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Article

<O/ No Power but Deaf Power \O>:
Revitalizing Deaf Education Systems via Anarchism

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Abstract

Deaf education is an incoherent macrosystem whose sub-systems—e.g., biomedical vs. sociocultural institutions—contradict. Unreconciled tensions cause stagnation, not regeneration, and harmful dissensus in deaf educational sub-systems. To revitalize deaf education, address these contradictions, and eliminate incoherence, we posit that a deaf-led systemic transformation of deaf education is necessary; furthermore, we argue it may best be realized through theories and actions constitutive of anarchism. To this end, we synthesize four thematic loci where anarchism overtly aligns with constructs immanent in deaf communities. First, collectivism is necessary for survival in anarchist and deaf communities toward shared goals including equity in education, social labor, and politics. Second, mutual aid is integral—like anarchists who work arm-in-arm, deaf individuals and groups exhibit uncanny solidarity across political, cultural, technological, linguistic, and geographical boundaries. Third, direct action tactics overlap in both groups: When facing internal or external threats, both communities effectively rally local mechanisms to affect change. Finally, both groups exhibit a stubborn, existential refusal to be subdued or ruled by outsiders. Reframing systemic dilemmas in deaf education via anarchism is a novel, beneficial praxis that's only been tangentially explored. Centering anarchism in deaf education also generates succor for ongoing struggles about sign language in deaf communities. Toward the horizon of radical equality, our staunchly anarchist analysis of deaf education argues that to guide deaf-positive system change neoliberalism is inert and neo-fascism anathema.

Issue

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1. Deaf Education: A History of Harm and Conflict

Conflict defines deaf education (Scouten, 1984). Deaf education is a macrosystem consisting of interconnected but conflicting subsystems focused on biology, culture, language, technology, power, and politics (Bauman & Murray, 2014; Leigh & Andrews, 2017). Presently, deaf research, including deaf studies on pedagogy, sign language linguistics, health literacy, and so on, exhibits generalized incoherence and contradictory goals (Foster, 2001; Lane, 2008). This dissensus about deafness may avail new lines of thought, but often causes harm (Skyer, 2021a).

Historically, deaf education was controlled—but not without fierce resistance—by nondeaf outsiders (Dye & Terhune-Cotter, 2021; Greenwald, 2021). Problematic aspects of incoherent deaf education systems are located precisely in this nondeaf hegemony. Juxtaposing biomedical and sociocultural stances is revealing. First, biomedical views—reproduced uncritically in medical settings, hospitals, and clinics—generally posit that deafness is

a scourge to be eliminated (Mauldin, 2016; Valente & Boldt, 2016). In opposition, sociocultural stances critically respond to injustice and center the activism of enclaves of self-determined deaf people (Mauldin & Fannon, 2017; Skyer, 2022). While biomedicine may dehumanize, socioculturalists posit that deafness is a testament to and a wellspring of human resilience and creativity (Bauman & Murray, 2014; Vygotsky, 1993).

We must be entirely clear about our values from the start: Deaf people have inviolable merit. Deaf people hold an inalienable right to agency, autonomy, and sovereignty in educational decision-making (NDC, 2020; Skyer, 2021b). This suite of rights supersedes deaf education; however, our focus is purposeful. Deaf education represents in microcosm a totalizing superstructure and point of inflection for other biological, social, political, linguistic, and cultural struggles. While the sources of antideaf harms change, the threats—from language deprivation to intersectional oppression—are widespread and constant (Glickman & Hall, 2018; Greenwald, 2021; Hiddinga et al., 2020; Moges-Riedel et al., 2020; Virdi, 2020).

Antideaf harm is universally problematic. It is especially egregious perpetuated against the vulnerable, including frighteningly-commonplace harms against deaf people who are (singly or in combination) very young, very old, newly identified, multiply disabled, or reside in precarious socio-economic/geo-political contexts (Friedner, 2017; Humphries et al., 2012). One study quantified the harms done by mainstream education against deaf children by measuring cortisol—a biomarker for stress and inflammation (Bess et al., 2016). When researchers collected saliva samples from school-aged deaf children, they found extraordinary volumes of cortisol. The researchers state: Deaf youngsters "experience increased vigilance…fatigue, loss of energy, and poor coping skills" (Bess et al., 2016, pp. 1–2). These deaf children awake in extreme anxiety and exhibit adrenal cortex dysregulation on par with adults suffering from burnout syndrome. While this evidence is (literally) microscopic, it suggests wider dilemmas.

2. Justification for Transforming Deaf Systems Concerning Unjustifiable Hierarchies

We believe nothing short of a deaf-led revolution of deaf education is necessary to uproot nondeaf hegemony, address systemic incoherence, and eliminate major sources of harm. Deaf people and deaf communities, we assert, ought to have sovereign power to determine operations in deaf education sub/systems. Despite our assertions, deaf people's lifeways operate constantly under threat of social isolation and cultural dislocation at every educational stage, in every model of implementation, from early intervention to deaf elder care (Chua et al., 2022; Henner et al., 2021; Hiddinga et al., 2020).

