience
Blue Serenity	41-50	Female	African American	3- 5 years
Cleopatra	35-40	Female	African American	11-15 years
Cookie M.	51+	Female	African American	21+ years
Elle Guillaume	N/A	Female	African American	21+ years
Lover of Ice Cream	51+	Female	African American	21+ years
Pereira Pal	51 +	Male	African American	21+ years
Robyn	41-50	Female	African American	11-15 years
Santi	51+	Male	African American	21+
Selena	35-40	Female	Hispanic/ Latin	11-15 years
T. Meeks	25-29	Male	African American	6-10 years

4. Results and Discussion

From the two focus group discussions, six themes emerged. The first theme encompassed "How I became an interpreter" and had subthemes of learning to dress for an assignment and interpreting education program experiences. The second theme was wearing black to an assignment. The third theme focused on double standards between Black and white interpreters and emphasized the sub-theme of "being better than good". The fourth theme included what professional attire and appearance look like. The fifth theme acknowledged a shift happening in the interpreting field with the idea of being a "rule follower or rebel" as being important. Lastly, the final theme revolved around safe spaces.

4.1 How I became an interpreter: Introduction to the field.

The participants in this study discussed their individual introductions to American Sign Language (ASL) and their journeys to interpreting by sharing the spark that initiated their interest in joining the field. Two participants were children of Deaf adults (Codas). One participant shared,

"I'm a Coda, and I had a favorite uncle on my dad's side; he was also Deaf, and he would always tell me that you're going to be an interpreter" (Focus group #1).

Being exposed to ASL-English interpreting and Deaf culture at an early age was shared by another participant.

"The person on stage interpreting were my grandparents. So, I started seeing interpreting done religiously from a very early age" (Focus group #2).

One of the participants became an ASL-English interpreter because of exposure to interpreting at church. A participant in focus group #2 shared their memory.

"I was a member of a church in Charlotte, and they had an interpreter. I was more fascinated with the interpreter [than the service]. I joined my ITP that fall" (Focus Group # 2).

A few of the participants shared instances of working with or befriending Deaf individuals and initially struggling to communicate. The limited access to communication was the catalyst that motivated them to begin taking ASL classes and later becoming interpreters. Many participants described personal relationships with Deaf community members. The next section delves into the subtheme of how the participants in the focus groups learned to dress for an assignment. This research also examines how their sense of style and professional appearance developed and the influences that played a role in the decision-making process. Participants share where they've learned the careful selection of appropriate clothes to interpret.

4.2 How did you learn to dress for an assignment?

This section discusses how the Black and Brown interpreters learned how to dress for an interpreting assignment. Some participants in this study discussed the lessons learned from home and childhood. These lessons of family values stuck with participants over time. Values that started from a young age continued as adults. Examples of this were shared in the focus group.

"You learned what to wear and what was appropriate- you could not wear your play clothes to church, and you couldn't wear school clothes to church. Dressing presentable and appropriately was really emphasized in our family" (Focus group #2).

The same participant in focus group #2 explained their father having pride in their appearance despite not having a white-collar job.

"My father wore a suit every day; he didn't have a suit kind of job." (Focus Group #2).

To add, another focus group member recalled similar experiences growing up where clothing and presentation were held to a high standard, whether at home or out in public spaces.

"I grew up in the same type of environment as far as dressing for whatever we were doing. When I reached the interpreting aspect of my life- I was already the type of person that liked to dress up anyway." (Focus Group #2).

This sentiment of family and community upholding high standards of appropriate and presentable appearance was echoed by another participant. The participant explains how habits learned as children have influenced their decisions as adults and working professionals. Reflecting on their childhood experiences, the participant felt dressing nicely was a part of their culture.

"It was just ingrained, and again in school, it was upheld as well. You know, tuck in your shirt! I grew up in a black neighborhood, went to schools and had black teachers, so everybody played a part." (Focus group # 2).

Some participants mentioned a sense of community where elders and other members of the community held the younger generation accountable when they were seen not meeting those standards.

"For us girls, we were around women who would tell you. You know, my grandmother, my aunties, they would tell you. Hey, girl, what's wrong with your hair?! Everybody had permission, even the neighbor." (Focus Group #2).

Moreover, one participant recalls when attending a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) where some students were required to dress up in professional attire as a requirement of their program and graduation.

"Students in the School of Business were required to dress up regularly [to meet requirements for graduation]" (Focus group #1 transcript, Pos. 7)." With respect to educational settings, the next section discusses Black and Brown interpreters' experiences in Interpreting education programs.

4.3 Interpreter education program

The participants in this study who attended an interpreting education program remember limited diversity in the professors and students within their program. The reality of limited people of color in the classroom has led to certain challenges in navigating education environments as a minority.

"All my professors were white, all like 100%. I remember hearing that most interpreters need to wear black, but there are some exceptions. And I wanted more information about the exception because I am the exception, and it wasn't really provided at the time, so I had to get that from other Black professionals" (Focus group #2).

A similar experience of having all white professors in their program was shared by another participant.

"I do remember my professors of the global majority [white]" (Focus Group #2).

Another participant who attended an Interpreter training program discussed experimenting with different colors to wear for interpreting with their professor. This participant received mixed messages from different white professors suggesting which colors contrasted with their skin tone.

"I've been told I should interpret in tan; I'm here to tell you, when the light hits me, it does not look right. I'm like, no.. that doesn't work for me. But they assume that all Black interpreters are the same skin tone." (Focus Group 2 transcript, Pos. 5).

The participant recalls the moment after sharing her concerns with their instructor about finding an appropriate color to wear that worked for their skin tone.

"I was kind of relieved, you know, I was like.. oh man, what if I had gotten out there and I'm still wearing black and Navy and dark green, and people are saying they can't see me." (Focus group #1).

The professor insisted their feedback to the student about color choices for attire had nothing to do with her race.

 "I just really couldn't see your hands to really understand the message. She could see some, but she said it wasn't something that made her comfortable watching." (Focus group #1).

A few participants discuss their experiences as students in interpreting education programs where they were either the only Black and Brown or one of very few.

"I went to an ITP as well. I'm not a CODA- and it was an immersive program, and I was a golden Raisin in my program." [Black-light skinned] (Focus group #1).

