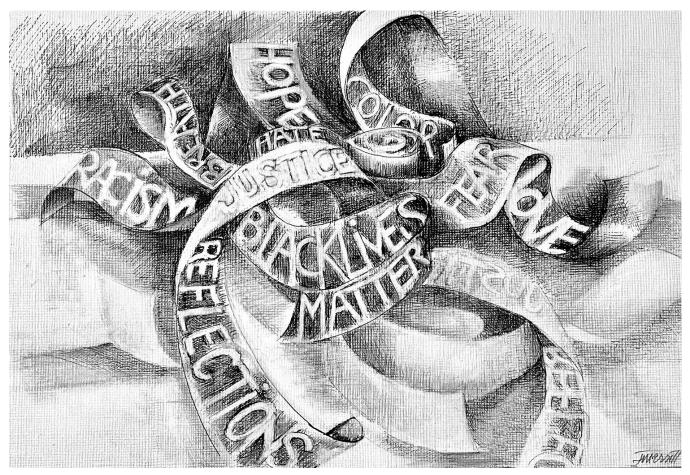# *REFLECTIONS*

NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING

"Entangled" Pen/Ink on Paper 22.5"x15" Jackie Merritt 2022

Artist Statement: My process was to create a grayscale visual presentation of movement. It represents how entangled, convoluted, twisted, and yet freeing it is to be in a position of service to others who see the color of your skin... before the color of your heart.

Special Issue on Black Racial Injustice:
Personal Reflections to Change Strategies

Guest Editors:
Priscilla A. Gibson, Valandra, Patricia A. Gray, and Rebecca Chaisson

REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING

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Reflections from the Guest Editorial Team:
Black Racial Injustice: Personal Reflections to Change Strategies

Priscilla A. Gibson, Valandra, Patricia A. Gray, and Rebecca Chaisson

Abstract: Antiblack racism is a system that is rooted in policies, practices, and institutions such as education, health care, and justice that reinforce beliefs, attitudes, prejudices, oppression, discrimination, and marginalization towards people of Black-African descent worldwide. As the first in a trilogy of Special Issues, this issue of *Reflections* focuses on experiencing and witnessing this type of racism from authors across racial groups. The images of brutality, death, family grief, and funerals supported the need for expression over the past year. Antiblack sentiment exists, creating stressors for those who live and experience them daily. Finding the antidote for antiblack racism is critical for the billions of Black people across the globe affected by its practice.

Keywords: antiblack, racism, African Americans, oppression, narratives

Priscilla

I conceived the focus of this Special Issue on personal experiences with and witnessing antiblack racism in isolation due to COVID restrictions after many days of self-reflection about the murder of George Floyd in 2020. As I sat in my house about a mile from the site of Mr. Floyd's murder, I struggled with intense feelings about my role and sphere of influence. I wondered if and how I allowed antiblack racism in my interactions with Whites in both my personal and professional spheres. In my self-ascribed status as wise elder having lived seven decades on this earth, I continue to be aware of the dilemma of perceived racial discrimination and its effect on my psyche. I don't want to ignore it, nor do I want to over-react. Yet, I know on many levels that the pervasiveness of racism is interwoven into the fabric of my existence.

I thought about breaking my isolation to join the crowd of protestors to follow my newly formed views of "no justice, no peace." Or should I add my voice to the many editorials about the injustice of violence against Black bodies connected directly to historical surveillance of Black folks. Or should I walk my talk by continuing to just talk my walk. My wisdom was silent, and I felt useless until I decided to start writing my thoughts. I focused on words associated with Mr. Floyd and his murder: "I can't breathe" and "get off my neck." Those words put me in touch with the deeply buried feelings of physical harm inflicted on my enslaved ancestors.

I started experiencing and witnessing antiblack racism as a young child growing up in a rural area of Southwestern Louisiana in an economically depressed community. Economic insecurity did not deter wanting an education, going to church, following family and community rules, and having what is now called "black joy," but the existence of antiblack racism placed severe limitations on them. Inherent in my life and those of my peers was this overriding struggle to "be" and to be worthy of attention—the kind of attention that allowed White children to drink at clean water fountains, sit downstairs in the movie theater, have a high school with a band and football team, and have teachers who look like them. And yes, some of us achieved a measure of success with the support of elders who instilled the importance of education and hard work.

Currently, I often think about how those experiences have informed my wisdom today and its strong quest to highlight the resiliency of Black people. I also wanted ways to deal and cope with experiencing and witnessing antiblack racism. I know this is emotional labor, and I accept it as my responsibility of being an elder and paying it forward. Part of my work is incorporated in Experiential Learning in the African American Community (ELAA), an annual, two half-day program I developed that shifts the learning of Child Welfare Fellows (MSW students) from the classroom into the African American community in the Twin Cities to focus on resiliency of Black families. Another aspect is capturing strategies to deal with racism from the stories of African American elder women and how they might transmit lessons learned to our younger generations.

In this Special Issue, I build on my work with the narratives of a village of like-minded scholars who share strategies that they have successfully employed in various venues and spaces. My wants are not without challenges, as you will see in Patricia and Valandra's introductions. Yet, I support highlighting the diversity within to illuminate our thinking and, hopefully, increase our spheres of influence on matters of antiblack racism. We must continue our efforts.

Patricia
My introduction to identifying, understanding, and addressing racism has been a lifelong journey. As an immigrant to the United States of America, my relationship with race centered on the deception of class. Being born into one of the poorest communities of Jamaica, where the mantra is "out of many, we are one," provided a sense of pride that hid the everyday occurrences of racism in the open—racism such as those who are light skinned are the workers in the bank, seen on the television as newscasters, or are often property owners. Further, because of your last name, your status in the community is cemented, revered, and respected. I remember being asked, "Pat, where in Jamaica are you from?" When I answered and said, "Jones Town," the response was, "Oh, I am sorry." When asked why he was sorry, he got red in the face and said, "Oh, no reason." I knew why he said he was sorry; he was a "light-skinned, pretty hair, uptown" individual living with the privilege of seeing me as someone from one of the poorer communities of the Island who needed his sympathy.

What I believe continues to be missing for those born on the other side of the community is that we all have pride in being Jamaican; where there is a will, there is always a way, and a big ax will cut down tall trees. Wilkerson's (2020) notion of caste being the bones and race the skin is apropos in the moment, understanding and accepting how racism and classism in the culture created this ranking of human value. Despite being Jamaican, the system produced supremacy of one group against the presumed inferiority of other groups based on ancestry, residential community, and educational attainment.

Like most Caribbean Nationals, education then became the focus of improving your class status regardless of skin color. Unfortunately, you remained in the class you were born in without meeting those educational milestones. I remember not passing the common entrance exam to move me from primary to high school and felt like the world ended. To this day, when asked which high school you went to back home, the hair on my neck stands up as I know what my answer would conjure. The "oh," then they'd move on as if I had not spoken.

In America, you not only have to deal with classism, but the ever-present racist society, which creates another layer of oppression. As a Black immigrant woman living in this country since 1977, the dual stressors of classism and racism are present daily. Although I understand that within a class—a social construct designed to keep you in your place until either through education, marriage, or migration—you find a voice which propels you to seek, learn, strive, and shed the cloak of classism, it remains.

I recall being pregnant at the orientation to attend college. The instructor asked all the young pregnant women to stand up. She then let us know that she did not expect to see us when class started in three weeks. Once class started, we met, and she asked the girls who were pregnant at orientation to stand up. Of the six of us, I was the only one standing. She was proud of herself that she was proven right. I told her in her arrogance, which seemed to be based on classism, that she probably caused the other young girls not to come as she took away their dream of a future. I vowed then and there to become an advocate for others.

My first experience with racism occurred as I worked in a major department store. The customer asked to see the sunglasses, and I asked her to give me a minute as there were other customers I was dealing with in the summer where name-brand sunglasses sold like wildfire. The customer banged her hand on the counter and said, "'n' stop what you are doing right now and come and serve me." I looked at her and then behind me to see if someone else was standing behind me. She said, "'n' yes, I am talking to you." I looked at her and told her a few choice words not only in patois but in English when I saw that she had a blank stare. The manager was not happy, and I was transferred from the department. Grappling with DuBois' (1953) double consciousness of how I am seen within and outside the community remains a struggle. Similarly, Glaude (2020) discusses this phenomenon in his interview with James Baldwin sharing that it remains rampant.

While attending a training, the lecturer, Dr. Henri Clarke (personal communication, n.d.), spoke about the importance of Black people in America living together in harmony as no one knows where you are from or how you deal with situations until you open your mouth and speak. Dr. Clarke stated that White people would only see you differently, but it will not matter as they will continue to split the groups, insinuating and suggesting that one is better than the other. Black people in America, he stated, must remember that race, racism, and classism are about dismantling, separating, and destroying communities. This is a lesson I remembered years later.

As I continue to work through and address class issues and center it on race, I provide a holistic viewpoint both professionally and personally. Teaching practice lab at a school of social work allows for open conversations with students, especially those of similar backgrounds whose eyes and minds were closed to understanding that within classism, racism exists. I have had feedback from students, like "I never thought of it that way" or "Wow, we don't do that in the Caribbean." I would counter. "Yes; we do, and here is an example of how classism and racism intersect." Finn (2021) describes how people give meaning to their experiences to make sense of their world. Migrating from the Caribbean, living in America for 44 years, and using the lens of classism to link racism has helped me understand oppression and the brutality leveled at individuals because of a caste system or one's skin color. The audacity of hope to move out of the class you were born into where you want to not take away the pain but give alternatives to

fight oppression and Black racism!

