

## Chapter 9

# An Unequal Partnership: Communication Sciences and Disorders, Black Children, and the Black Speech Community

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter addresses what Rickford referred to as an unequal partnership between researchers and the researched. In this chapter, Rickford's assertion of an unequal partnership within the field of sociolinguistics is extended to the field of communication sciences and disorders (CSD). A summary of the CSD literature on the Black speech community identifies shortcomings, leading the authors to argue that more can be done to equalize the partnership between CSD researchers and the Black speech community. The authors make the case for the establishment of service-in-return as a general principle of CSD research – especially when the researched community is a minority, marginalized, or underserved community. Ideas of ways that researchers can give back to the researched communities are provided. The authors also suggest ways that researchers can foster a sense of civic responsibility in student researchers in order to usher in a new generation of researchers who are more committed than past generations to equalizing the partnership between researchers and researched communities.*

*Ms. Helen introduced me to the students by saying: Remember I told you all about Ms. Baker-Bell? She's here from Michigan State University and will be working with us for a few months on a project about language. She's not like those other people—you know the ones that I'm talking about. They come watch us and then we never see them again. Ms. Baker-Bell is not like that; she's good! The "other*

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*people” that Ms. Helen was referring to are the “hit it and quit it” researchers that enter into schools and classrooms, collect data, and bounce.*

*-Linguistic Justice April Baker-Bell (2020, p. 93).*

## **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides us with the opportunity to discuss and provide suggestions for how to remedy the unequal partnership between researchers in communication sciences and disorders and the Black speech community with a specific focus on Black children. This has been a growing concern for the two authors since the time that we were doctoral students in the early 2000s. At that time, we discovered Rickford’s 1997 article, *Unequal Partnership: Sociolinguistics and the African-American Speech Community*. As doctoral students working in a research lab that focused on Black children’s language, we awakened to racial disparities in the research literature and research culture in our field. We were becoming aware that White scholars were studying Black children and their families with seemingly no regard or concern for them. With our very own eyes and ears we were witnessing the “hit it and quit it” phenomena. We were also feeling convicted that for most of our years as doctoral students, we spent our time in a research lab studying Black children’s language but had very few opportunities to interact *with* Black children and their families as part of our work. In a sense, we felt isolated and cut off from the population that we studied and feared that we were becoming complicit in perpetuating an unequal partnership within our own community.

A little less than 20 years later as we write this article, we are isolated for a different reason -- the COVID-19 pandemic, a world health crisis that in our country, is disproportionately affecting Black Americans and keeping people socially distant. While the pandemic is still raging, Black Americans are in the center of another pandemic (i.e., a pandemic within a pandemic; Sanders, 2020) -- racial injustice and violence, most notably marked by the killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor in 2020. At the same time that Black Americans are experiencing a pandemic within a pandemic, they are watching White Americans go undetected and unpunished for unimaginable actions associated with the capital “insurrection” (Mogelson, 2021). This being what many have considered to be the ultimate signs of White privilege and the racial injustice in our society (Glanton, 2021; Inskeep, 2021). So, we write this chapter at a time when Black Americans are in the midst of an unprecedented health crisis, physical and mental harm, and racially unjust treatment. It is within this current context that we find the courage and boldness to write about the seeming exploitation of Black children in research in our field, Communication Sciences and Disorders (CSD).

This chapter, inspired by Rickford (1997) will address what he referred to as an unequal partnership between researchers and the participants and what Baker-Bell (2020) contemporarily refers to in the introductory quote as “hit it and quit it” research. In this chapter, we extend Rickford’s assertion of an unequal partnership within the field of sociolinguistics to the field of CSD. To build our argument, we begin by discussing some key events in the history of research on African American English (AAE) in the field of CSD. In doing this, we discuss how child speakers of AAE, have gone from invisible to deficient to different to an unequal partner in the narratives of their communication behaviors. A summary of the CSD literature on AAE will identify shortcomings of the existing literature and more broadly in the field, leading us to argue that the Black speech community has been underserved and that more can be done

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