Unreconciled dilemmas harm deaf people (Skyer, 2021b). Conflicts about deaf languages—including if fam-

ilies and schools should use spoken languages, signed languages, or artificial sign systems—are a metonym for generalized political struggle (Scott & Dostal, 2019; Scott & Henner, 2021). These dilemmas about language intersect power, knowledge, and values, centered on an analysis about *whose* axiological framework is considered authoritative, and whose is subordinated (Snoddon & Weber, 2021). A hypothetical question might ask: Does "normalcy" supersede "divergence" in importance? (Davis, 1995, 2013). The basic question that links authority, knowledge, and values about deafness is also posed in domains about auditory technologies, representing in proxy another fight for deaf people's rights, including bodily and mental autonomy (Aldersley, 2002; Scott et al., 2019).

Given harms and threats, it's justifiable that deaf people worldwide consider themselves besieged. Deaf people often find themselves in antagonistic relations with socio-political forces appearing more powerful than small but diverse deaf populations (Ladd, 2003; Luckner, 2018). It's justifiable that deaf people need and desire not only effective mechanisms for *resisting* harms but also effective mechanisms for *supplanting* harm with conditions that foster flourishing (De Clerck, 2019; Skyer, 2023b).

2.1. An Anarchist-Informed Theory of Deaf Power

Our stated goal is to bring about a deaf-led system change in deaf education by inverting the historical power dynamic that has harmed countless deaf people for centuries. This approach to "deaf power" is also reflected in the emoticons of our title, which graphically show an internationally-recognized sign language utterance for the same phrase, where one hand covers an ear and the other is raised in protest. Next, we explore a similar but anarchist-informed theory of power in deaf education about a nexus of four dialectical concepts that require explicit analysis (Vygotsky, 1993).

First, we examine two oppositional theories about structures of deaf power: (a) *hierarchies*, i.e., top-down structures of system control, and (b) *heterarchies*, equitable networks of shared responsibility (Skyer & Cochell, 2020). Hierarchies and heterarchies are both widespread in deaf education systems. Hierarchies and heterarchies may each lead to harm or benefit, depending on the persons involved, their motives, and justifications for action (Chomsky, 2013). As we show, nondeaf hegemony is seldom justifiable because coercion by a nondeaf power-elite very often results in harms against deaf people (Skyer, 2021b). In strong contrast, Deaf Culture is usually described as collectivist (Grushkin & Brockway, 2020). In this heterarchical ordering, the deaf group's success is paramount. This set of heterarchical values differently configures deaf educational classroom interactions and other social interactions in Deaf Culture.

Anarchists hold that hierarchies are generally coercive and thus seldom justifiable (Chomsky, 2013; Kropotkin, 1912/1964). While anarchism presupposes

suspicion of all hierarchies, we are specifically suspicious of educational hierarchies that may be unacknowledged sources of harm. Cherryholmes (1999) for example, questions Bloom's taxonomy and undermines its commitment to the "operative assumption that scientific [knowledge is] hierarchical" (p. 12). While Bloom enjoys widespread influence in (deaf) education, under close analysis, his tenets are problematic. As Cherryholmes lays bare: There is no *one* knowledge that is legitimate and supersedes all others. In deaf education, this requires (at minimum) adjoining generic knowledge about teaching and learning with deaf educational epistemologies (Kusters, 2017).

Second, we propose that (c) *autonomy*, that is, independent, uncoerced decision-making, and (d) *intact communities* founded on interdependent decision-making are complementary social forces. Generally, deaf people are members of at least two major groups: majority-nondeaf societies and minority Deaf Cultures. In response to nondeaf majoritarianism, deaf people coalesce, pool scarce resources, and share power among one another. The desire by deaf persons to be self-determined as individuals is not at odds with the desire for there to be diverse deaf communities. Any community is, by definition, a group of individuals making choices jointly. Similarly, Indigenous scholars demonstrate that self- and community-actualization are mutually constituting forces (Blackstock, 2014). Maslow's appropriated hierarchy of needs distorts the Blackfoot Nations' tribal ideology; it wrongly opposes the needs and goals of individuals with those of social groups (Michel, 2014; Safir, 2020). We reject the idea that communitarian and self-directed decision-making are oppositional. Furthermore, we think deaf self-actualization is enabled by prior-existing social cohesion and dependent on deaf community-actualization.

In connection, deaf people worldwide often self-identify with intersectional perspectives, this is because deaf people often belong to more than one minority community and these forms of oppression often interlock. Deaf people who are *also* disabled or Black, Indigenous, brown, or persons of color (BIPOC) may experience multiple forms of oppression that are interconnected, including when racialized identities or cultures intersect with deafness (Moges-Riedel et al., 2020). Effective praxis at this juncture requires collaboration in the form of heterarchy, and the deft unification of autonomy and community.

Our anarchist stance suggests that in deaf communities, autonomy and community decision-making are mutually-constitutive and may be an effective means to subvert nondeaf majoritarianism and uproot sources of intersectional harm. Likewise, anarchists and other radical deaf liberation theorists affirm that rejecting audism and eliminating racism, requires interrogating their commonalities in ableism (Lawyer, 2018; Stapleton, 2016; Yancey, 2023). Likewise, we reject all other systematic *-isms* in deaf education, including the ageism that positions deaf children as "lesser" decision-makers or as lacking knowledge—this and other *-isms* are often exploited as justifications for antideaf coercion in schools.