Similar experience from another participant in a separate focus group.

"[in] my ITP, there were very few of us that were black in the program. Most of the people that were Black in the program were in the ASL version. When it got to the interpreting side... I was the only one." (Focus Group #2). Ford (2021) describes "other" as "the lived experience of being perceived as an outsider, which left an indelible imprint on their psyches." (Ford, 2021, p.181).

Again, another participant recalls their experience in their interpreting education program where they, too, were in a small minority group.

"I remember it being.. I would say predominantly Caucasian; but with a few of us, interpreters of color mixed in. I wasn't the only one." (Focus Group #2).

A participant shares their experience as the only Black student in their class. The participant goes on to share that professors in the program felt that they would never succeed in becoming an interpreter. The lack of support and attempts to oust them from the program was brought up by the participant.

"They [professors] felt like I would never achieve. They tried to kick me out several times. I would tell myself, just stay in there; you can do this. I was called to the principal's office so many times even though I was a straight-A student, which is ironic, and yet they say I will never be an interpreter." (Focus group #1).

The participants in both focus groups shared a common disappointment with the lack of diversity and support in the student body and instructors within the interpreting education training programs. Williams (2016) supports this stance. "One of the major

challenges experienced by Black students in the IEP classroom is the isolation and stress associated with "being the only one" in this setting." (p. 95).

4.4. Wearing Black

This section, "wearing black," explores the personal narratives of Black and Brown participants in the study wearing black to professional assignments. Providing personal lived experiences navigating professional spaces wearing the color black as a Black and Brown interpreter provides a unique perspective into this discussion. Participants below share their thoughts on the expectation of wearing contrasting colors while showing up in spaces Black and Brown.

There seems to be an unspoken rule that "Black and Brown" interpreters should not wear Black. Some believe it is not contrasting enough to be visible. Some Black and Brown interpreters disagree. One participant shares how the shades of Black and Brown have a broad spectrum, ranging from very light-skinned to very rich darker hues. A participant felt black clothing could work for some Black and Brown interpreters. The same participant recalls a challenging colleague about clothing colors.

"When it came to the shade of clothing is when I started knocking heads with my colleagues." (Focus group #2).

For example, *"the no- melanin AKA Caucasian group, you know they'll tell you not to wear black, and they will wear black, brown, blue, navy blue. As for me- they tell me I can't do that [wear black]. I replied I can. It's still a contrast if I wear it. I'm not black in that aspect."* (Focus group #2)

In a separate instance, one Black participant in the study shares the scolding they received when wearing black.

"I was paired with a white interpreter, and I knew she was going to show up in all black, so I wanted to match her. So, I showed up in all black. My supervisor was not there, but apparently, it was streamed [online]. She called me and said, please tell me you did not wear black on stage, and I was like I did. That's when she reinforced that black people are not supposed to wear black. That's been an internal conflict for me, so I choose gray." (Focus group #2).

Another memory of a participant in the study was interpreting on a cruise for white Deaf consumers. The interpreters were asked to pack formal wear for an evening event being held on the ship.

"I brought a lot of varying clothes but black for evening wear, and they said to me in the middle of the assignment- you can no longer wear that; you can't wear that black anymore. We got complaints. I thought maybe the complainants were stuck in this paradigm." (Focus group #2).

The participant describes the paradigm as the traditional model of contrasting colors on skin tone. In an early publication, "Interpreting for Deaf people", Quigley (1965) discusses the need for interpreters to wear contrasting colors. "Skin color and clothing should give contrasting effect. If the skin is light, the clothing should be dark; if the skin is dark, the clothing should not blend." (p.22)

Participants went on to share their experience getting off the cruise ship in search of a replacement outfit during the assignment.

"I get off [the cruise ship]. I'm running around every place you stop trying to shop and buy something, and you know I couldn't find anything in my size, and so it became a problem." (Focus group #2).

To provide contrast, the same interpreter has experience coordinating interpreters for National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA) conferences, where interpreters experienced less stress and were trusted in making professional choices for attire.

"Everybody [NBDA interpreters] just kind of wore what was professional, and it was never a problem." (Focus Group 2).

"I have always internally fought with the ideology black interpreters shouldn't wear black because I've always felt that I am caramel enough that my hands show up against black." (Focus group #2)

Another participant reflects on her experiences wearing black and poses the question is Black the only color considered professional as an ASL interpreter?

"Are certain populations trained to see people of a certain color? When they don't have that certain color presented before them in whatever skin they're in, it can be an issue. They're used to seeing interpreters in black. You come in different colors; you know it throws them off." (Focus group #1).

As a light-skinned Black woman, one participant explains how they navigate this issue and the reasoning behind their decision-making.

"I just noticed that it's just easy and simple to just go with black for me, so that's kind of been my journey with it. I just felt that it probably has to do with me being light-skinned and, um, just, you know. I learned why people default to wearing black. Even being raised, I went to a white Catholic High School, you know, and just some of my experiences that kind of impacted me. I remember in high school one time, a white girl putting her arm up against mine and insisting she was darker than me. I remember how that made me feel. I mean, you know I didn't like I was embarrassed." (Focus group #1).

For this participant being Black and of lighter skin created a fork in the road where their race and skin tone had to be a constant reminder when deciding what to wear. Being lighter skinned, they felt that they must follow the model of white interpreters, wearing black.

"I have internalized my own complexion as well in America, you know, and so I became aware that, well, I'm not your darker skinned; I know my pigmentation is lighter, so I need to go on this side instead of, you know, this other side. You know, so I can't wear the soft pinks or the tans or the pastel yellow, you know, so that's how my mind processed it, so I just figured, oh okay-I, need to darker colors, when really, I do believe that I can play with colors much more." (Focus group #1).

The same participant mentioned how this system of what is professional and contrasting has been forced into the minds of interpreters. Limitations of what to wear for Black and Brown interpreters, in particular, place them in a box with not much latitude.

"I've been indoctrinated, and you know mentally into this color system of clothing, and so you know I haven't been able to be uncaged from it." (Focus group #1) Additionally, the efforts to wear darker colors for this participant were rooted in wanting to fit in.

"Wearing black was from a place of wanting to be accepted or be approved and also feeling comfortable." (Focus group #1).