Valandra
The invitation from Priscilla to serve as a Co-Editor of a Special Issue of *Reflections* about "Black Racial Injustice" came at a time in my life when I was really questioning, and I still am, my ability to effect change in a profession that I was drawn to precisely because of its social justice mission. The invitation came at a time when I was feeling enraged by all the rhetoric, platitudes, and pronouncements about racial equality made by universities and organizations, including the social work profession, after the murder of a Black man, Mr. George Floyd, by White Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin. The invitation came after my visit, in the aftermath of Mr. Floyd's murder, to the South Minneapolis neighborhood I lived in for 20 years. My old neighborhood looked like a warzone with barricades blocking the streets and demolished, abandoned, and burned buildings. I was reminded of an earlier summer when I visited Minneapolis, the summer when Philando Castile, another Black man, was fatally shot in front of his girlfriend and her 4-year-old daughter by another police officer, Jeronimo Yanez of the St. Anthony police department in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. I attended a chilling, thought-provoking play about his murder at Penumbra Theatre, an African American theatre company in St. Paul, Minnesota, before heading back to Arkansas.

The invitation to co-edit this Special Issue came shortly after I experienced academic censoring because I used critical race theory in a report about Black students' experiences of racism at a Predominantly White University in the South. The report was gutted and essentially whitewashed to appeal to a conservative White audience. The invitation came after me and several members of the Fayetteville, Arkansas, community in which I live now partnered with the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) to erect a memorial marker and held a dedication ceremony to honor three Black male victims of racial terror lynchings that occurred in the area in 1856. The invitation came at a time when I was recognizing the frequency with which White social work educators overwhelmingly and persistently vote to recruit, hire, and promote other White social work educators while professing their commitment to addressing racial inequality and meeting their university's diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) goals.

The invitation came at a time when Arkansas Senator Tom Cotton, a White man, introduced legislation, along with other White Republican senators, to stop the *New York Times Magazine's 1619 Project* (Silverstein, 2019), the brainchild of a Black woman journalist, Nikole Hannah-Jones, from being taught in federally funded public K-12 schools. The invitation came after I learned from a friend that my 3rd-generation grandmother, Willie Ann Rogers, was mentioned in another *New York Times Magazine 1619 Project* article about slave auctions that ripped apart Black families, written by another Black woman, the historian and author of *The Weeping Time*, Anne C. Bailey. I would subsequently find out that Willie Ann's mother, Lizzie Spotsell Johnson, my 4th generation grandmother, was sold as a young woman on the auction block in Richmond, Virginia, to a White man named Ephram Hester and that she would eventually escape enslavement.

I grew up listening to my grandmother, Berdine Hall Williams, talk about how as a child, she accompanied her grandmother Willie Ann who delivered babies and cared for the sick in their

community and how it inspired my grandmother to want to become a doctor, but she couldn't become a doctor because of Jim Crow laws in the South and White segregationist laws in the North. The invitation came after the magnitude sunk in that my grandparents were born in Arkansas in 1919, less than 60 miles away from the 1919 Elaine Massacre of hundreds of Black sharecropping families who were murdered with impunity by a mob of White plantation owners because the Black families demanded a fair price for their cotton. My great grandparents had a farm in Brinkley, Arkansas, and worked as sharecroppers (among other jobs) along with many of their 14 children and successive generations of my relatives.

Black racial injustice has persisted in this country for over four hundred years. My ancestors have also persisted in their insistence on living as fully as possible while resisting White supremacy and domination through enslavement, the Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights movement, and the Black Lives Matter movement. The mythology that we live in a race neutral, colorblind, merit-based society, with equality for all is an impenetrable barrier to real change. In my article, "Living and Learning While Black: Navigating White Supremacy," included in this Special Issue, I share some personal and professional experiences with Black injustice and use critical race theory to frame strategies for disrupting structural Black racism within the educational system. I hope that our collective narratives provide the impetus needed to move readers to commit to taking action to dismantle racism before passage of the next four hundred years.

Descriptions of Articles

Authors in this Special Issue, provide us with detailed accounts of experiencing and witnessing antiblack racism. Their stories offer diverse perspectives across time, and space as well as different stages of development. They demonstrate how personal experiences can translate to social justice action in the form of strategies and recommendations. We know that racism is a public health crisis (Benjamin, 2020) that affects every aspect of a Black person's life. Despite its daily presence, talking about it can be difficult. In this Special Issue, 10 brave souls narrate such experiences not only to illuminate the pernicious hold that antiblack racism has on society but also to advance strategies for addressing it.

The theme of "I can't breathe," described as restricting one's ability to live creatively and exercise agency, forms the backdrop of three authors' narratives of historical and contemporary experiences of being racially restricted. In "Lingchi: Living and Learning While Black," Sober takes us to task about unrealistic expectation we place on Black children to behave in a certain manner and strongly urges "Whites" to unlearn and relearn the concepts of race and race construction. In "KG to PhD: How Antiblack Racism Shaped My Educational Experiences," Fields takes us on a journey starting with kindergarten where her experiences of antiblack racism can be aptly labeled as microaggressions. Valandra's "Living and Learning While Black: Navigating White Supremacy" gives voice to lived experiences that White supremacy labeled as inferior in many aspects of her life; using tenets of critical race theory, Valandra offers a framework for addressing antiblack racism in the education system. In a "Professor: A Reflection on Racialized Labor and White Fragility," Grier-Reed explains experiences with White fragility resulting in fatigue and recommends strategies for raising the awareness of

Whites to racialized labor as a burden for Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC). Using the title, "Trauma Triggers and Resilience: Reflecting on the Death of George Floyd and Its Impact on a Social Work Practitioner," White describes a more contemporary experience regarding how the murder of George Floyd triggered buried traumatic experiences and offers strategies to eliminate racial injustice in public policy, programmatic initiatives, and policing. Williams provides rich and searing narratives congruent with bringing Black women into the conversation about antiblack racism; using an intersectionality lens of race and gender in "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Leaving Academia When the Pain Was Too Much: Strategies for Black Survival," Williams gives voice to the stresses and challenges Black women face in academia and offers trauma-informed strategies focusing on self-survival.

Highlighting "get off my neck" strategies to deal with restrictions and barriers, the following articles interweave stories by and for Black people. Ogongi and Gitau's "Reflections from Facilitating Difficult Social Justice Conversations: Utilizing African Concepts of Restorative Dialogue" details their experiences incorporating an African concept, Ubuntu, when facilitating conversations about antiblack racism to engender powerful and genuine dialogue. In "Black Males' Plight to Breathe in America—Black Racial Injustice," Wright relates the use of an Afrocentric Perspective focusing on experiences of Black males' encounters with structural racism and White supremacy. Using the concept of safe space, Williams and Rios offer strategies for engagement in mental and behavioral health services for Black males who experience the cumulative effects of racial oppression in generations and communities in "Chop It Up! A Clinical Reflexive Case for Barber Shops as Safe Havens for Black Men During the Pandemic." In "Reflections on the Meaning of Jacksonville 60 Years Later by a Jewish Girl from Brooklyn: From Ignorance and Innocence to Awareness and Action," Mizrahi describes how having multiple identities in oppressed and oppressor groups while also observing antiblack racism resulted in heightened awareness of racism in her formative years; numerous strategies are offered to deal with racism including self-reflection.

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With Gratitude...

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We appreciate your commitment to this journal and its authors!!

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Lingchi: Living and Learning While Black

Whitney L. Sober

Abstract: The physical, mental, and emotional burden of societal pressures and expectations placed on me as a young Black child are unacceptable. It can be a struggle to develop a positive self-image without considering the extra strength it requires to overcome additional adversity such as racial oppression. The stereotypes I was exposed to as a young Black child made it difficult to imagine a world in which I could be myself. The stereotypes that reinforced the idea that Black children must conduct themselves as mature adults at a very young age to be respected are particularly harmful as they perpetuate White supremacy and elitism. The demands made by mainstream White society for Black children to comprehend and defend their personhood at such a young age is an unwarranted psychological burden that contributes to childhood trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder that will impact adult life.

Keywords: white fragility, white supremacy, intersectionality, social work

Conscious Reflection on a Racialized Upbringing

> The ancient Chinese torture tactic known as lingchi — which translates loosely to 'slow slicing,' 'lingering death,' or 'death by a thousand cuts' — was used as a method of execution from the seventh century up until 1905, when it was officially outlawed. As the name implies, lingchi was a drawn-out and brutal process.... Unlike most execution styles, which aim to kill sooner rather than later, the aim of lingchi was a long, slow punishment, intended to see how many cuts a person could withstand before dying, or simply losing consciousness. (Kuroski, 2018, para. 1-2)

As a mixed-race child raised in the southern United States, my upbringing was marred with cognitive dissonance, and thousands of cuts. My father, the grandson of a Klansman, and my mother, a direct descendent of enslaved Africans, were married in the late 1980s. Like so many others, they mistakenly believed that love and love alone would end racial hatred and bigotry. Incidentally, believing that passive actions will dismantle or repair the damages of racism aid in the reproduction of colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2014), White fragility (DiAngelo, 2018), other racially insensitive and mentally taxing White supremacist ideals. I believe that only the complete and truthful recounting of American history can propel us into a post-racial society.