2.2. Authorial Positionality

Writing this article, we attempted to praxis what we preach. Here, we aim to demonstrate our values through an analysis of positionality as it relates to deafness and other topics we analyze (Graham & Horejes, 2017; Saldaña, 2018). This may assist other scholars who wish to disrupt and dismantle all inequities in deaf education. Our stances are informed by our thinking about education research, linguistics, deaf studies, disability studies, and anarchism, among other concepts and disciplines. Here, we reflect on relevant traits that comprise our life experiences and views on deaf politics.

Michael was born to a deaf family. He's bilingual in English and American Sign Language (ASL). He is also deaf and lives to spite a neurodegenerative disease. Michael originates from a precarious (USA) working-class background. He's worked with deaf/disabled communities for two decades. As long as he's had an ethical credo, Michael's been an anarchist.

Jessica is hearing and has learned and used ASL for 24 years. Jessica is an educator and researcher who has worked exclusively in ASL-instructional schools and programs. She is straight, cis, white, and from a (USA) middle-class background. Philosophically she's aligned with American Pragmatists (e.g., Dewey, James), which is a tradition that can be aligned with anarchist principles (Asimakopoulos, 2013).

Dai is deaf. He prefers British Sign Language (BSL). Dai is a straight, cis, white, male from a (UK) middle-class background. While he's been interested in left politics and anarchist theory throughout his adult life, Dai's interest in exploring anarchist principles in deaf lifeways is relatively recent, driven by the brewing political crisis in the UK and Europe.

3. Anarcho-Deafness

Our anarchist stance obliges us to rethink the dilemmas of power and authority in deaf education. Nondeaf hegemony is a majoritarian macrostructure of harm based on unjustifiable hierarchies. Where nondeaf socio-political forces disproportionately outnumber deaf people who are minoritized and marginalized (Skyer, 2021b), there is impetus to reimagine the systems that comprise deaf education. Standing opposed to nondeaf hegemony are scholars supporting deaf-led transformations of deaf education (Kusters, 2017; National Deaf Center, 2020; O'Brien, 2020; Santini, 2015; Valente, 2011). These critiques analyze dilemmas present in deaf education to converge on claims for educational sovereignty, self-determination, and autonomy.

We stand in solidarity with our deaf colleagues worldwide who work to replace outdated, harmful systems,

construct new paths to benefit contemporary deaf people, and ensure that future deaf people can thrive.

Our goals are expansive and focused. They include evolutionary changes to make deaf spaces more humane and beautiful (Cherryholmes, 1999; Kurz et al., 2021). We also envision an optimistic rearticulation of deaf education's teleology (Scott et al., 2023b). Consequently, we propose that the most coherent means to achieve our goals is by expanding anarchism in deaf studies. Henceforth, our analysis of anarcho-deafness consists of four parts: collectivism, mutual aid, direct action, and the refusal to submit (see Figure 1). These concern interrelationships between (a) sub/systems of deaf education, which we've introduced. Next, we juxtapose them alongside, (b) the theories, ethics, and actions ("praxis") of anarchism. Like classical anarchists, we are interested in the past and the future (Horowitz, 1964, citing Bakunin, Malatesta, and Kropotkin); however, we don't just theorize distant time periods. Anarchism is not some far-off goal. We can "do anarchism" to revitalize deaf education systems *right now*.

3.1. Thesis

Deaf Culture is already imbued with anarchist tenets; furthermore, synthesizing anarcho-deafness assists anarchists and deaf groups mutually. Rather than consolidate external "top down" authority, or "bottom up" social democracy, we situate an *inside out* analysis to explore a radical, emic locus of deaf power toward deaf education system change (Kusters et al., 2017; Skyer, 2021b). Broadly, we posit that the sole means to reconcile systemic incoherence in deaf education is through a deaf-led transformation, which can be aided through anarchist praxis. To adequately explore this idea, we briefly introduce anarchism and then link it to changes and dilemmas in deaf education. Then, in the next section, we explore our thesis in four ways, using the four sub-themes that illustrate connections between anarchism and deaf studies.

3.2. Anarchism

Anarchism is not one thing, but many. Its theories and applications, like its theorists and activists, are global and diverse (Gelderloos, 2010). Far from being impractical or impossible, anarchism is a profoundly useful set of ideas (Asimakopoulos, 2013). Anarchist praxis positively interprets concepts like self-organization and disrupts harmful actions like tyrannical state-violence (CrimethInc, 2017; Proudhon, 1849). Anarchism differs from communism, socialism, and other melioristic stances insofar as

Figure 1. Anarcho-deafness.

anarchists believe that, to transform society, dominating social relations must be expelled completely (Bookchin, 2005). We cannot attend to all variances but emphasize that anarchism is plural with a long, international history embodying many successes. As Horowitz (1964, p. 60) points out, anarchists are fundamentally concerned with transforming society: "Anarchism is an argument of perfection against an imperfect world. [Anarchism] is a rising force of voluntary association[s] to bring about rejuvenation.''

3.3. Deaf Education and Anarchism

Anarchism provides useful concepts to theorize education (DeLeon, 2008; Suissa, 2010). This includes problems latent in deaf education (O'Brien & Emery, 2023). Skyer (2021b, pp. 420–421) writes:

> Anarchism [is] a critique of the state's failed relationship with the people. [It] emphasizes local networks, mutual aid, [and] direct action [because the state] failed to provide those goods to minoritized communities. [The] "failures" of deaf education [are] not failures of individual deaf educators, deaf students, or deaf communities. Instead, they are failures of education [systems] unwilling to respond to [deaf people's] situated needs.