This standard of wearing black was echoed in another participant who acknowledges Black being considered professional in the interpreting field.

"Originally, the color black in our field is associated with professionalism, so if you come in and any other color, you're not being professional." (Focus group #2).

This was not the feeling of all the participants in this study. A participant explains how they exercise their autonomy.

"I wear whatever I want to wear, and I don't let anyone dictate to me what looks good and what doesn't look good." (Focus group #1).

Participants also shared their experiences of not wearing black as a standard or instances where black would not be their first choice of attire. These perspectives also bring a unique lens to this topic. When dressing for an assignment, a participant expressed,

"I have always just felt like the contrast of black does not work for me. I have never worked in black. I've always worked in your soft pink, yellow, and pale colors. As I said, most of my jackets that I wear for the role of interpreting are a beautiful burnt orange which is a great contrast for me." (Focus group #1).

Wearing colors other than black is practiced by another participant. The participant shares feedback she received from her Deaf white consumer.

"When I have to watch you for a while, everything kind of just blends in. So, I tried the creams and some of the darker pinks, and you know other colors, and they worked out well." (Focus group #1).

During a conference assignment, one participant explained when the suggestion was proposed to coordinate the team of Black interpreters' shirt colors. To present a unified appearance, the team took time to survey which colors each other felt comfortable wearing and which colors would also be best for platform interpreting. That approach of reaching a consensus was felt positively by the interpreting team. The participant shares feedback from the Black Deaf community.

"We also got feedback from the community on the colors; they said, I hope y'all wearing that pink again. I mean, we just found that they loved it. The Black Deaf community loved it because they said they were tired of seeing interpreters in black. Looks like y'all sad all the time going to a funeral." (Focus group #2).

At a separate interpreter conference, another participant discusses their experiences preparing for the event and not complying to set standards of wearing Black or darker blues. There were dress requirements sent out to the interpreters for the event which the participant describes,

"I went to a conference one time, and of course, it's an area where there's there was no melanin whatsoever in this area. They sent out a blanket email that everybody must wear black, brown, Navy blue, and green for this conference. Of course, my name if you look at my name, you don't know [my race], you know, because people assume they can tell who you are by your name. I show up, and they go- can I help you? And I give my name and reply- I'm on the interpreting team, and I said I'm sorry I can't comply with your request for clothing and she looks at me she goes.. Oh my God, I'm so embarrassed! As you can see, we're so white. And I was like, yes, I've noticed." (Focus Group #2).

4.5 Double Standards

A theme that emerged from both focus groups was double standards between white and Black and Brown interpreters in the interpreting field. Participants in the focus group feel that oftentimes Black and Brown interpreters are held to a completely different standard than their white colleagues. To avoid stereotypical labels placed on Black and Brown interpreters, the participants in this study detail examples of having to be "better than good" to overcome the double standards identified.

A participant shared issues of double standards from the state of Alabama. In Alabama, the participant feels the interpreting community is segregated between white and Black and Brown interpreters related to attire and professionalism.

"Alabama is the worst, Alabama is still the worst for that. [Double standards] We have had panels dealing with this." (Focus group #2)

The participant expressed an unspoken policy of professional attire as an ASL-English interpreter.

"This is what we're going to wear [white interpreters], and you [Black and Brown] should not cross." (Focus group #2).

When sharing concerns as a Black and Brown professional in a predominantly white space, a participant feels consideration of perspectives against the status quo is not always received or welcomed.

"It's still that separation although on the surface they're saying -oh no, we get along everybody, we're so open to diversity here, but deep down inside, it's not the case. So, when these things are brought to light, you get a lot of eye rolls; you get a lot of people who don't want to talk to you anymore." (Focus Group #2).

More participants chimed in on the topic of double standards, one participant stated.

"There's always going to be that subpar perception of us right if we can really do the work. So, we have to put in that effort [dressing appropriately] in the dressing before they give us a chance." (Focus group #1).

Subpar perceptions were expressed in another experience shared with the focus group. This perception of not being as skilled as their white counterparts was felt by another participant.

"It happened over and over where people said you're not credentialed enough, or you're not skilled enough. I always ask, oh, you've worked with me before? Have you seen my work? They would reply no, but I heard you just came out of your program." (Focus group #1).

A participant in the study recalls an interpreter workshop where a Black woman presented on being Black in the interpreting field. Professional appearance and the double standards in the field were touched on in the presentation; however, it wasn't well received by a few white colleagues who walked out of the presentation. This action of walking out in the middle of a presentation that addresses issues from different perspectives ironically debunks the diversity, equity and inclusion framework they and many other organizations have implemented since the uprising of George Floyd and Black Lives Matter.

"We had a young lady present on being black in the interpreting field. There were so many people who got up and left the room because they could not take it. Because she was talking about being who we are [Black interpreters], dressing the way we do, our hair and everything. That does not make who we are as an interpreter; you know it's just clothes, it's just hair." (Focus group #2).

The focus group participant explained that the presenter pointed out clear examples of instances where one rule is applied to one group and not the other and acknowledged professional appearance as an issue.

"it's okay for them [white interpreters] to have mohawks and purple hair and all this other stuff, but when we [Black and Brown] go to a traditional hairdo that we like, it's not acceptable. You know, these types of things are still being brought up." (Focus group #2).

When asked how standards are the same and how are they different in the focus group, thoughts of drastically different expectations were identified by another participant. The participant adds,

"standards are not the same at all. They're like polar opposites. We show up, and we show up correctly. Our white colleagues, not all of them but many of them, do not even show up to the game. I'm at a complete loss as to why it's never a big issue; there's never a problem." (Focus group #1).

One participant feels the interpreting community and their consumers are overly critical.

"They are way too comfortable in their hostility towards us. I've seen black interpreters do the same thing as white interpreters, but they [Black interpreters] get reprimanded for it. They're doing the same thing with a colorful bottom solid top, but it's not acceptable when it's on the Black interpreter." (Focus group #2)

In another example from a participant in the study, they attended a graduation ceremony which provided an ASL interpreter. In the audience, the participant shares that the white male interpreter onstage wasn't dressed appropriately as an interpreter for platform interpreting. Describing the interpreter's appearance,

"it's a graduation, and this boy has on jeans, he has on a striped polo shirt. I'm watching him, and I am furious." (Focus group #1)

The participant in the study feels from experience and navigating the interpreting field as a Black person, they wouldn't have been granted the same grace. Furthermore,

"if either one of us were on this panel today, we would have been shot down! We would have been shot down and crucified in a heartbeat!" (Focus group #1).