Their marriage posed considerable challenges; at its onset, my father's family did not believe in miscegenation. My mother's family was not entirely supportive of their union either, fearing for her well-being. While neither of their families truly supported the marriage, their hesitations came from very different places. My paternal great-grandparents refused to meet my eldest sister until she was five years old. When reflecting on aspects of American history such as this, some White people defend individuals such as my great-grandfather, stating that they changed at the end of their lives. While this may be true, it does nothing to undo the pain and suffering felt by those persecuted all the years before they changed. White supremacists do not deserve to be

glorified or rewarded for treating their fellow man with basic human decency and respect after a lifetime of racial hatred. Growing up, my parents wanted to shield me and my siblings from the realities of racism, and often neglected to discuss race and race relations. They were unaware, like so many others, that ignoring a problem does not make it go away. I have always felt the harsh realities of racism. It is only now, as an adult, that I have the knowledge, understanding, and vocabulary to deeply and intelligibly reflect on my childhood experiences and social development.

Talking About Race and Racial Macro / Microaggressions

My father failed to discuss race because he lacked the experience and expertise to discuss such topics with respect to my position as a Black individual. All the times I can recall discussing race with my father have revolved around me correcting his historical oversights and biased views. As a straight White male, my father was not taught nor required to think critically about race—White, Black, or otherwise. My mother discussed the trials and tribulations of Blackness, especially the implications of being Black in America. I distinctly remember her warning me not to wear my hood up after the murder of Trayvon Martin. I also remember her sitting me down to discuss how I should conduct myself in the presence of the police. The only time my mother failed to discuss a particular issue was to protect my innocence as a child. Her primary motivation was for me to remain unburdened by society's deep faults.

Isolated from society, I grew up on the outskirts of a town of approximately 170 people. The only social interaction I received growing up was from my extended family on both sides. I began public school after my parents divorced in December of 2006. I was often the only Black person in my classes. Some contained one or two people of Indigenous heritage. As I was often the first and only Black person of color (POC) that many teachers, parents, and students had ever met, I was subject to countless macro and "microaggressions" (Sue et al., 2007).

Growing up mixed in a sequestered all-White community taught me to view myself as White and, in essence, reject and disown my Blackness. I often straightened my hair, avoided conversations about race, and unknowingly oppressed and perpetuated White supremacist ideologies. If I conducted myself too carelessly, my White classmates would remind me of my Blackness and thus of my place in society. I was often told that I was "pretty for a Black girl" and that I was "not ghetto and loud like the rest of *them*." Hearing comments such as this caused me a great deal of psychological distress. I wanted to defend myself and those like me, but if I were to speak out against such microaggressions, I would be typecast as another angry Black woman and subsequently diminished further. In my mind, it was better to be the "fun" and "non-threatening" version of myself. At some point in my adolescence, Blackness became "trendy," elevating me from something others would rather forget existed to a token spokesperson. As a mixed-race woman, I appear as just the right amount of Black to be palpable and thus quasi-acceptable by White people. I became an excuse for racists. "My friend is Black" translates to "I can continue with my racially insensitive and psychologically damaging behaviors because of my proximity to Blackness." In my experience, White people often only accepted Black people when required by law to do so or when Black people joined in on the racial degradation of their own community. The moment I began fighting for racial justice, I lost the support of some of my family and many of my so-called friends.

I rarely discussed race-related incidents or their impact as I and many others saw this as the "norm." As I got older, I outright refused to have these discussions with people as they were not discussions but attempts to gaslight or belittle me into racial submission. As John Henrik Clarke once said, "I only debate with my equals; all others I teach" (Dykes, 2020, 0.12). I am not sure if I will ever fully understand the impact those transgressions had and will have on my emotional well-being as they are innumerable and continuous. I struggled to find my place in the world, and now I struggle to create a place for me in the world.

Elementary and High School

In sixth grade, I moved to a bigger community—but I was still in a predominantly White and infamously redlined community. For the first time, I had the pleasure of learning with a Black classmate. While the experience did validate my feelings about racial conceptualization, it did present more questions. Why are Black students expected to be friends or know other Black students? Why is 'Black' something people whisper? What did it even mean to be Black? Why are Black students expected to know and understand race better than White students even though we have similar educational backgrounds? Every time a class would discuss slavery, Martin Luther King, Jr., or something of the like, my classmates would turn to look at me as if I had somehow been there. I still cannot quite place the looks on their faces. Pity? Guilt? Fear?

As I got older, I began to educate myself outside of the classroom. I have lived my life as an avid reader, and that alone has saved me in so many ways. Based on what the public school system taught me about Blackness, I would have never discovered self-love. Reading often provided me with a sense of escape, freedom, and knowledge. The public education system provided nothing conducive for racial enlightenment. By the time I was a junior in high school, my knowledge of Black history and race in general often exceeded that of my teachers. Because those around me were painfully undereducated about these issues, I often felt belittled by them. During the summer leading up to my senior year, my high school underwent a mascot change. The previous mascot had been a notorious symbol of racial hatred and "southern pride." During this transition, I heard students and parents alike argue in favor of keeping the old offensive mascot. At one point, there was a KKK rally in the parking lot, complete with a noose in support of the "rich cultural history" my school upheld. I felt unsafe at my school, and I began to truly understand the value of an education. At this time, I did not know how to advocate for myself, much less those who looked like me. Who would I even advocate to? The very system in which I had been placed was designed against me. I learned to lower my voice and to know my place as it were.

Colin Kaepernick began kneeling for the National Anthem to protest police brutality during my high school basketball career. I remember my straight White male basketball coach pulling the team aside for a huddle before a home game to tell us that we would *not* be kneeling in solidarity. In true White supremacist fashion, he made it a point to tell us that while he "respects our right to protest, as members of his team, we would not disrespect the military or veterans." Of course, I wondered about the Black men and women who had honorably served the country only to be killed by the police. However, I feared being ostracized, so I bit my tongue, looked the other way, and bottled it up inside.

Like most other children of color, I grew up very quickly due to a myriad of factors: one of them

being the over sexualization of the female body, another being the ever-present danger posed by the White authority. Young girls, especially young Black girls, are often made out to be "hoochies," and "jezebels" for simply being. Black girls are often blamed for sexual assaults or presumed to be "asking for it." This blatant disregard for Black girls dates to the antebellum slave era: an era in which Black women were not women, but property, unable to assume any level of body autonomy. At a young age, society began to reinforce the idea that Black girls were not girls but mini women. As a child, I skipped to adolescence because I was Black and needed to learn to control myself, lest I be seen as a threat. As an adolescent, I skipped to adulthood because the White male world saw me as a grown woman. My female White peers were envious of the treatment, not recognizing the behavior as objectifying or as grooming. How was I supposed to advocate for myself in a system that was not designed to protect me?

The mental exhaustion of constantly having to fearlessly call out anti-Blackness and White supremacy, coupled with the constant berating of the "but I'm not racist" racists, made very little time to enjoy being a child. I have always felt personally responsible for educating people about race because I have felt the brute force effects of their ignorance. I was forced to defend my personhood, my intelligence, my worthiness, my beauty—and my mother's, and her mother's, and her mother's mother, all the way back to Africa. The treatment I faced as a young Black girl unbalanced my life. On the one hand, I was ugly and uneducated. On the other hand, I was an evil, sophisticated mastermind. Either way I could not fit the mold society had picked out for me.

White parents, teachers, and politicians shield White children from the harshness of reality at the expense of Black children. These uneducated, undereducated, or miseducated children grow up to believe in a false narrative. They will inevitably inflict harm by failing to understand the history of our nation. It is not the responsibility of the oppressed to educate the oppressor, just as it is not the responsibility of a child to educate an adult. Whiteness is taught to be assumed as correct, innocent, or angelic, whereas Blackness is taught to be assumed as wrong, criminal, unintelligent, or demonic. The undue burden placed on individuals who are non-White breeds disaster for both sides. I grew up afraid and angry, while my classmates just grew up. Unburdened by the knowledge of these ideas and atrocities, my White classmates did not need to reflect on society in the same manner I did. Unable to understand why I felt the way I felt, White people often tried to dismiss my emotional state as unfounded.

Historically White Supremacist University

I was 18 years old and attending a university by the time I had my first Black professor. I wish I could say it was for a class that did not pertain to race. As much as I enjoyed being taught by someone who saw me and understood what I was going through, it pained me to see the blatant disrespect my teacher was subjected to at the hands of White students. Never in my life have I seen White male doctorate holders addressed in such a manner by their students. Although I attended a historically White supremacist university and thus the population was predominantly White, I met more Black people than ever before. I was still often one of the few, if not the only, Black person in my classes. In my first semester, I had a White male professor allow his students to maintain the belief that White privilege was a myth. During my junior year, one of my professors told my 25+ classmates of mostly White men that Black men in inner cities were lazy

and prone to criminality, along with a list of other racially degrading statements and sentiments. Openly comparing the Black community to the Asian American community, he claimed that Black people were lazy because other racial minorities have been successful. I asked him if he had ever heard of the "bootstrap myth" (Wilson, 1986, p. 23) or of the "triangulation of race" (Kim, 1999, p. 106), to which he replied "no." I then asked him if he had heard of Kimberle Crenshaw, to which he again replied, "no."

This classroom experience was so traumatic for me that after the full course of events, I filed a formal grievance with the university and forcefully withdrew from the class. Upon hearing my complaint, the university investigated my claim; however, it ruled that no punishable wrongdoing had occurred. The response was underwhelming. One staff member told me that I should prepare for such dispositions and reactions from my co-workers and bosses in the future.

Although I have four years of supervised study and two years of unsupervised research on this issue, as well as 20 years of personal lived experiences, uneducated White people refuse to hear me on this topic. White supremacy allows mediocrity to live as greatness. The critiques of Whiteness and White ideals are so foreign to White people themselves that some believe that mentioning race, calling out racism, and/or holding people accountable for their actions and statements is racist. The psychological wage of Whiteness is the burden of educating White people about Whiteness.