The state is not the only problem, nor is the state one thing; however, the state—including laws regulating education—*is* a dominating force that demonstrably imperils deaf persons (Skyer, 2019). Later, we return to these ideas. Currently, we hasten to point out that failed state-led systems are often circumvented by self-organized deaf students, educators, and the wider deaf community. This history of deaf heterarchical powers comprises the subtext of what follows.

3.4. Four Sub-Themes

To explore our main argument, we synthesized four overlapping loci where anarchist praxis expressly aligns with constructs immanent in deaf communities. Each is elucidated through examples of deaf individuals who've seized and wielded power in deaf education and research (Harris & Loeffler, 2015).

3.4.1. Collectivism Is Necessary for Survival in Anarchist and Deaf Communities

Like anarchists, deaf people rely on themselves, their own ingenuity, and their role in wider communities to realize shared goals, including equity in education, social labor, and politics (Hall et al., 2016). In this, desires for community interdependence, individualism, *and* autonomy are coherent, not contradictory. Anarchists and deaf individuals each co-labor to increase the probability of surviving as individuals and thriving in communities (Horowitz, 1964). For example, Bookchin (2005) cites anarchist cooperative endeavors between disabled and nondisabled groups in his social ecology theory to demonstrate the macrostructure of human relationships.

Like anarchists who work arm-in-arm, deaf groups exhibit uncanny solidarity, which transcends traditional social boundaries. Deaf communal care exists across considerable changes in geographical, temporal, technological, political, and sociocultural structures (De Meulder et al., 2019; Murray, 2008). Ladd (2003) and Holcomb (2012), outline how deaf people build collective cultures and support one another if facing duress. Lindsay (2022, p. 186) examines how deaf business owners deliberately hire other deaf people and supply meaningful "opportunities [to develop] their skills and career progressions."

Collectivism is required when deaf people converse in sign languages. Deaf Culture embraces collectivism so much that there's a vernacular style of architecture called DeafSpace—whole buildings are manifest on the principle of "care for the well-being of others" (Bauman, 2014, p. 388). Research about proxemics shows deaf conversationalists expend collective effort to care for one another's physical well-being meanwhile navigating architectural environments (Bauman, 2014; Sirvage, 2015). Elsewhere, Kusters (2009) reports on negotiated, community care in train-cars among deaf citizens of Mumbai (India), where deaf-positive spaces are maintained to protect physical and social well-being. In education, Kusters (2017) also shows that deaf educators feel intergenerational responsibility toward their deaf students. Research suggests this ethic of care enables and defines deaf community cohesion (Emery, 2016).

3.4.2. Mutual Aid Is Integral in Deaf and Anarchist Camps

Mutual aid is an anarchist theory of relational assistance that is freely given, reciprocated, voluntary, and active. Kropotkin (1902/2021) who defined it, writes: "Mutual aid is the real foundation of [human] ethical conceptions" (p. 227). Kropotkin shows that equitable assistance requires giving-and-receiving, and benefits partners differently. Kropotkin even cites cooperative efforts among disabled and non-disabled people.

Mutual aid is community solidarity. It works against harmful hierarchies and toward harmonious heterarchies in deaf and anarchist spaces. We cite two transnational examples. First, the Deaf Academics Conference (https://dac2023.com/dac) is a formal research group whose members are all deaf. The Deaf Academics Conference's local units and partner organizations are worldwide and support deaf academics who produce and share scientific research about deafness across national boundaries and systems of government. Second, through a plurality of sign languages and sites, the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD; https://wfdeaf.org) is another transnational, globally-networked affinity group of deaf individuals who endeavor to uplift other deaf

people. A WFD principle is that deaf people from advanced nations support comrades in developing countries (De Meulder et al., 2019).

We recognize that not all parties in mutualist deaf networks must have the same form or amount of power. However, we argue against charity assistance, where deaf people are positioned as powerless (Vygotsky, 1993). Non-mutual assistance requires that deaf people act as passive recipients of outsider aid that may not be needed or desired. This is coercion. Missionary aid and governmental social work seldom operate on mutual principles. In deaf spaces, they can harm Indigenous deaf people via combined paternalism, audism, and literal colonialism (Skyer & Cochell, 2020). Evidence shows that the Church of England frequently disrupts deaf-centric, non-conformist religious spaces (Ladd, 2003; Lysons, 1965). We lack basic research about exploitative relationships between religion, charity, and imperialism in deaf communities, but our experiences suggest that their role in deaf history is large and should be researched from an anarchist standpoint. Doing so would likely reveal other unjustifiable hierarchies, including the subordination of deaf people's knowledge of god through writing (Skyer, 2023a).

Mutual aid exists in deaf communities under different guises. For example, "deaf-gelt" is "a talent, ability or behavioral quality which could…*benefit the whole community*" (Ladd, 2003, p. 340, emphasis in original). Deaf people with strong writing skills might aid others possessing different skills. In deaf-gelt, the work of translating a letter could be compensated by a meal and shared sign language conversation. This tactic kept exchanges of aid inside deaf communities not through the work of outsiders, like hired interpreters who were not deaf. Overall, deaf mutual aid exists and can be expanded in deaf communities; likewise, between deaf and anarchist groups. In our conclusion, we discuss the tension between access and inaccessibility in activist spaces, which may prevent mutual aid and suggest means to circumvent it.