In a separate experience, one participant explains an assignment where their colleague was deeply affected by the critical feedback given by a white consumer. This resonated as a double standard within the discussion.

"They were wearing an Afro, and they're beautiful, very dark melanated nonbinary interpreters, and they wear polos usually, and they're different colors. This day they were wearing a mint green polo and khakis, looking business professional. Their team was wearing just a black sweatshirt and some leggings, and the deaf person said to the Black interpreter, you know, maybe that color is not great for you. This triggered my colleague very heavily in that you're gonna tell me this white lady wearing these sweats looking like she just came from a yoga class is professional. It's okay? But my polo is distracting?" (Focus group #1).

When equal expectations are set and enforced for all, no matter race or gender, it creates less room to assume race is a factor and root of the issue. One participant shares their experience.

"I can tell you that I know multiple stories of my own and multiple stories of me wearing the same outfit that my peer is wearing, and I will be the one that is told by my manager to go home and change." (Focus group #1).

At the workplace of one of the participants, the dress code policy is business casual. However, despite following the policy, the participant feels that non-Black and Brown interpreters have more freedom in their attire selection.

"There's an unevenness. Because many who are within my peers, I know, do not dress business casual, maybe a little even more casually than business. So, I know there's a disparity, and most of the time, who gets comments are the black and brown interpreters devoid from dressing business casual." (Focus group #1).

There is a clear disconnect of expectations related to what professionals look like in the interpreting community one participant feels.

"There's such a conflict when it comes to each side as to what a professional looks like. I think a lot of interpreters look awesome in what they're wearing, but you will hear from one side of the fence that's not professional. And I'm like, well, according to whose perspective." (Focus Group #2).

Again, participants added to the discussion their personal experiences working as a Black and Brown and facing double standards.

"I see interpreters in some of the most God-awful clothing yet criticize what we do as black interpreters. I'm asking my colleague; do you think that beachwear is professional? Or they may have on something they may wear to a cocktail party. It really doesn't fit the environment of the assignment. But it's okay for them to do it. If we do it, you know we're looked at as if we're trying to show off." (Focus group #2).

4.6 Being better than good
This chapter identifies strategies Black and Brown interpreters adopt when face working in a predominately white space. The idea of "being better than good." When Black and Brown individuals enter spaces professionally, they often are the minority. Black and Brown interpreters in this study contextualize and explain tools used to navigate these spaces to achieve success. Many of these

discoveries start at home, where family, friends, and close members of the community train the upcoming generation early on white privilege and the importance of putting your very best foot forward and remaining resilient in everything to be able to compete and succeed in this country.

One participant recalls meeting with her mentor, who provided a valuable lesson, at an event where interpreters were present, the participant and their mentor engaged in a conversation related to interpreting. One piece of advice that stood out to the participants was the advice to be better than your white colleagues. The participant's mentor shared with them a valuable message.

 "You have to dress better than most of your peers that are here. You see her? She's wearing leggings and a sweatshirt; we're not doing that. So don't do that; you represent yourself better than she's representing." (Focus group #1).

An additional piece of advice shared by the mentor was that working with white peers, the expectations are different, and you must outperform them.

"She's white, she's gonna get a pass, they're gonna bring you into the office and say you know you are dressed unprofessionally." (Focus group #1).

One of the tools used to be taken seriously as a professional and peer are to dress and carry yourself exceptionally.

"We've had white [interpreting] teams come in yoga pants and heels. They look like a hot mess. We already know this is coming in. We have to be better than-we can't just be good. We gotta be better than good." (Focus Group #2).

Another participant expressed that they, too, take extra care and consideration of the clothing worn when interpreting.

"I think on paper the standards seem the same, but in actuality, it is not, and I think just like everyone has said thus far, you know we always have to dress to the nines." (Focus group #1).

This model has been adopted by many Black and Brown interpreters to get and keep their foot in the door. Black and Brown interpreters are already aware of the biases against them. As one participant bluntly stated their vices.

"I've already got all of these vices you can't tell me my shirt is dirty. That should not be on the list of reasons why you're not hiring me. Even to my hair." (Focus Group #2)

Echoed by another participant is the effort of going above and beyond in their clothing selection to be respected as equal. As a result of history, stereotypes and biases have been placed upon Black and Brown people in general, such as lazy, dirty, unprofessional, and angry. Black and Brown interpreters found strategies to climb the ladder despite the adversities they face.

"I always know that I have to be a step up." (Focus group #1).

4.7 What does a professional ASL-English interpreter look like?
This chapter is an exploration of how professional ASL-English interpreters should dress when arriving at an assignment from a Black and Brown perspective. This chapter also discusses factors an interpreter should consider when preparing what to wear. For example, factors such as the environment, comfortability, and your own individual style. In addition, participants mention the importance of meeting traditional expectations of appearance in business and business casual settings. By the same token, having a variety of clothing in your repertoire can aid in customizing your clothing selection depending on the factors pertaining to a particular assignment. These considerations are the thoughts of the participants in the study.

Analyzing the nature of your assignments and preparation is a great tool to make sure your overall appearance matches the assignment.

"You really must match the environment and be prepared." (Focus group #1).

A medical interpreter in the study discusses the variety of interpreting assignments within the medical field that influences how they dress for work. One assignment is never the same. Practicing a blanket approach of dressing "professional" where one particular model is (i.e., Black suit and tie) used as the standard is not always a perfect match. The participant shares their experience.

"I'm a medical interpreter, and there are some days where I have to put on scrubs and other days, I have to walk around in business casual attire. Then there are days where I must put on jeans because I'm gonna be playing with a little Deaf person on the floor. So, you just have to be conscious of your environment, and you have to be comfortable." (Focus group #1).

An educational interpreter who often works with children provides some insight into their considerations.

"Professional attire is matching what the setting calls for. Maybe if you're working in an elementary school and all the children are out on the playground for field day, maybe jeans, a nice polo, or something like that I think is fitting. Jeans and polo are professional because that's what's required of the setting." (Focus group #1).