A neighbor once told me she did not believe in systemic racism and then later in the very same conversation proceeded to mention how her father had a friend named "n-word Joe." As I was visibly disturbed by the usage of such language, she launched into a speech about words only being words, the n-word not being offensive to her, and even going so far as to say that she would not care if I called her a "cracker."

When recounting racist incidents, it is common for White people to assume the innocence of my perpetrator and question or deny my experience. They claim such-and-such was not racist or was racist by accident, and therefore excusable. The blatant refusal to make amends and impart radical changes in behavior and thinking has allowed racism and anti-Blackness to permeate our society. Even now, as I write this, I wonder about the reactions of my family. Will they hear me? Will they examine their behavior, or will they demonize me and double down on their refusal to see the world through someone else's eyes?

Solution

That is my story, and I have every right to tell it. If reading what I have to say upsets you, imagine how I feel having lived it. Every day that I wake up, I wake up Black. I wake up every day with 400 years' worth of societal mistreatment to wade through and fight against. I cannot, I will not "get over it" or "calm down about it." For far too long Black people, myself included, have been pushed aside, pushed down, and pushed away. I will no longer satiate the desire that others have to feel comfortable about my abuse and oppression. I am not allowed to speak out against racism without someone trying to sweeten the blow. I am tired of White people telling me how I should feel about being Black, who I should forgive, how, and when. I am required through expectation to teach non-Black Americans about the history of OUR country while

simultaneously holding their hands. Until White America sees racism, anti-Blackness, and White supremacy as a problem to be solved by White people, we will not have reconciliation. For too long, the oppressed have been forced to bend to the will of the oppressor.

Implications for Social Work Practice

The persistent abuses of Black children and youth for generations will require active work to overcome. Social work by proxy is an extension of White supremacist ideologies. Social workers hold special power in our society, as they have the power to make or break families. We must ask ourselves who founded these institutions and why? What is the ideal family model? What does mental health look like for those with no escape? How can help be delivered to underrepresented communities? Who will decide these answers? Who will enforce them?

Racism is a deep social issue within American society that will require individuals in positions of power to understand the critical dynamics at play in 21st century American society. We must all unlearn and relearn the concepts that we have been collectively taught regarding healthy parenting and communicating styles.

Social workers, like every human being on this planet, have an obligation to show up fully for those around them, especially those in pain. How do we show up for young Black people? We must educate ourselves to the point that our ignorance no longer physiologically damages our youth on a national scale. Racism is salient in American society and affects every corner of the country. No job, household, or life is untouched by its ugly hand. We owe it to our communities to not look away. We must roll up our sleeves and hold space for tough conversations. We must not be afraid to be ostracized for the innocent.

Conclusion

White people must unlearn and relearn the concepts that they have been taught regarding race and race construction. Whiteness holds built-in privilege. That privilege encompasses the ability to simply read and learn about the issues others experience first-hand. If, as a child, I was expected to be able to critically think about and articulate ideas involving race, adults should be able to do that now. White social workers have a greater burden placed upon them than the average White American. The power and influence social workers hold over communities of color cannot be taken lightly. If we are not a part of the solution, we are a part of the problem.

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Kindergarten to PhD: How Anti-Black Racism Shaped My Educational Experiences

LaShawnda N. Fields

Abstract: I was introduced to anti-Black racism and robbed of my childhood innocence very early in my academic journey. From kindergarten through the completion of my doctorate degree, I have had to manage my responses to and navigate a system built to sustain White supremacy while seeking academic excellence. In this narrative, I share some of the barriers and triumphs of my educational journey. The lack of inclusion I constantly dealt with led me to question my abilities and self-worth. My current scholarship serves as an opportunity to intervene and disrupt these oppressive systems so others can potentially have more equitable experiences. Over several decades and a variety of professional and personal experiences impacted by anti-Black racism, I am working towards dismantling White supremacy within social work education. Finally, I proffer ways in which individuals and institutions can work to commit to anti-racism policies and practices.

Keywords: equity in education, inclusive cultures, tenacity, cultural sensitivity, White supremacy

In the Beginning…

My first experience with race and racism was in kindergarten. I didn't have the language or understanding as to what was going on, but I can still remember how different I felt. My teacher, who was White, was handed a slip with my name on it as we were introduced. She turned to me and pointedly said, "I am never going to be able to spell your name." I replied that I didn't need her to teach me how to spell my name because I could do so independently. When I think about this, I am always grateful to my mother for having the insight to know my name could be a way for others to mistreat me, so she was proactive. I arrived reading and writing and extremely self-sufficient to the start of my education experience. The cold and agitated response from my teacher was my introduction to the isolation and hostility that often came with being a Black student in a predominantly White institution (PWI). Over the years I would face many microaggressions. Huber & Solorzano (2015) define microaggressions as subtle, automatic, and unconscious predominately verbal assaults that cumulatively take an academic, physiological, and psychological toll on their victims.

The intentional mispronunciation of my first name was the most common microaggression I faced. I would correct people and spell my name phonetically, yet there were often letters added or removed when I was called upon. I began to resent my name. I was growing up in the era of Heather, Amanda, and Jennifer being the most popular names in my classrooms. I yearned for a name that would allow people to accurately and easily identify me. By third grade, I decided I would begin to use my middle name because it was more simple. I decided on the first day of school going forward I would ask my instructors and classmates to address me by my middle name. At nine years old, I thought I had found a solution that would allow me to feel "normal" while attending this PWI. Once I changed my name, I felt more included as a student, but it

would not be long before I once again felt targeted and distant from my classmates.

I began to stand out academically, and most of the students did not respond well to this achievement. I was often teased and taunted because of my outstanding grades and the way some teachers would use me as the standard for behavior and academic excellence. I would ask my teachers not to make a big deal of my performances. I was often held up like the most amazing student because I was bused in from a lower-performing school district, not simply because I was performing well. It was as if most of the administrators could not believe I was capable of excelling. In both first and second grade, I was offered an opportunity to skip a grade to get me more challenging instruction. My mother refused to allow me to accept these double advancements out of fear I would not be as mature as my classmates. I would hold a grudge towards her for some time, as I saw this opportunity as a way to once again be average and blend in with others. I would always say to myself that I could cut back and get more wrong answers and lower my grades, but that never set well with me. My family expected me to excel, and it was important to me to always do my best.

When I was commencing from fifth grade into middle school, I won the top spot for the Presidential Academic Honors. There was controversy before the ceremony because a Black girl was winning the award, but my mother put an end to all of that immediately. My mother had a conference with the school principal and guidance counselor. They reviewed my transcript although this had been done by my teacher, and it was determined that I had the top academic performance of my peers for grades K-5. The parents of my peers were assured that, after further review, I was indeed the top pupil, and the ceremony went forward without further incident. This was a situation where no one ever explicitly said they could not understand how a Black child had outperformed their White child, but my mother and I both knew what we had experienced.

In sixth grade, there was a moment that led me to wanting to change back to using my first name. A teacher had found a note that was signed with my middle name and assumed it was written by me. This was my advanced math teacher and this class only had two Black students: my close friend and me. In front of my classmates, and close friend, my teacher verbally assaulted me for something I knew nothing about. I don't remember all the specifics, but in essence her point was until Black students stopped fighting to resolve disagreements, we would never be able to live quality lives. I had never misbehaved in the classroom, and I was one of the top pupils, but at that moment none of this mattered. It did not occur to the teacher that more than one student could be known by the same nickname. I thought if she knew anything about my community, she would know that there were probably three girls called by that name on each block in the inner city where I resided. I was from a two-parent, middle-class home that happened to be in the city that led to me being bused out to a school district with greater resources. Whatever assumptions this teacher had about students who participated in the desegregation program could not have been further from my truth. I was so embarrassed and hurt that I never spoke in her classroom again.

The author of the note was eventually identified, yet my teacher never apologized to me or acknowledged how she had behaved towards me. Once again, I felt attacked and alone. I chose not to tell my parents about this incident because I felt they were often intervening on my behalf,

and I wanted to be able to stand on my own. Additionally, I did not want to be removed from the school and kids I had been with since kindergarten. I felt responsible for managing my experiences on my own. In some ways, I felt that I was protecting my parents from having to engage in what I interpreted to be difficult conversations.

The Formative Years…

This confrontation with my sixth grade teacher changed me in ways it would take me years to understand. Up until that point, I often ignored or made excuses for the way White people treated me, but that was no longer true. I began to feel that White people were awful and I needed to protect myself from them. I listened more intently when they spoke to me. I watched how they moved around me, and I was very cautious when speaking with them. It was draining. I stopped participating in class as much, I cut back on extra-curricular activities, and I wanted to know the racial make-up of all spaces I would enter before arriving. I became obsessed with race and racism. I no longer wanted to read a lot of the young adult books I had explored that had White characters. I was seeking out Black experiences exclusively. This was difficult for several reasons in the early '90s, but change was on the horizon.

I transferred districts for high school and attended a predominantly Black magnet school. I had never gone to school with so many Black students, and it was both comforting and challenging at the same time. It felt amazing to have people correctly pronounce my name; there were many people who listened to the music I enjoyed, who kept up with some of the same current events that interested me, and it was overall easy to show up daily. I was concerned in the beginning because I stood out not because of race but because I spoke differently than most of my peers. I had gone from an environment where my Blackness was often an issue or topic of discussion to not being "Black enough" for some at my new school. An additional layer was that I had a fair complexion, freckles, and naturally red hair in my youth. When the film *Jungle Fever* (Lee, 1991) was released, I had a close friend hold my hand and say we matched the film's promotional poster. As difficult as it was some days to convince people both my parents were Black, my experiences at this majority Black high school were so much healthier than my time at a PWI.