3.4.3. Direct Action Networks Using Local Power Overlap in Deaf and Anarchist Groups

A third locus of interest where anarchism and deafness overlap is applications of intense power through direct action. Direct action leverages subordinated but determined groups against enemies vastly more populous or powerful. Anarchist direct action examples include the 1871 Paris Commune, the 1936 Spanish Revolution, the 1999 Battle for Seattle, and the Rojava (YPG) fighters in contemporary Syria. When facing threats or incursions by outsiders, deaf groups also rally local networks and consolidate power. Direct action supports small groups of self-determined deaf individuals to become stronger tactical forces capable of resolving specific local dilemmas.

Direct action has a lengthy history in deaf education. Emery (2016) posits that direct action is a feature (not a

"bug") of Deaf Culture. In writing this section, we found we had too many examples to pick from. Therefore, we focus only on grassroots direct actions instigated by deaf youngsters who have self-organized heterarchical power and successfully agitated for targeted political changes.

In direct actions, deaf people organize, struggle, and win against entrenched political bureaucrats, corporate elites, or uninformed policymakers hostile to deaf lifeways. The most famous example occurred in 1988. *Deaf President Now!* was a successful set of direct actions at Gallaudet University (US), the world's only deaf university. *Deaf President Now!* was an organic outpouring of dissent against the board of trustees who appointed a nondeaf president over an equally qualified deaf candidate. In response, students organized several direct actions—including the use of human chains and a blockade of buses—across weeks of unrelenting pressure against the board, who eventually conceded defeat. Afterward, Gallaudet University's first deaf president, I King Jordan, was confirmed (Jankowski, 1997).

Deaf President Now! exemplifies a nonviolent deaf community variety of the anarchist tactic called "propaganda of the deed," which is defined as one successful high-profile direct action that inspires a set of subsequent actions. *Deaf President Now!* continues to embolden deaf students to rise and overthrow unjust material conditions. We discuss two recent cases below.

In 2011, there was a sudden, unjust closure of the 4201 schools in New York (US), which serve deaf, blind, and disabled youth (Kappen, 2011; Santini, 2015). In response, primary and secondary students led the community in revolt. During 2011, Michael was a classroom teacher in a 4201 school. He applauded his deaf high schoolers who stood in solidarity with the young deaf children in the school gymnasium and signed anti-State and anti-austerity protest chants in ASL. With the later support of other classroom teachers, administrators, and parents, the deaf students organized a convoy of buses that transported hundreds of students from a dozen schools to the state capitol. At the end of the actions, the budget cuts were reversed and full-fledged funding was restored (Huntley, 2011).

Second, in 2021, a high school-aged student group at a residential deaf education institute in Georgia (US) protested the selection of a white, hearing superintendent who was not fluent in ASL. Through coordinated direct action events, the deaf youth successfully ousted the interim leader. The direct action eventually resulted in the hiring of a new, deaf superintendent (Scott et al., 2023a). One of the Latino deaf protest leaders, Trinity Arreola, "was inspired to speak out against audism and racism…by earlier protests at Gallaudet University" (Morris, 2021). As these other examples show, deaf people effectively use direct action to revolt and force institutions and governments to address local educational crises. Through a unity of purpose, direct action consolidates deaf power and inspires future change.

3.4.4. Deaf and Anarchist Groups Existentially Refuse To Be Subdued

Our final theme is the refusal to be subdued by existential threats or ruled by outsiders. Here, we focus on how deaf community organizers preserve and enrich sign languages when threatened by nondeaf hegemony at the intersection of research, policy, and education. Our anarchist stance on deaf power obligates us to discuss complex relationships, including conflicts of autonomy and coercion between deaf people, sign languages, and the personnel who operate education systems. We focus on the hostility of nondeaf, non-signing policymakers, and dilemmas of power between deaf people and sign language interpreters in schools. Lastly, we analyze toxic ideas about sign language stemming from nondeaf researchers, and counterarguments by deaf professionals who refuse to be subdued.

The persistence of sign languages is the tangible result of deaf subversion. Deaf history is largely a story of deaf people resisting nondeaf authority figures who are hostile to sign languages. In Soviet Russia, despite top-down regulations that ostracized signers, deaf people subversively signed in schools (Shaw, 2017). Vygotsky (1993) who studied the matter, wrote: "It is impossible to ban [sign] language….It may be forbidden, and its users punished, but this does not mean that it is defeated" (p. 90). More recently, a critical mass of deaf students assembled in Nicaragua at what was supposed to comprise a new school that had outlawed signing (Senghas et al., 2005). In spite of this philosophy, a deaf student coalition constructed a novel sign language in an action of linguistic rebellion (Senghas & Coppola, 2001).