Another professional in the study touches on meeting the expectations of matching the environment and including some variety that allows for casual comfortability as well.

"For me, professional attire is always a tucked in shirt. If it's a high-profile event, then it's a suit. Always, always. If it's a casual day, if it's a Friday, you may see me in a pair of jeans but still a collared shirt looking professional or a nice sweater that contrasts my skin tone." (Focus group #1).

Responding to the same question, another participant mentioned the importance of being comfortable interpreting while still maintaining a professional appearance. Wearing clothes that allow full mobility of the interpreter, avoiding restricting and uncomfortable clothing that can affect the interpreting performance.

"For my professional attire, I want to feel comfortable, but I also want to feel I can move around so I'm not limited. I want to be able to have that wide space if I'm doing high visibility stage work versus in the classroom." (Focus group #1).

Maintaining your own individual style was mentioned by two participants in the study. Honoring the traits that make you, you were passionately expressed. One shared the importance of honoring your personal style.

"You still have to be you, so you still have your individual style." (Focus group #1

Another participant added similar thoughts.

"I also want to honor my own style, my own flair and present my best self for access." (Focus group #1).

Looking presentable requires time, effort, and consideration shared by another participant.

"Did it take effort for them to look that way? If you just woke up, walked out the door and threw something really quick, and walked to work, we all see that's not professional. I mean, your clothes are all wrinkly, your jacket has your lapel sticking up, and things like that. That's obviously unprofessional, so it's easy for us to spot what professional clothing doesn't look like." (Focus group #2).

The conversation then transitioned into what Professional appearance is not. These, too, are characteristics that the interpreters in the study identified as non-professional as it relates to dressing for an assignment. These are the personal lived experiences and opinions of the Black and Brown interpreters in the study.

An example of an instance where their team was not dressed appropriately was brought up by one of the participants. Considering the nature of the assignment, as mentioned above, can also determine what is professional or not. The participant shares an experience.

"I've done a conference, and I was wearing a full suit, and my team showed up in jeans, converse, pigtails, and a flannel that wasn't tucked in. They had a lot going on." (Focus Group #2).

A participant in the study was assigned to a mental health emergency and explained feedback shared by the Deaf client to their interpreting team about their clothing.

"The client commented on how poorly this interpreter was dressed, and I'm thinking to myself the last thing he should be worried about is how his interpreters are dressed. My team came in looking like a bum." (Focus group #1).

Footwear was another interesting point touched upon by participants in the study. Making sure the footwear is comfortable but appropriate.

"I also think about shoe wear. Sometimes people don't talk about shoe wear, and I see a lot of Crocs sometimes, and I'm like - those shoes are for the house." (Focus group #1).

Another participant shares that some sneakers are too distracting, and open-toe shoes and leggings are unprofessional to interpret.

"I love seeing great sneakers, I love sneakers. But some sneakers are a little too flashy and have too much going on." (Focus group #1).

"My white counterpart team interpreter came in with open-toe shoes and leggings." (Focus group#1)

One point made by a participant was that many people have different interpretations of what professional is and what not to wear for certain assignments that need to be explicitly detailed.

"Sometimes it has to be listed on what not to wear as a professional, like not wearing gym shoes, torn jeans, and sweatshirts, you know. I'm saying this because, unfortunately, I really believe most people don't know what a professional is. I really believe that because I see it often." (Focus group #1).

This next chapter discusses the intersectionality of generations in the field and the current "shift" happening in the interpreting field.

4.8 A generational shift in the field
There has been discussion in the focus groups about how different generations navigate the field. Experienced interpreters that have many years of experience compared to newer generations entering the field sometimes hold different perspectives in some areas. There is a clear shift in the interpreting field identified by some of the participants. The participants lay out a few examples that they have experienced that relate to the evolution of how ASL interpreters present themselves. Traditional and conservative approaches still hold an important role for many of the experienced interpreters, and breaking down old paradigms and establishing new standards that are more inclusive and sensitive to cultural and religious traditions were the sentiments of some of the younger generations and some seasoned interpreters.

One participant explains how the expectations are no longer as clear but vaguer because of the overlap of generations. This presents a challenge for some interpreters. Which approach is considered the best practice?

"I think one of the challenges in the field now is that we have an overlap of generations where the definition, you're absolutely right, rules are very vague." (Focus group #2).

Another interpretation also feels the change happening in the field now leaves some ambiguity as to what is acceptable.

"I think that it is evolving right now for the newer generation versus, you know, those from older generations. I think there's a variety." (Focus group #1).

The question that organically arose in one discussion was to define professionalism. The interpretation of this definition varies for everyone.

"I think professional is relative to the time. The earlier professional was in all black. Well, here we are in 2023, that definition is relative, and it's changing. So I imagine that with time what I even expect will change as well." (Focus Group #2).

Providing a different take on the discussion, a participant shared

"I've been doing this a long I'm not willing to change because I know what gets me in the door, especially as a black interpreter." (Focus group #2).

More Black and Brown interpreters entering the field is exciting but experienced Black and Brown interpreters remember a time when the disproportionate number of Black interpreters was starker. An interesting perspective was shared by an interpreter about having one chance to make a first impression as a Black and Brown interpreter. Overlooking the importance of making an exceptional first impression can be detrimental.

"We have high profile positions where you get one chance. One and done." (Focus group #2). The same participant used the US. Capital in Washington, DC, as an example.

"You are not going to walk in there without a full-fledged suit, male, female, nonbinary, whatever you are, that's not going to happen. I think that people need to understand that there are some expectations. Lately, you know, I've been working at conferences where newer interpreters are coming in. One had on these printed plant pants and a solid top, and I know she felt that was it. And sneakers. All of them had on sneakers, and I'm thinking, oh, I got to go and buy some sneakers, some white sneakers. This is what everybody's calling professionals now." (Focus Group #2).

From a younger generation, one interpreter agrees that traditional professional standards have an important role.

"There are things that are going to carry across transgenerational. Meaning we're going to see a person looking clean, a person looking presentable." (Focus group #2). However, some members of the younger generations set different standards for themselves in appearance. Having more autonomy in what they wear was an interesting comment made.