An Institution on a Mission…

Following an amazing and inclusive high school experience, I chose to attend a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) in my city. It turned out that the institution was not a good fit, so I transferred. I loved having all Black professors and classmates and knowing I was a part of a rich history, but I was not satisfied academically. The curriculum lacked rigor, and I felt that I was not being challenged. The major I initially chose was no longer appealing, so I felt it was best to move on. I found myself back at a PWI for undergrad. It wasn't awful, and there were enough Black students that I found my circle and thrived. Years later, I returned to school to pursue my MSW. Again, I stayed local and attended a school that felt out of reach following high school. Black high schoolers in the area often considered this top-rank research institution to be an ideal fit for wealthy White students from private high schools. This did not include me because I was Black, not wealthy, and a graduate of a struggling public school district. Several

years later, I found myself in the Whitest educational experience I would have to date. I expected more from a school of social work, and an institution situated in such an urban area in a predominantly Black city.

I was working full-time at the same institution as I completed my graduate program, so I knew how low the Black student representation was, but I did expect more in social work and the culture to be healthier. As a new student-support staff member, I was beginning to understand politics and policies in higher education from a non-student perspective. I was supporting students through the Student Support Services TRiO Grant, which aims to ensure low-income and/or first-generation students persist through to graduation. Our institution supported 200 students each academic year and about half of those students were Black, whereas Black students only made up about eight percent of the general student body. I began participating in all campus service opportunities that were attempting to move the needle on matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Following some awful anti-Black racism situations involving Greek life, professor interactions, and graffiti around campus, the provost and chancellor responded to the pleas from Black undergraduates by developing a strategic plan dedicated to improving the campus culture and climate around race relations.

As a staff member, I was cautiously optimistic that actual change was going to be prioritized. I knew so often these efforts were more about saying the right thing versus doing the actual work to ignite change. I was so proud of my institution as they hired a vice provost to focus on recruitment and retention of Black faculty members across the campus. Many of the staff-generated affinity groups and diversity initiatives received funding and proper recognition. Resources were allocated to improve representation across the campus, and change was visible. Ten years later, there remains much work to be done, but the institution has several metrics to show what can happen when a desire to change is genuine, prioritized, and properly financed. After eight years of supporting the campus community—more specifically, the Black undergraduate students—I was ready to take on similar challenges at another institution that stated it was ready to make similar strides.

Higher Education Lip Service…

I decided it would be a great idea to take on new challenges by changing institutions. I believed that the more campuses I could help begin their journey towards equity and inclusion, the greater my overall impact would be on healthy cultures in higher education. According to Parsons et al. (2018), institutions that evolve beyond passive, independent system-wide or department-level policies around diversity and inclusion to actively solving problems simultaneously at the departmental and institutional levels will achieve greater success with improving their cultures and climates. Unfortunately, I had accepted a role with an institution that had not reached the evolution Parsons, et al. spoke of, but they were deceitful in presenting themselves as such. I was hired to split my time between diversity initiatives and international programming. It made perfect sense on paper, and I was told the administration was committed to change at the request of both students and faculty members.

After only two weeks into my new role, I realized I had made a grave mistake. The institution

was not genuinely interested in changing the culture. I was hired to give a false impression that the institution was committed to change, but it was just lip service. They were beginning to say many of the right things, but they weren't actually interested in doing the work. In my first two months on the job, a climate survey had been developed and administered in partnership with a local diversity organization. Upon analysis of the data, the responses to the open-ended questions highlighted just how toxic the environment was for some of the Black students. Due to our experience with micromanagement by the college president, my supervisor and I thought it would be best to allow him to review this data before publishing our findings in publicly available reports. He stated we were prevented from disclosing any open-ended responses, and limited us to producing a one-page report. I was completely devastated; I realized I had been censored and would not survive the toxic culture of the institution for long. I had worked in challenging organizations before, but never had I been told to sit still and be quiet.

In addition to limiting the climate survey, I was instructed to end all diversity-related activities for the foreseeable future. I later found out that a few alumni were not pleased with diversity and inclusion being prioritized and threatened to end their donations to the college. This financial threat resulted in me sitting idly in my office for 18 months twiddling my thumbs. I was miserable and regretted leaving my previous institution. I had to figure out how to cope with my budget being eliminated, as well as my instructions to sit and wait until things settled down. While I was not allowed to plan events or engage directly in diversity and inclusion initiatives, I used my time on campus to partner with other units who had more autonomy to help shape campus activities. Additionally, with this vital work being postponed, I developed a few presentations for national conferences as a coping mechanism. The effect of my positions swiftly changing from intentionally hearing the voices of students to improve their experiences to not working at all took a toll on my physical well-being. I was dealing with chronic headaches, depression and anxiety, and random panic attacks. Not only was I dealing with this, but I believed I had let down the Black students who were so enthusiastic about my arrival. The worst part of my experience was the expectation to recruit students of color without simultaneously working to ensure they had an inclusive experience should they attend the institution. During the recruitment season of my second year in this position, I was sent to Atlanta to recruit students from Spelman College, Morehouse College, and Clark Atlanta University.

During my MSW program and time as a staff member at my previous institution, I had realized the power that faculty held on campus, and the many ways in which academic freedom could be used to influence higher education cultures. Accepting my commitment toward equity and inclusion, I considered obtaining a PhD. I believed that having more buy-in would allow me to be instrumental in the changes I hoped to see and know students deserved. However, I did not always feel capable of completing this task. Part of this hesitation was due to not having a Black female faculty member throughout my graduate studies and realizing there were only a handful of Black women faculty members across my entire university. I had experienced some of the barriers to doing this work as a staff member and was not certain that joining faculty would lead to the results I expected.

It was during this recruitment trip to Atlanta that I was completely honest with myself and decided I could no longer be guided by fear. Much like in my childhood years, I was afraid that

while I had done well academically, I would not rise to the occasion and complete a doctoral program. I knew many people who had enrolled in doctoral studies and stopped once reaching the "all-but-dissertation" phase of the program. I thought it was best to not start rather than to have to eventually quit. All of these thoughts were running through my mind, but I was able to complete the task at hand. I interacted with students and recruiters from all over, but I did not try to influence one student to attend the college I was representing. I shared the facts of the institution and fulfilled my job duties, but I was very honest about the lack of diversity and inclusion and how I did not expect change in the short-term. When I returned to my hotel, I realized the time was now to pursue my doctorate and change my approach to diversifying higher education.

The Art of "Othering" …

During my two-year tenure at the PWI that was not prepared to authentically engage in creating an anti-racist culture, I was able to develop relationships with some of the Black women students. I was able to informally mentor these students and support events they organized through the Black Student Association we revamped. It was through these students and my time as a graduate student that I grew more interested in the specific experiences of Black women in higher education. In the fall of 2015, I began my doctoral studies at the PWI where I had worked for eight years and completed my MSW. Based on my prior experiences with the institution, I knew that diversity continued to be a challenge, but the school had made great strides in creating an inclusive culture. Still, I was not prepared to be the only Black member of my cohort of 13 students, which was a large cohort within a school of social work. There had been several Black prospective students present on interview day. Of course, I have no way of knowing who received offers and who declined said offers, but I would discourage institutions from having a single member of a demographic group in a cohort whenever possible. Thankfully, there were Black women students in cohorts ahead of mine, but it was not the same because they were at very different points in the program from myself.

Reflecting on my time as a MSW student and now a doctoral student, I committed to using my scholarship to draw attention to what Collins (2002) noted as justification for race, gender, and class oppression by way of frequent images of Black women as "other." I struggled nearly daily with "imposter syndrome" throughout my graduate studies. I felt I was granted admission because I had previously attended the institution for my MSW and because I had been a staff member. I thought of countless reasons that I was admitted to the program except for my academic record, adjunct teaching experience, and commitments to scholarship and teaching. Being the only Black member of my cohort also caused me to consider that I may have been fulfilling some sort of minority- or diversity-driven quota. When minority students are seen as not fitting in, this may lead to faculty and administration misinterpreting their behaviors as lacking interest, hostile, uncommitted, or unable to be successful in their studies, while the students may be working to manage the racialized stress related to the experience of being "other" (Weng & Gray, 2017). I was afraid to speak up in class most days out of fear that an incorrect answer would haunt me through the entire program. Whenever the opportunity was available, I took courses in other disciplines to increase the likelihood that I would not be the only Black student in the course. These experiences helped shape my interest in better

understanding if others felt similarly and, if so, how they were coping. This led me to study Black women scholars' experiences through the prisms of imposter syndrome and authenticity in schools of social work. It is this feeling of being "other" that can lead to these scholars having to manage their responses to both internal and external racism. I expected more from social work, as had others.

At the start of my third year in my doctoral program, I only visited campus as needed. I had healthy enough relationships with members of my cohort, but many of our discussions evolved into brainstorming sessions for their research agendas or therapy sessions for problems in their personal lives. I was on average ten years older than most members of my cohort and a great listener, but it began to feel as though I was being used to fulfill a "mammy" stereotype. Collins (2002) defines a mammy as a faithful, obedient domestic servant who places the needs of her White employers above her own. Though the dynamics were not identical, I definitely felt the interactions with several members of my cohort mirrored this behavior, resulting in me rendering myself unavailable. While disappearing solved one problem, it created more feelings of isolation and loneliness that allowed my experiences with imposter syndrome to increase.