In some ways, the relationships between deaf signing clients and nondeaf sign language interpreters is one of dependence. Originally, determining the quality of sign language interpreting was a task that was vetted by deaf people (Garrett & Girardin, 2020). Deaf people led the training of sign language interpreters. Deaf people determined if interpreters were qualified or not (Hall et al., 2016). When the US Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID; https://rid.org) was formed, it signaled the end of deaf-led quality control of interpreters. RID is presently led by a nondeaf majority—to our knowledge, less than a third of RID leadership is deaf. By devising this structure, the power to evaluate sign language workers was *taken* from deaf communities and *bestowed* on nondeaf outsiders (Wright, 2019). In an ongoing conflict without resolution, deaf Americans are struggling to gain power in RID. As Hall et al. (2016) and Caselli et al. (2020) state—directly or inadvertently—sign language interpreters may contribute to systemic antideaf oppression and recapitulate epistemic violence.

Deaf power is expanding in modern professional spheres as a needed counterweight to problematic audist theories and methodologies (Young & Temple, 2014). Research produced by deaf scientists, like Moges-Riedel et al. (2020), Glickman and Hall (2018), Henner et al.

(2021), Gulati (2019), Humphries et al. (2012, 2022), and others, shows that with sufficient exposure to signing deaf role models, deaf children experience natural language acquisition. Contrariwise, language deprivation and brain damage are *caused* by people who withhold sign language (Scott et al., 2023b; Singleton & Newport, 2004). Deaf-led research subverts unjustifiable hierarchies like phonocentric discourse ideologies (Skyer, 2021b). Our anarchist stance clarifies: Any hierarchy based on ableism or audism is unjust and must be rejected. Centering anarchist praxis assists deaf researchers who desire a system change in deaf education and generates succor for ongoing struggles about deaf self-determination and cultural and linguistic revitalization at the community level. As Jankowski (1997, p. 46) writes, "because sign language was [shared by] deaf people not the dominant society, this difference naturally drew deaf people closer together [and] fostered [a] self-governed deaf community."

4. Embrace Anarcho-Deafness

4.1. Reject Incoherence

That biomedical and sociocultural institutions of deaf education are incoherent is a source of harm. This impediment to progress results from centuries of crushing antideaf oppression and a remarkable history of deaf struggle involving collectivism, mutual aid, direct action, and a tenacious refusal to submit. Deaf-led struggles for power have slowed and even reversed nondeaf hegemony—this subversion must be explored and expanded.

Biomedicine is the main source of nondeaf hegemony. By positioning deafness as "deviant," deaf people are pathologized (Namboodiripad & Henner, 2022). Biomedicine claims to be "factual" and "objective" but tacitly condones cultural and linguistic death (Skyer, 2023b). It has the greatest capacity for antideaf harm (Scott et al., 2023b). Biomedicine concomitantly: (a) lacks evidence that sign language causes harm, (b) denies the prosocial habilitative role of sign languages in deaf education, and (c) refuses to accept undeniable evidence about the benefits of sign language (Glickman & Hall, 2018; Scott & Henner, 2021; Scott & Hoffmeister, 2017). Biomedicine and sociocultural stances aren't opposing views; they cannot be reconciled. It is impossible to compromise on the view that deaf people are medically-deficient or inferior. We are emphatic: *Nondeaf hegemony cannot be reformed, only abolished.*

Deaf people may benefit from deepening a commitment to anarchist praxis in struggles against social domination and educational injustice. Numerous stances exist about mechanisms of change in deaf education. Traditionalists wish to stay the course. Reformers desire incremental change. Atavists repeal change. We are not content with these options. Our deaf-anarchist synthesis uniquely supports the deaf-led transformation of deaf

education. The foregoing shows why this confluence is important to research. The remaining analyses suggest how it may occur. Throughout, we aim for a praxis redolent of both the deaf-led struggle for power and successful anarchist actions.

Our arguments are built with the understanding that our basic tenets and conclusions may be rejected. Yet, we find it necessary to co-labor and engage with anarchist theory. Why? To upset entrenched systems. To fight harmful and unjustifiable hierarchies. To eliminate coercion. We welcome debate, even strong disagreement. Dissension would show that *anarcho-deafness* has standing. Dissensus may benefit the deaf community by elevating contrarian emic views and informing deaf people about parallels between deaf and anarchist struggles to transform society (Rancière, 2010; Skyer, 2021a). Despite marginal risks, we are firm—it is *necessary* for deaf people to lead the transformation of deaf education.

4.2. Skepticism of Democracy

Our deaf-anarchist arguments strongly contrast deaf education systems grounded in democracy; moreover, they require skepticism of democracy (Rancière, 2010), specifically, the state's role and motivations in (deaf) education (DeLeon, 2008). Democracy is complex and full of unresolved tensions and ambiguities. Most non-anarchists regard democracy as a flawed but "lesser-evil" approach to managing human affairs. In the contemporary US and UK, which we (the authors) are most familiar with, democracy is *sold* as oppositional two-party politics (CrimethInc, 2017). Where the left has liberals and neoliberals (Democrats, Labour, etc.) who support a degree of social freedom, deregulation, and free-market capitalism, the right has conservatives and neoconservatives (Republicans, Tories, etc.) who favor traditionalism, nationalism, and authoritarian control. These ideas are predicated on prejudice, xenophobia, and lurking antisocial fascism.

Anarchists understand that democracy is mortally flawed. Opposition among "wings" is incidental, anarchists claim, amid totalizing state-based oppression. Contrasting the "horseshoe" model, we endorse the "ratchet" metaphor as the most apt. In this, rightward movement is inevitable and the left force is reserved for brief interludes of "resistance" (Skyer, 2023a).