"I think that society is starting to change and redefine what professionalism means as we start to look at newer generations of interpreters; specifically Gen. Z coming out of interpreting training programs; professionalism is a completely different definition. You don't tell me what I can wear." (Focus group #2).

Another participant added to the discussion their thoughts on color selection on clothing while interpreting. "

When it comes to color and tone, I wear whatever I want to wear. I don't let anyone dictate to me what looks good and what doesn't look good." (Focus group #1).

4.9 Rule follower or rebel
As mentioned earlier, the current shift in the interpreting field, in many ways, challenges the status quo and traditional practices that have been highly regarded as the standard. This section discusses the positionality of Black and Brown participants' thoughts on challenging traditional standards or following them. The thoughts on this topic varied in response from the participants. Some challenge the industry norms, some want to, and others follow the rules already set before them. This section explores participants' thoughts on this theme.

"I do have those moments of wanting to rebel and wanting to buck the system and to do something a little bit out of my comfort zone, whether clothes or accessories." (Focus group #1).

Another participant explains that in most scenarios, they are rule followers; however, there are exceptions. One participant mentions owning a few pairs of African-inspired earrings that they love to wear despite negative feedback they may receive as a result.

"I'm a follower with a little bit of a rebel streak when it comes to the earrings." (Focus group #1).

Having confidence and remaining resilient was a way to challenge certain paradigms one participant.

"I've always got major compliments from anybody I have worked for, and I said OK, well this must be working. So, I have never listened to the naysayers." (Focus group #1).

Another perspective by a participant was being a rule follower but also calling out things of concern.

"I'm in the middle of being conservative and liberal with dressing. I'm gonna follow the rules, I'm gonna be over in that direction, but I am going to challenge the status quo just a little bit. I think it's for the better and for the natural evolution of this field." (Focus Group #2).

Another participant adds control over lighting and background like Video Relay Services environments; they can expand their clothing options.

"I always like to push the envelope a little bit, especially when I was working in VRS." (Focus group #1

Adding to the benefits of having control of lighting, another participant talks about having options when working virtually.

"I have tons of lights. In the instance that consumers can't see me, I can shut the curtains or adjust the lights to be visible." (Focus group #1).

Wearing a traditional smock from the early days of interpreting worked for a participant who works in VRS.

"I wore a smock, a purple one. I received many compliments. Consumers always thought it was a royal blue, but it's really purple, so you just never know how the color interprets."

One of the participants discussed being a member of a sorority and interpreting during Founders' Weekend at her alma mater, an HBCU. A conflicting issue arose with this participant when preparing what to wear. The participant was uncomfortable wearing a piece accessory that showcased her ties to this sorority. Regardless of the environment, the participant considered their role as an interpreter when preparing their clothes.

"I was interpreting an event and panicked because I chose to wear a small "Z" to represent me as a member of the sorority. The event was held at the school that I was initiated into. But even still, I was panicking about wearing the small Z on my chest to indicate this is my Founder's Day. I am a Zeta. I will represent. But still, I asked myself, is that professional?" (Focus Group #2).

Another instance where the participant felt the need to decide between the allegiance to their community versus the standards of being an interpreter happened during church service. At church, the music minister wanted to coordinate colors with the choir and

the ASL interpreters. This caused an issue for the participant. To follow the traditional rules of interpreting or rebelling and dress as a member of their cultural community was a deciding factor for the participant.

"We were asked to match the choir's color scheme, which was African. So, I said not happening. Because African attire is very much prints and loud colors, and very proud, very beautiful, very very bold, but also very inappropriate for flying hands [interpreting], so I had to connect with my team and say if you want to, do it on the bottom- but I prefer that you don't do it because for our role." (Focus group #2).

Lastly, having autonomy in how Black and Brown interpreters wear their hair. Cultural hairstyles such as braids were considered rebellious and were not welcomed in professional spaces. For this Black interpreter, it took legislation, [CROWN ACT SENATE BILL 188] to be comfortable wearing braids to work.

"You know for years I wanted braids? I was a full-time court interpreter, and I knew better. I couldn't do Braids. I couldn't do braids until we got a Supreme Court ruling. So now I can do braids, but prior to that, I wanted the Braids; there was no way I was going to do braids Monday through Friday." (Focus group #2).

Interpreters discussed lived experiences where they, as Black and Brown interpreters, have to decide on how they present themselves in professional spaces. The factors to decide are either to follow the mold that has already been established for white interpreters who hold the majority in the field or follow what speaks honestly to them as a Black and Brown interpreter.

4.10 Safe space
This section will discuss the safe spaces that Black and Brown interpreters often seek when working in the interpreting field. These safe spaces can serve as a platform to discuss sensitive issues, training, feedback, and overall encouragement. Interpreting education programs are often predominantly white institutions (PWI) and lack the diversity to meet the needs of Black and Brown interpreters upon their arrival. As a result, Black and Brown interpreters seek or develop their own safe spaces which provide support, guidance, and some instances, mentorship. Many experienced interpreters take novice interpreters under their wing, explaining the do's and don'ts as an interpreter of color. These unique spaces are not always accessible for Black and Brown interpreters who learn and work in majority white spaces.

One CODA interpreter explains how their father encouraged them and their siblings to become an interpreter. The push and love from their parents made all the difference in deciding to pursue a career in ASL interpreting.

"My dad encouraged me to go to become an interpreter, which I did not want to do, but as they would have it, I ended up being an interpreter, and apparently, I love what I do. There's five of us; four are interpreters. My two other brothers and my sister are all interpreters and their spouses." (Focus group #1).

The participants also discuss how the Black Deaf community provided affirmations and support to aspiring Black and Brown interpreters in their ability to be great interpreters. Support from Black and Brown Deaf community members and experienced interpreters with honest and encouraging feedback provide a support system and overall boost to persevere for aspiring interpreters. This interpreter explains how his safe spaces helped them,

"There were interpreters in my community who kind of guided me and said- oh, you'll be a great interpreter. I didn't believe them. They gave me their books, and I studied and trained." I didn't go to an ITP." (Focus group #1).

The interpreter also discusses the journey to become certified on a national level and how safe spaces contributed. Having a support system that provides feedback and anecdotes that are often not available in PWIs or white spaces. Having a sense of likeness and mutual connection allows for a safe space.