I was selected for a fellowship at my institution that seeks to diversify the professoriate by funding underrepresented doctoral students. It was within this community that I felt most supported, safe, and empowered. I was surrounded with mostly Black students from all disciplines, with whom I developed long-standing relationships. I attribute much of my success to this program, as it was a constant reminder that I could complete the journey. We had annual meetings with program alumni, professional development funds, and opportunities to present our research within and beyond the campus community. Much of what I was not receiving within the School of Social Work was provided by this campus-wide initiative. It would serve universities well as they begin to prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion to factor in transdisciplinary support, because most departments at a college will likely have limited representation. This is a way by which students can have greater access to faculty members of color and other potential mentors.

The Power of the Pen…

As previously stated, after two years of struggling my way through feelings of isolation and loneliness as a doctoral student, I decided to change my research agenda to focus on eradicating White supremacy from social work education. My research specifically centers on the voices of Black women faculty and doctoral students in schools of social work. When I made the decision to change research directions, I was met with a great deal of resistance. I was told the population was not one many would be interested in learning more about. One advisor said the representation of Black women faculty was so small I would not be able to have a solid power analysis. Finally, I was told that qualitative research was not as rigorous as quantitative research, and I would struggle to obtain a job upon graduating. These comments all came before I had fully flushed out my thoughts, while I was just casually mentioning a change in my focus. Initially I thought about listening to those who were in positions of power and influence and selecting a different research area. In all honesty, I was heartbroken and ready to walk away from it all. Instead, I dug in my heels and decided this was exactly the work I needed to be

doing; I needed to show people how different the experiences of Black women in higher education could be in comparison to their counterparts.

The reactions to my interests affirmed what I already knew to be true: Not many social work researchers were interested in discussions surrounding race, equity, diversity, or inclusion. I was honestly hurt as one of the faculty members who wrote a letter of recommendation into the program had waved off my interest as if it were a complete waste of time. This was a White man who I previously believed to be an ally and now I was having to question our relationship. My advisor at the time was a Black man. He also was not supportive of this line of inquiry, making it clear to me that as a Black woman, my experiences were not only unique but potentially invisible to others. It was difficult for me to stand firm in my decision initially, because the rejection came from those whose opinions I had trusted and valued for years. However, I eventually found my support system. The advisor I had during my MSW program and a professor I had during the first year of my program agreed to serve as my dissertation chair and she was also excited about my newly identified research topic. She identified as a Black woman social work faculty member and had her own stories about being both invisible and hyper-visible within the school. Through these supports, I received the guidance I needed to complete the arduous task of finishing and defending a dissertation.

Black feminist thought prioritizes empowerment and believes it is essential that Black women intellectuals are committed to advancing the theme of self-definition, because speaking for oneself and crafting one's own agenda is essential to empowerment (Collins, 2002). Black feminist thought is the foundation upon which I am building my research agenda. It is my priority to uplift and amplify the voices of Black women in the academy, specifically within social work education. As a discipline charged with ensuring social justice, dignity, and worth of the individual, we need to constantly engage in self-reflection and make sure we are adhering to the National Association of Social Workers (2021) *Code of Ethics* and being true to who we claim to be.

From a very early age, I have been burdened by my race and gender in trying to navigate a world that was created without my needs being considered. I am positioned at the intersection of racism and sexism which means I am often seen as less worthy, less capable, or even invisible to some. Through my scholarship and teaching, I am committed to reducing and/or eliminating barriers for the Black women who follow me in social work education and beyond. The expectations that Black women will survive and thrive while being discriminated against, overlooked for advancement, and overworked have been reinforced by numerous laws and policies (Collins, 2000). The time is now to combat these archaic beliefs and behaviors. I stand on the soldiers of giants, and I am grateful for the opportunity to uplift others along this journey.

Possible Solutions…

Having gone through many racist experiences throughout my education, I would like to proffer a few ways in which institutions and individuals can better interact with Black students. It's actually quite simple, but I believe people like to give the impression that it is difficult to absolve themselves of responsibility. This work can be done with simple research and genuine effort.

There are countless free-of-charge resources devoted to exploring implicit bias and discrimination, along with equity and inclusion. A simple internet search can lead to many tools such as book clubs, webinars, podcasts, and curriculums that can be used for course development, professional development trainings, and/or personal growth. While these resources have been available for years, their accessibility has multiplied tremendously following the murder of George Floyd and subsequent protests against racism in the United States.

The responsibility must fall on individuals and organizations to engage in self-reflection and commit to ending anti-Black racism, both systemically and individually. I could never recall every racist interaction I have experienced, but collectively it has led to a state of exhaustion from the burden of navigating White supremacy in spaces that should be safe for members of all communities. At such an early age, Black children lose their innocence, as they are often taught early the responsibilities tied to remaining safe while navigating White supremacy. It would be ideal if White children were being taught early how to behave in anti-racist ways to reduce the burden on Black children. I believe we have much work to do before this is normalized, but it should be the goal.

Here are a few more suggestions to move the needle on matters of anti-racism and dismantling White supremacy, specifically in the classroom. First, it is important to make an honest effort when pronouncing a student's name. This is a sign of respect and shows interest in the student as an individual. Throughout history, most of us have learned to pronounce all types of names from creators of classical music, art, and literature from a variety of cultures; therefore, we should also learn to correctly pronounce the names of people we interact with in person. It is also important to make sure each student feels that you, the teacher, believe they can succeed, and that you are committed to helping them reach their full potential. Students should not be made to be representatives of their race; instructors should encourage "I" statements, so students are only speaking of their individual lived experiences. These are some ways we can prevent biases from negatively influencing the relationships being cultivated within educational settings.

Additionally, educational institutions—from elementary to secondary school as well as at the post-secondary level—should make every effort to prevent situations where there is only one student of color in a class or cohort. I recognize this will not always be possible, but it should be given serious consideration. Identifying as a Black person is not a monolithic experience, so this is not to imply these students will always get along or support one another, but at least they will have representation. Increasing representation of faculty and staff should also be a priority. It is important that students of color have an opportunity to engage with people who share some of their identities. This can serve as a source of confidence and inclusion for these students who may otherwise feel uncomfortable and out of place.

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Living and Learning While Black: Navigating White Supremacy

Valandra

Abstract: Anti-Black racism shaped my life experiences in many ways. The pervasiveness of Whiteness and White supremacy in the United States required me to learn and unlearn specific lessons—some critical to my survival and others that hindered my ability to thrive fully—leaving me with an insatiable longing for freedom. This narrative describes some of the pivotal moments in my journey of living and learning under the yoke of White supremacy. I examine the coping mechanisms and *un*learning necessary to combat racial battle fatigue and strike a healthy balance of social activism and self-care. I use critical race theory to focus salient experiences of racism and counter-narratives that support my life process. While I recognize that people of all ethnicities can perpetuate anti-Black racism, my narrative is centered on living in relation to White people and White systems of domination.

Keywords: resilience, strategic learning, unlearning, white supremacy, whiteness

Early Memories of Race and Racism

One of my first memories of racism was the execution of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King by an act of the state in 1968 (Pepper, 2018). I was seven years old, and I feared for my life listening to the panic and alarm in the voices of my elders, who, with their eyes glued to the TV, bellowed, "They shot King! They shot King!" A feeling of devastation, doom, and gloom lingered in me and our household for weeks as we watched the rioting and the burning of buildings, the demonstrations, and the massive memorial services that took place afterward. I remember the uncertainty in the air, and I can still feel the fear I felt in the pit in my stomach like it happened yesterday. I don't know how we returned to some semblance of normalcy in our lives after that, but I do remember the belief that "people who look like me are not safe in this country" became seared on my psyche. Throughout my life, several experiences continually reinforced that childhood insight in a way that I believe has become an irreversible core creed for me. The other unspoken truth that I instinctively understood was that the "they" that my elders were referring to through their heart-wrenching revelations were White people. Forever afterward, I always knew who "they" were whenever my elders felt that life necessitated that they guide my comportment in any way to shield me from the racial hatred and mayhem of White people generally, or the disregarding and discriminating behaviors of specific White people, to ensure my survival.

Another early memory I have does not completely belong to me, but it influenced my life and self-image profoundly. It was conveyed to me in greater detail by my mother as I tried to piece together the fragments of memories I have about my sister riding her little red tricycle around the house. My mother remembers my sister riding her tricycle around the basement once while my mother was down there doing the laundry. At some point, my sister stopped circling the area on her trike, looked up at my mother inquisitively, and asked, "Mommy, what are *colored* people?" My mother said, "That's what you are, honey, you are *colored*." My sister started crying and told my mother, "I don't want to be *colored*." My mom tried to console her, explaining that

"everyone in our family is *colored* and it's not bad to be colored—that's just what 'they' call us." I don't remember if my sister felt any relief from that explanation or not, but what I do remember is that experience got paired with riding the little red tricycle around, and it didn't feel so enjoyable and free anymore to roam around the house on that little three-wheeler.

As an adult, I would learn about the famous Clark and Clark (1940) doll experiment, where preschool Black children overwhelmingly chose the White doll over a Black doll as the one they would prefer to play with and the one they believed to be nicer. The racial trauma (Comas-Diaz, 2016; Williams, Printz, et al., 2018) and indoctrination of White supremacy seeps into the pores of the subconscious like a poisonous invisible gas. I am grateful that my sister and I eventually learned, through the persistent and unwavering love and efforts of my elders and community, that the White racist world that we live in is the problem, not our skin color. While I learned in some ways not to adopt that White hatred of myself, my family's efforts unfortunately did not totally protect me from internalizing racial stereotypes about Black people. This is something I have had to unlearn through consciously and consistently reflecting on the impact of the steady, unrelenting stream of negative imagery I witness about our lives as Black people.