While a comprehensive review of democracy is outside our scope, two outcomes appear general for all democracies. First, the people comprise the state. But, second, the state takes precedence over the people. We are skeptical. We doubt that the state desires to or even can represent a people, much less a deaf population it systematically refuses to understand (Skyer, 2019). We also contend that the state relies on amoral, unethical operations of majoritarianism and coercion undertaken in the name of "democracy" (Boorstin, 1975; Rancière, 2010). These operations impact deaf people in specific ways.

4.3. Deaf People versus the State

The context of democracy matters in a deaf education system change because the majority of research about deaf education comes from (and is limited by) Western European traditional canons. This two-hundred-year history is dominated by white nondeaf men who've constructed a "scientific" rationale for social domination against deaf lifeways. This research is, subtly or overtly, aligned with majoritarianism, which, by its inherent design, overwhelms dissenting minorities by force.

Our anarcho-deaf model is predicated on the idea that there are fundamental limits to deaf education via the statist-democratic governance of deaf education. Top-down state regulations for deaf schools based in *or* resulting in the continuance of nondeaf hegemony are fundamentally at odds with deaf community freedom and self-determination (Bookchin, 2005; CrimethInc, 2017; NDC, 2020). State democracy has specific harmful repercussions and negative consequences in deaf education, including but not limited to pervasive linguistic harms and educational neglect against vulnerable young deaf people.

We find that the state does not resolve systemic dilemmas, but often causes and maintains pervasive structural harms against deaf people and deaf lifeways. The state cannot bestow or vouchsafe freedom. All people, including all deaf people, are already free but require self-determination *and* a lack of oppression to exercise that autonomy. As supporters of anarchist ideologies, we do not support state-based frameworks for power bestowed. This includes the "democratic" control of deaf schools and research traditions, which are often harmful hierarchies operating under a guise of benevolence. "Inclusion," for example, isn't usually problematized, yet it tacitly posits an "in-group" who monopolizes power and grants only small concessions to "tolerate" the "other.''

4.4. The State and Deaf People

Here's another contradiction we wish to highlight: Deaf people rely on state aid. Some do so for fundamental access to food and shelter, others for access to education. In the USA and UK, there are enclaves of deaf people who rely on the state as the guarantor of access to governmental affairs, education, markets, and workplaces. The Equalities Act, the Access to Work Act (UK), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (US) are legislative constructs that configure and *monetize* deaf accessibility. Said differently, these laws interface disability into a scheme that props up market capitalism (Skyer, 2019).

Yet, in the UK, the largest, most successful deaf political campaign resulted in the official recognition of BSL. Organized by the Federation of Deaf People (FDP), founded in 1997, the FDP are deaf volunteer activists who were exhausted by the stagnation of bureaucracy and national deaf organizations that failed to resolve a major existential dilemma about BSL. The FDP organized

direct action events in London and inspired smaller actions in Bristol and Wolverhampton, consisting of road blockades and sit-ins in solidarity with the Deaf Liberation Front (DLF). The outcome of this sustained pressure was the official governmental recognition of BSL as a language. This victory was a huge step forward that shocked traditionalist deaf organizations into the realization that there was an appetite for radical politics (Beschizza et al., 2015; Emery, 2016).

We are keenly aware of this contradiction—anarchists reject the state but also live in state democracies, and may rely on the state in one way or another. As anarchists work to abolish the state, most still live in states. Meanwhile, they can contest specific actions of the state. If they can't abolish the state's violence *today*, then, instead, today we *can* demand that the state does more good and less harm. This argument toward anarcho-pragmatism in and outside deaf education is not a fundamental contradiction. While two of us (Michael and Dai, who are deaf) understand that the state supports our survival, our stance is unfulfilled with mere survival. We're not content with "access" to ableist government, or "inclusive" markets and schools. These are examples of the many unjustifiable hierarchies that must be banished by self-determined deaf people, working to rebuild deaf education from the inside out.

5. Challenges Synthesizing an Absent Literature

Given a dearth of literature, our text synthesizes and explores evidence linking deafness, disability, and anarchism. We encountered unique problems due to limited prior research on this confluence of ideas. As a result, we examined many left-populist constructs (Mouffe, 2018), professing to transcend flaws in modern democracies, including deaf studies from classical libertarians, democratic socialists, and communists. We also bring evidence from our recalled experiences as teachers and researchers. We draw incomparable richness from the "gray literature," including varied TED talks, soapbox speeches, zines, and Google Drives of cached documents that describe and analyze subversion and mutual aid in deaf education. Far from being a detriment, this "gray" literature was a major asset. Like deaf people, anarchists support surfacing marginalized "unwritten" histories; likewise, both groups reject the gatekeeping that often reinforces marginality (Harris & Loeffler, 2015).

We found little deaf research explicitly about anarchism (O'Brien & Emery, 2023; Skyer, 2021b). We expanded our review to anarchist literature and disability activism studies but found little direct engagement on deaf anarchist praxis. *The Routledge Handbook of Disability Activism* (Berghs et al., 2020), for example, never mentions anarchism and has but one chapter about deaf activism. By expanding our focus, we found treatments of *disability* in some anarchist frameworks (Ben-Moshe et al., 2009) and oblique references to disability in classical anarchist texts.