"The first time I failed, I got feedback from some interpreters in the community [Black interpreting], and they told me what I needed to do. I went, and I took it again, and I passed. So, there were several people in New Hampshire and a couple of people here in Massachusetts that kind of looked out for me and guided me. Not only interpreting but in my personal life as well, so I was grateful for that." (Focus group #1).

Having culturally appropriate mentors and colleagues that interpreters can reach out to is crucial. Representation matters; it allows other aspiring interpreters to dream and visualize themselves as successful interpreter. One interpreter mentioned being resourceful and asking questions to experienced interpreters.

"'I'm resourceful, so I will ask another interpreter in a heartbeat. I was checking with them for an assignment, one thing, and they said- hey, don't wear black. I said OK, so I wore purple. The client ended up saying, by the way- "I love, and I'm so glad you didn't wear black." (Focus group #1 transcript, Pos. 16).

Another example comes from an interpreter who had entered the field of ASL interpreting as a second career. Unfamiliar with a lot of the implicit rules of the field, they reached out to another Black interpreter they felt comfortable with to gain a better understanding.

"Thank God I reached out to another interpreter really quick to double check, to avoid me going inside looking crazy or, you know, not understanding that environment." (Focus group #1).

Another CODA recalls having strong ties to the Deaf community early on in their childhood.

"My parents would often travel to another city where there was a bigger black Deaf population, and they had, you know, organized activities, so I mean not very far. I was only about 45 minutes to an hour away; however, that's where they went to socialize, but that's not where I worked." (Focus group #1).

A trilingual interpreter describes their experience growing up and being exposed to interpreting early.

"Coming from a family of Spanish-speaking majority, I also interpreted from my grandparents that lived with me many times; I interpreted many things, especially phone calls. I would pick up the phone and interpret; I was 7 years old." (Focus group #1).

Lastly, this experience from an interpreter that attended a National Association of Black Interpreters (NAOBI) conference was quite powerful. The interpreter described it as finally "coming into my own" This feeling of being comfortable and identifying significant connections, which allows the imagination of new possibilities, was a significant shift.

"I went to a Black Deaf Advocate (NBDA) and NAOBI summit. That was the place where I felt like I had finally come into my own. I saw all these black interpreters dressed in nice clothes and everything. Dressed and pressed. I was so happy. I learned from mingling with the right people that I can wear this, and I can wear that." (Focus group #2).

5. Discussion
In two focus group discussions, the findings in the sections above explore participants' experiences and thoughts on professional attire and appearance as it relates to ASL-English interpreting. These individual perspectives shared by Black and Brown interpreters bring the concerns, challenges, and successes in navigating professional appearance out of the dark and into the spotlight of discussion. Jones suggests the importance of discussion allows "the unique experiences of Black and Brown to be shared in a setting where their voices are seldomly heard." (Jones, 2009, p.122). Six themes emerged from the study that centers the navigation of attire and professional appearance through the frame and reference of Black and Brown professionals.

5.1 How I became an interpreter.
Participants in this study took a community-based approach in their introduction to the interpreting field. Many interpreters' first exposure to sign language developed with relationships within the Deaf community. This led to invitations into Deaf spaces, which fostered the ability to form healthy connections. Connections with Deaf Church members, Deaf significant others, colleagues, and family all share intimate moments. These experiences require both parties to be active members of that community. "Novice interpreters need to be aggressive in maintaining their ties with the Deaf community and develop authentic relationships with the members of the community" (Holcomb, 2017, p.216). Holcomb (2017), in "*Deaf Eyes on interpreting*", the authors provide perspectives on the positive qualifications of a good interpreter through a Deaf lens.

5.2 Learning to dress for an assignment
In many African American communities, an individual's presentation is important; looking presentable, being neat, and tidy was crucial to overcoming stereotypes and navigating the world as a Black and Brown body. One focus group participant commented on how values taught at home influenced their appearance. "It was just ingrained [at home], and again in school, it was upheld as well. You know, tuck in your shirt! I grew up in a black neighborhood, went to black schools, and had black teachers, so everybody played a part." The participants' experience corroborates the sentiments of Jenkins' (2009) *Bridging the racial opportunity gap*. "African Americans learn that to not conform is to run the risk of being disenfranchised from the rights and privileges that members of majority culture can easily take for granted (e.g., access to education, employment, health care, housing)" (p. 50).

These shared values that were cultivated as norms at home, school, and amongst members of the Black and Brown communities helped influence how some of the participants learned to dress and show up in public spaces. These values also apply and are transferred in the decision-making process of dressing for interpreting related environments. In the next section, the findings from the two focus groups on interpreting education programs will be discussed.

5.3 Interpreter training programs
Interpreter education training programs play a major role in the preparation and development of interpreters. They serve as one of the main institution students enroll in to learn ASL and the interpreting process. Black and Brown students who attend these

programs are often taught how to dress as professional interpreters and thus subjected to the narrative of wearing black or contrasting colors to one's skin tone. Humphrey suggests that interpreters "wear solid colors that contrast with the interpreter's skin tone." (Humphrey, 2020, p.63).

All the participants discussed that most, if not 100%, of their professors and classmates within their interpreting education programs were white. The lack of diversity in students and professors in these programs creates segregation in the classroom and the field.

Additionally, the lack of representation and diversity in professors runs the risk of preventing Black and Brown students from achieving their maximum potential because of the lack of cultural sensitivity and cultural competence in professors. Williams' (2016) mentions this disparity in their dissertation as an absence. "Absence of Black faculty within IEPs, the lack of a substantial number of Black students enrolled in IEP programs, and the scarcity of Blacks and other communities of color in the IEP curricula." (p.122). An all-white professor population within interpreting education programs lack the cultural background to provide Black and Brown interpreters effective feedback in certain areas, such as navigating the interpreting field with a minority or selecting contrasting colors for Black and Brown bodies, for example. As a result of institutions having very few Black and Brown professors, if any at all, struggles. How do programs understand and synthesize the culture and barriers of Black and Brown individuals? Participants in this study were forced to seek advice from other working Black and Brown professionals in the field, opposed to in the classroom.