The K-12 School System

> White supremacy affects every element of the U.S. education system. (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2021, front cover)

My relationship to the formal education system in this country is linked to the historical legacy of the time of chattel slavery in the lives of Black Americans, when learning to read and write was a crime punishable by death (Rodriguez, 2007). Jim Crow laws and racial discrimination in the North continued to ensure that, if educated at all, Blacks would receive an inferior or otherwise substandard formal education in the public school system (Edwards & Thompson, 2010). With the passage of the civil rights legislation known as *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, the American school system was effectively desegregated. However, the systematic ways in which Black children are disparaged and targeted for racially biased practices and policies within the school system have persisted (Horsford, 2018; Marrus, 2015) despite federal legislation designed to eliminate racial segregation and discrimination. This is particularly true in predominantly White schools. Facing racial injustice within the school system, Black students must continue to find ways to resist racism and create counter-stories (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004) that challenge dominant White narratives. For example, while learning to excel educationally using a host of strategies from many sources, Black students must also contend with racial stereotypes, White myths of meritocracy, whitewashed historical accounts, and untrustworthy claims of race neutrality.

As soon as I could hold a pencil in my hand correctly, my mother taught me how to spell my name. In that "pay attention, this is serious" kind of tone of voice, she explained to me, "When you start school, they are going to try to shorten your name to *Val*. You tell them your name is not *Val*, it's *Valandra*, and you tell them how it's spelled; do you understand?" I was around four or five years old, and my mother was right. At least one teacher in every grade I attended from kindergarten through college attempted to shorten my name. I attended predominantly White schools throughout my formal education, and all my teachers were White except for a

Black female math teacher I had in the seventh grade and a Black male biology teacher I had as a senior in high school. Constantly having to assert my right to be called by my name was only the beginning of a long educational career of navigating Whiteness (Doane & Bonilla-Silva, 2003) to achieve my academic and career goals.

I did not like school, and I was an average student. I hated the feelings of alienation and isolation I experienced regularly sitting in a sea of Whiteness every day for so much of the day. No one was particularly mean to me, but the absence of Black students and teachers was so constant that I often felt stifled emotionally and psychologically. I felt like I had to hold my breath and always stay on guard just in case something happened—in case "they" decided to enact their hatred, prejudice, or violence against me without warning. I would have no recourse or hope for support in an educational system that only begrudgingly tolerated people—*colored* people—who look like me learning to read and write in the first place. The feelings of isolation and loneliness were most pervasive for me during history and world geography classes. In history classes there was never anything taught about the history of Black people, except when the lesson got to the Civil War and the teacher would utter the words "...and Lincoln freed the slaves," and that was the only reference to Black people I ever heard which did not garner feelings of pride but just the opposite. I felt shame and embarrassment sitting in a class all year long with White students learning about the many grand contributions of their ancestors, when the only thing I learned about my people was that I come from slaves and Lincoln freed us. The other thing I learned in history class is that these slaves were brought from the "uncivilized" continent of Africa, which made world geography another dreaded class for me. I was taught nothing about Black history to be proud of from the formal education I received in elementary, junior high, and high school. During this whitewashed racist formal learning, I was required to stand up every day in elementary school and pledge allegiance to a flag and a nation that erased the existence and contributions of my people, dehumanized us, and exploited our bodies and minds regularly. Talk about cognitive dissonance! I hated it – and having to perform that act of allegiance and patriotism everyday with my hand over my heart was another betrayal of myself. Jones (2020) refers to what I experienced as "curriculum violence." She explains that "curriculum violence occurs when educators and curriculum writers have constructed a set of lessons that damage or otherwise adversely affect students intellectually and emotionally" (Jones, 2020, p. 2). Inaccurately representing or omitting historical narratives of groups of people is one form of curriculum violence that can be repeated throughout a student's school experience. Other examples include teachers requiring students to engage in staged reenactments of slavery such as slave auctions, along with students dressing up as enslaved people, plantation owners, Ku Klux Klan members, etc., and referring to this "instruction" as Black history.

Thankfully, I had lived experiences which offered counter-narratives (Miller et al., 2020) to the whitewashed racist history I was subjected to in school. I learned about Black history within my family, community, and church, especially when I spent my summers with my grandparents in a Black neighborhood attending a Black church. I was able to see the accomplishments of enterprising Black leaders firsthand and learn about important historical Black pioneers from the oral histories shared within my extended family and community. Black parents, grandparents, relatives, and neighbors have a long legacy of devising ways to help their children learn, sharing books, oral histories, and other resources within their communities (Norris, 2010; Williams, 2005). I am also grateful that we also had a Black newspaper that published a Black History

spread every February and illuminated the accomplishments and events of the local Black community regularly.

I appreciate initiatives like the Pulitzer Center 1619 Project in school curriculums (Pulitzer Center, 2020). It offers teachers of all grade levels free curriculums, guides, and activities for students, and it "supports students and teachers in using the 1619 Project to challenge historical narratives, redefine national memory and build a better world" (Hannah-Jones et al., 2019, p. 99). It's time White people stopped perpetuating myths and lies about the birth of our nation, the consequences of slavery, and the roles that Black Americans played in the growth of the country, among a list of other fabricated constructs intended to perpetuate White supremacy and suppress Black progress.

During my senior year in high school, it was my Black male biology teacher, not the White academic guidance counselor, who helped me prepare applications for college. He was also the assistant track coach, and he and his wife gave me an enormous brown cloth hardcover Merriam-Webster dictionary and an alarm clock as graduation presents to help me in college.

Black Studies and College

As a first-generation college student, although I was prepared academically, I was not ready for the social culture I faced attending a predominantly White college. Unlike my siblings, who also attended White universities, I did not live on campus in student housing. Instead, I lived with my grandparents. I was the first in my family to attend college (my sister followed the year afterward), and my parents were concerned for my safety but wanted me to get a good education; so, I was strongly encouraged to live in a familiar city with close relatives. In retrospect, this was the best decision for me, because the alienation, isolation, racial stereotypes, and whitewashed education continued into college. It was part of my survival to be able to retreat to my home community and not have to stay in that environment 24/7 like those who live in student housing.

A few major things *did* change for me compared with my experiences in K-12. I was able to take Black Studies classes and formally learn about the rich and diverse history of Black people in the United States and the African diaspora. I was also able to learn the true history of Africa and its colonization and independence. I loved my Black Studies classes and, although I was a declared business major, I took every Black Studies class offered during my four-year college career. It was the first time I sat in classes in which Black students were in the majority, and many of my instructors were Black and from all over the world, including the United States! I was elated. I walked around that campus feeling 10 feet tall every day, even when I was in my business courses with no Black instructors and very few Black students. The Black Studies department was my home away from home, my therapeutic intervention for the 12 years of educational misery that I had to endure. The Black Studies professors encouraged me academically, while some of my business professors were still trying to call me *Val* or not paying me any notice at all—with the exception of one White male accounting instructor that was very impressed with my analytical abilities and encouraged me to consider a career as an accountant.

Graduate School and White Allies

Forty-seven years after surviving a predominantly White educational system, when I was completing my doctorate, I would run into White racial bias (and paternalism) again regarding my name. An editor of an academic journal refused to publish an article I submitted to the journal after I had successfully completed the peer review process and my article had been approved and accepted for publication by the co-editor of the journal. Because my name did not fit the editor's White American cultural frame of first, middle, and last name, he required me to use an arbitrary letter as a first name and use my first name like it was my last name; otherwise, he would pull my article from the scheduled publication. I was furious but knew that I needed that publication to improve my employment opportunities as I sought a tenure-track academic appointment at a research university after I completed my PhD. I conceded to his arrogant, racist, paternalistic demand and threat, betraying myself and compromising my values in the process. In effect, I changed the name I used for that article so that it would be published. The implications of changing my name for that specific publication included the strong likelihood that it would NOT be included in a literature search of my published articles using my given name. For career purposes, this could have implications for tenure and promotion and for any other consideration in which publications are prioritized in assessing my scholarship, contributions to the field, and so on. Some scholars describe this experience as an example of the "Black tax" that African Americans must pay to participate in White spaces. Black American students attending White graduate schools are routinely subjected to the Black tax in several ways. Burrows (2016) identifies four "defining characteristics of the Black tax" that Black graduate students can face:

> (1) [P]resenting an acceptable [White] form of blackness to the white world; (2) appreciating the generosity of white society for being allowed into their institutions; (3) representing the [Black] race; and (4) recognizing that the African American subject is an intrusion to white institutions. (p. 16)

My approach to graduate school was, pretty much, "keep your head down and focus on your studies." I learned very early from my elders that "getting a good education is something that 'they' can't take away from you, and it is the key to getting a good paying job." I wanted a good paying job, and I believed a "good education" was my ticket, although I also knew I would have to deal in the workplace—just like I did in school—with the myth of Black inferiority that permeates our society. The price of my good education ticket meant that I would have to continue enduring racial isolation with even fewer Black students and professors in the graduate school programs that I attended. Nevertheless, I saw a graduate education as the road I had to travel on the way to my destination—the workforce. When I started college, my grandparents told me, "You are there to get a good education; you need what 'they' have to be considered half as good in their eyes, so focus on your studies, nothing else, do you understand?" With my marching orders as clear as they could be, I approached higher education with two specific goals: Get that degree and get a good job. Consequently, I did not look for a "sense of belonging" in graduate school. And after all, whether it was a fair assessment or not, I did not expect much in the way of meaningful interpersonal academic experiences or exchanges with White peers or professors. Therefore, it was a complete and somewhat unnerving surprise when a few White female professors took an interest in me academically and started informally

mentoring me—I didn't know at the time that this was what they were doing. As an undergraduate, I had experienced Black professors in the Black Studies department supporting me academically and emotionally in navigating racism, but they never referred to it as mentoring—in retrospect, I think I just assumed this was what Black professors do for Black students. As noted by Duncan (2020), "one group that has consistently worked to help Black students navigate a society in which they are perceived to be problems is Black teachers" (p. 1). They are often the unsung heroes who must navigate their own race-based stressors in the academy while supporting Black students and often students of other ethnicities who seek them out as mentors. They are truly in a class of their own (Fairclough, 2007).