In the latter, we found outdated terminology and insufficient synthesis. Bookchin (1982) extended the human urge for equality to include disabled people in preliterate societies. He writes: "Wherever possible, society will compensate for the infirmities of the ill, handicapped, and old, just as it will for the very young [who depend] on adults" (p. 109). Malatesta (1884) also observes that social support for disabled people in anarchist societies is vital: "The lame, the weak and the aged should be supported by society, because it is the duty of humanity that no one should suffer. We'll grow old too, or could become crippled or weak, just as those dearest to us." This neatly anticipates the postmodern claim that, eventually, we shall all be disabled (WAAD, 2022).

A compelling strand of thinking about radical egalitarianism came to us from disability studies, including Ben-Moshe et al. (2009) and Davis (2013) who describe disability in terms of biocultural diversity. Bauman and Murray (2014) similarly support cooperative labor among groups of people with varying disabilities, including intrinsic and extrinsic benefits sourced from deaf lifeways. This perspective departs from and inverts ableist assumptions that deaf/disabled people depend entirely on nondisabled others (including governments) for survival, and supports cooperative work by deaf and disabled people in subcultures who may thrive absent authoritarian social norms and ableist hierarchies.

5.1. Expanding the Praxis of Anarcho-Deafness

Thus far, we've analyzed how deaf people gain by anarchism, next we focus on how anarchists can reciprocate. As deaf scholars, Michael and Dai find that engaging in traditional anarchist politics is burdensome. It's hard to "do anarchism" cut off from networks and movements by language barriers. Deaf people may find that points of entry to anarchism are twice-limited by language: First, because most anarchists can't sign; and second, because most anarchist theory is written in English. Not all deaf people have the same literacy competencies and many global deaf people will never learn English (Knoors & Marschark, 2015).

Anarchists who profess an ethics founded on radical equality should be fundamentally concerned with disabled people's plights. Mutualist direct action is needed. Translations of anarchist texts into local sign languages are welcome. Radical meetings will improve for deaf people when allied interpreters are present. Michael recalls a recent street demonstration made accessible by an interpreter who was signing and walking backward, so as to provide access for the deaf people and deaf students who were present. We also welcome nondeaf allies, radical-minded teachers, researchers, interpreters, and community organizers to co-labor with deaf people without paternalism, coercion, or hierarchy. How might anarchists benefit? For tacticians, we posit this incendiary notion—police have weaponized hand signs for street

combat, but authentic sign *languages* would be an ideal, covert means of communication.

While writing this article was one example of anarcho-deaf praxis, work should continue. Our efforts demonstrate productive forms of inter-ability thinking, deaf/nondeaf solidarity-based agitation, and transnational scholarly networking. It would be instructive to learn from other anarcho-deaf teams in other places. This should include consciously uplifting intersectional perspectives, which may reveal new forms of agitation and deaf community organizing. Careful analyses of deaf subcultures and micro-communities may reveal if anarchism can resolve intersections of ableism or hierarchies grounded in racialized, gendered, economic stratification, or class divisions. To address an absent literature, these and other counter-narratives must be documented.

6. Conclusion: Anarcho-Deafness and Deaf-Led System Change

Analyzing systemic dilemmas in deaf education via anarchist praxis is a novel approach toward deaf-led transformation in deaf education. Deaf power is not bestowed by the state. It is built not through democratic consensus, but by self-determined struggle (CrimethInc, 2017). Deaf power is not vulgar mob rule. It requires communitarian labor and mutual aid. The deaf-led transformation of power must be grown from the inside out. A deaf-led system change can only be realized by deaf individuals and deaf communities working in solidarity against oppression. This work can be revitalized by embracing and deepening anarcho-deafness.

As we argue, many iconic and beloved aspects of Deaf Culture, like collectivism, mutualism, direct action, and resisting outsider control, are also the basic tenets of anarchism. We also note the existential need for *critical masses* of deaf students to sustain heterarchical sign language transmission by deaf peers in schools (DeConde Johnson & DesGeorges, n.d.; Humphries, 2013). We note that "critical mass" is an insurrectionary concept of anarchist origin (Blue, 2012).

Rather than deny the shared lineage of anarcho-deafness, we wish to expand it. Furthermore, doing so mutually benefits both anarchists and deaf communities. Hierarchies exist that ought to be abolished in both deaf and anarchist groups. Their abolition is a mutual goal. There is enormous potential for deaf/disabled people to engage with anarchism, not only to counter the damage of ableism, but to consciously politicize deaf and disabled communities. It's no coincidence that the old protest chant—"Nothing about us without us!"—has postmodern analogs that are used by deaf and disabled people doing digital agitprop, using hashtags, and constructing Tweets and memes.

Within the anarcho-deafness confluence, the staid egalitarian mantra—"from each according to their abilities and to each according to their needs"—acquires a new disability-forward thrust, which requires new analysis. Toward deaf education system change, our deaf-anarchist stance interjects these necessary questions: Whose abilities? Whose needs? And, probably most importantly: Who decides?

Here, we stand firm. Deaf people decide. The community of deaf individuals decides. Anything less is unethical. Anything less perpetuates systemic incoherence and maintains the yoke of nondeaf hegemony. In closing, we argue that toward radical equality and the transformation of deaf education systems, there is no time like the present. And there is no power but deaf power.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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