The issue of race diversity is not the case for white students, where color schemes have already been selected, laid out, and set as a standard. When Black and Brown bodies don't meet the skin tone "standard," it creates a sense of "otherness." Not being included among the majority. Ford (2021) provides specifics on how "race not only separates African American interpreters from their non-Black peers and how that arises in representation, perceptions of qualifications, specific encounters with racism, and the cost of being an African American ASL-English interpreter." (Ford, 2021, p. 182). Many interpreting training programs have not met the mark of providing a diverse professor pool to meet the diverse student population they serve.

When challenging societal norms within the interpreting education program, one of the participants shared, they received adverse treatment when not conforming or challenging the status quo. "So, when these things are brought to light, you get a lot of eye rolls, you get a lot of people who don't want to talk to you anymore." In a separate study focusing on Black students in predominately white institutions in the South, adverse action toward Black students when challenging discrimination was again highlighted. For example, "one student described being portrayed as a stereotypical "angry black [person]" for questioning why he was treated differently than another student. Another described being accepted by others via acting like "nice Black people that smile all the time," but treated more poorly when "challenging" White colleagues and university personnel." Strunk et al., (2018) (p.9)

A line of separation has been drawn in the sand where certain colors are deemed professional for white interpreters, and certain colors are appropriate for Black and Brown. More flexibility and trust should be granted to Black and Brown interpreters to dress according to their skin tone.

5.4 Wearing Black
Wearing black has become synonymous with professional ASL interpreting. Wearing all Black has become an identifying marker for ASL interpreters, which is rooted in the ideology of the color black being contrasting to lighter skin. ASL interpreting is dominated by whiteness, and Black and Brown interpreters are the minority. When Black and Brown interpreters wear black, the reaction among colleagues and consumers varies. There seem to be mixed reactions from white people when Black and Brown interpreters show up wearing black or professional contrasting colors regardless of the shade of the person. The ability to wear black and darker clothing for Black and Brown interpreters depends on person to person.

The variety in skin tones allows for flexibility in clothing choices that best fits the person. A "one size fits all" is not a successful method to address clothing choices for Black and Brown interpreters. The participants within this study discuss the expectations of many interpreters to wear black and how Black and Brown interpreters contextualize this expectation. In addition, some Black and Brown interpreters challenge the narrative that Black clothing is not contrasting with Black and Brown bodies. Allowing latitude for the Black and Brown Deaf community and its interpreters to experiment and discover which colors work best for them on an individual basis is needed. This latitude is lacking in the interpreting community. Some participants within the study do not honor the standards of contrasting colors set by white professors and colleagues but discover their own style and colors when professional interpreting.

5.5 Double Standards

Black and Brown interpreters experience hyper critical feedback so often that it's expected. Meanwhile, many white colleagues receive less critical feedback when in some instances, white interpreters have missed the professional standard mark completely. The expectations between the two races can seem unequal often enough for some Black and Brown interpreters.

In certain instances, conforming to traditional standards as a Black and Brown interpreter seems safer. Emphasized in Strunk et al. (2018), a participant describes their experience trying to blend in as a minority in white spaces. The reputation and livelihood of many Black and Brown interpreters depend on the decisions made in that last look in the mirror before they leave home headed to an assignment. This may look like wearing colors that white professors and colleagues have deemed contrasting to Black and Brown bodies, wearing a particular hairstyle that makes white colleagues comfortable, not challenging stereotypes, hyper-criticism, or omitting any cultural identifying markers when dressing for an assignment. Following these expectations, some interpreters get their foot in the door in certain interpreting spaces where few or no other Black and Brown interpreters are present.

For other interpreters, following their heart in deciding what to wear to work is a priority. Not adhering to white standards of the field as it relates to which colors are considered contrasting. With careful consideration of professionalism, environment and their own skin tone, many Black and Brown interpreters are confident they can decide which colors look best on them. Not adhering to white standards in dressing for an assignment for a Black and Brown interpreter can be presented in explicit and subtle ways. This can look like wearing a cultural or traditional dress, wearing an Afro, locs, a particular pair of earrings, colors they themselves deem contrasting, or challenging the system and hypercriticism. In some situations, generational differences play a role in the act of following rules or rebelling. However, with younger generations entering the field, they challenge norms previously established in the field. This contributes to the shift in the field where the definition of professionalism and contrasting colors are changing. The standards of how to appropriately dress set by white colleagues and peers are not considered in preparation for some Black and Brown interpreters. Moments like this help shapes interpreters' skills, confidence, and overall connection to the community they serve. The next section of the discussion explores the avenues Black and Brown interpreters connect with externally to receive the information that is not available or excluded in the interpreting education classrooms.

5.6 Safe space

Having safe spaces within your community provides major benefits for Black and Brown interpreters. This allows access to transparent discussion on challenges faced in the field, as well as providing space for vulnerability and constructive feedback. Both Safe spaces within colleagues and consumers of Black and Brown interpreters can prove important. This allows the latitude of making mistakes and perfecting your interpreting craft in a safe space without hypercriticism. Moreover, having someone who looks like you to look up to can make all the difference. Imagining themselves one day as a member of the field is the spark many interpreters need to pursue SSSa career of ASL-English interpreting. These safe spaces are created because of bias, racism, and criticism often faced by some Black and Brown interpreters.

6. Conclusion

This study significantly contributes to the limited body of literature on the experiences and perspectives of Black and Brown ASL-English interpreters. It underscores the burdens and barriers they face in terms of professional appearance, aiming to challenge and dismantle the prevailing norms in the ASL-English interpreting field. Additionally, the study highlights the impact of interpreting education programs on professional appearance and sheds light on the challenges encountered by Black and Brown interpreters in the professional field. Furthermore, this research encourages the involvement of more Black and Brown researchers to explore similar topics in the future.

For future research, it is recommended that scholars take a closer look at the experiences and perspectives of Black and Brown ASL-English interpreters in the post-Black Lives Matter movement era. Specifically, examining the experiences of Black and Brown male interpreters navigating the professional interpreting landscape would be valuable. Additionally, investigating the concept of diversity within interpreting education training programs is an important avenue for further exploration.

Overall, this study adds to our understanding of the experiences of Black and Brown interpreters and calls for continued research and attention to this important topic. By amplifying diverse voices and fostering dialogue, we can work towards a more inclusive and equitable ASL-English interpreting profession.

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