While I continued to receive support and was introduced to meaningful opportunities from the White female professors I had as a graduate student, it was a Black female professor who continually guided me in navigating the pitfalls, twists, and turns of the White academic culture, from how to approach publishing, to presenting at conferences, as well as teaching. One of only two Black faculty in the program, this professor was new to the university when I approached her and asked her if she would mentor me. She said yes and has continued to serve in that capacity and as a friend ever since. I feel like I had the best of two worlds with the support and guidance of some White female professors and having a Black female mentor, too. Over time, I began to experience a sense that I *did* belong in the academy because of them, and I sought their emotional support and guidance when I was betrayed by the silence of my White peers in one of my graduate classes. It was the relationships with the professors that helped me navigate my feeling of being ostracized, and the disappointment, alienation, and isolation I felt at the students' refusal to provide critical feedback on my proposal after I had watched them in previous classes encouraging each other, making suggestions for what a White student presenter might do differently in the future, sharing resources, etc. But when it was my turn to present my proposal and benefit from critical student feedback, I was met with stone-cold silence. You could hear a pin drop in that classroom. By this time, I had developed what I thought was genuine friendships with some of these White students who looked at me like I was their worst enemy. Even after the professor raised a question about the silence, not one student in the class was willing to say anything. Nothing! Nada! I experienced their collective persistent silence as a form of White hostility. The experience unfortunately reinforced one of my many childhood lessons from my elders; they had told me, "White people are not your friend, and they cannot be trusted. They have the power to smile in your face and stab you in the back... and they will." It would be several years later when forging friendships with some of my White colleagues that I would realize the need to unlearn this lesson to some extent. However, from that point on in my graduate program, I distanced myself physically and emotionally from my White peers. I declined their invitations to study together, and I dismissed the private individual attempts some of them made to rationalize and excuse what they had witnessed in that classroom and participated in themselves.

Weaponization of Whiteness and White Fragility

[J]ust as all white people have the ability to weaponize their whiteness, all Black people can be harmed by it. Black students aren't exempt. Weaponizing whiteness happens in schools every day. (Dillard, 2020, para. 7)

One of the things I remember from that experience beyond my hurt and disappointment is what the professor—who was one of my White female faculty mentors—said to me afterward. She told me that, unfortunately, I was getting a glimpse now of what I would likely face in the academy, and she described their silence as a form of passive-aggressive hostility. She was right. I witnessed this phenomenon happening in a variety of ways and circumstances with some frequency to other Black students, faculty, and staff in the White academy. Some years later, after accepting a tenure-track faculty position, I would see a similar dynamic unfold during a faculty search. After her job talk, a White woman candidate received what I and some of my White colleagues experienced as friendly, encouraging feedback by the all-White (except me) and majority women faculty department. The White candidate was also given some suggestions and resource recommendations for thinking about her topic differently and finishing her doctorate. In fact, she was given so much feedback that she pulled out a piece of paper and pen to write down all the helpful suggestions she was given, and off she went. In contrast, the Black woman candidate experienced a rapid-fire interrogation, with no suggestions or resources; some of the faculty openly and aggressively questioned her ability to achieve the goals she presented for completing her studies to join the workforce. The hostility was palpable. Talk about a jarring contrast! I was shocked and dismayed. I was angry and felt helpless. I also empathized with the Black woman candidate, having recognized this scenario myself so many times. This collective anti-Black, White power phenomenon results in a barrage of harm but is often cloaked as White individual innocence, or unconscious bias, or fear, better known as "White fragility" (DiAngelo, 2018). Coshandra Dillard (2020) also lays out scenario after scenario of how this pattern of what she calls the "weaponization of whiteness" harms Black children in our school systems daily. Dillard explains that the weaponization of Whiteness can occur when White people perceive their entitlement to power and authority to be challenged and is demonstrated through "anger and a need for retaliation, feigned fear and, finally, white fragility" (para. 9). This time, I said something to my White colleagues; and, thankfully, the few that *I* consider as allies challenged the way things went down, and it resulted in the program taking some concrete steps to systematically confront racial bias and work to stop the patterns and practices that perpetuate anti-Black racism within the program. Their efforts are not always successful or effective, but "they" are on the path—at least some of them are.

Recommended Solutions

Education is indoctrination if you're white—subjugation if you're black.
— James Baldwin

I was annoyed when I read in the call for these manuscripts that they "must include recommendations for solutions in the context of the narrative" (Gibson, 2020, para. 3). I thought, "Here we go again! Leave it up to the people who are the victims of anti-Black racism to come up with the solutions for ending White supremacy." Upon further reflection, I realized that first, anyone can submit a manuscript, not just individuals who have been victimized by systemic anti-Black racial injustice. Secondly, the call states, "...in the context of the narrative" (Gibson, 2020, para. 3), which gives me more room to step out of the constant role of having to teach White people how to fix the racist system that they created, they benefit from, and they perpetuate. I appreciate it when White people are willing to do their own work in dismantling racism, and when they are willing to hold each other accountable whether I am present or not.

In the context of my narrative, four basic tenets of critical race theory (CRT) offer a framework for addressing anti-Black racism within the educational system, including 1) the recognition of racism as commonplace in U.S. society; 2) the critique and challenge of dominant ideological claims of race neutrality, objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, and equal opportunity; 3) recognition of the legitimacy of the experiential knowledge of racialized persons; and 4) a commitment to social justice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). I agree emphatically with Coshandra Dillard (2020), staff writer for *Learning for Justice*, that it is the responsibility of educators to recognize and examine how Whiteness operates in schools and to take actionable steps to dismantle the White supremacist educational system that harms Black students, instead of simply engaging in performative allyship statements and gestures (Davis & Fields, 2021) that essentially maintain the status quo. I also believe that social workers interested in supporting racial equity also have a role to play. Dismantling anti-Black racism in education requires recognizing, critiquing, and confronting White supremacy and anti-Black racism directly.

Recognition of Racism as Endemic of U.S. Society

Anti-racist educators and social workers can critically examine the pervasiveness of White supremacist ideology, policy, and practices within the K-12 school system and its impact on the emotional, psychological, and physical well-being of Black families and children. Racial trauma scholars have provided ample evidence that Black children are at greater risk of race-based stress and trauma within the school system—perpetrated by teachers, administrators, staff, and other children—than their White peers (Anderson et al., 2019; Dumas, 2016; Henderson, 2017; Henderson & Lunford, 2016). For example, according to data released by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (2018), despite making up only 15.4% of students during the 2015-2016 school year, Black students constituted 31% of referrals to law enforcement. Black students in the public school system continue to be suspended at higher rates than their White counterparts, and they are more likely to be referred to the child welfare and juvenile court systems (Horsford, 2018; Marrus, 2015). These statistics are even more alarming when I consider the fact that over 80% of public school teachers, administrators, and school boards across the nation are White (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Structurally, White supremacy is operating exactly as it is intended—to maintain a racial caste system of policing and restricting Black bodies with power and privilege concentrated in the hands of White people at the top of the education hierarchy. White school officials need to find the courage to see racism, commit to examining their complicity in perpetuating structural racism, and challenge the mechanisms that keep the anti-Black racist engine humming. Black children and youth deserve nothing less.

Likewise, within higher education, the research on anti-Black racism within predominantly White universities and colleges is pervasive and revealing about the cultural climate in which Black students are expected to learn and achieve academic success while routinely resisting anti-Black racism (Jones & Reddick, 2017). Studies document anti-Black racism across all facets of campus life (Bourke, 2010), including the classroom (Morales, 2014), student housing (Harwood et al., 2010; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2017), Greek life (Daly, 2014), academic affairs (Wallace et al., 2011), student services (Garibay et al., 2019), campus security (Jenkins et al., 2021), etc., as well as the myriad strategies Black students use to confront, to resist, to educate

the ignorant, and to maintain their comportment to achieve their goals and aspirations (Fleming et al., 2012; Hollingsworth et al., 2018; Torres et al., 2010).

Ongoing exposure to racial discrimination has been linked with race-based trauma and stress (Carter et al., 2017). The potential for long-term negative effects include post-traumatic stress disorder (Williams et al., 2021), hyper-vigilance, depressive symptoms, and anxiety (Ponds, 2013; Williams et al., 2019). Mental health clinicians propose the use of the Developmental and Ecological Model of Youth Racial Trauma (DEMYth-RT) for acknowledging, recognizing, and addressing racial trauma developmentally and contextually among children and adolescence (Saleem et al., 2020). Additionally, the UConn Racial/Ethnic Stress & Trauma Survey (UnRESTS) offers clinicians with an interview instrument to assess racial trauma within a DSM-5 framework for children and youth (Williams, Metzger, et al., 2018). Clinical social workers and other mental health clinicians can utilize these assessment tools to support Black students in coping with racial trauma and to challenge widely held beliefs that racism in schools occurs rarely in isolated instances.

Critique and Challenge Dominant Ideological Claims of Race Neutrality, Objectivity, Meritocracy, Colorblindness, and Equal Opportunity

In a 2021 policy brief advocating for the support of Black students in schools by understanding and addressing racial trauma, the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA, 2021) recognized the well-established practice of "teachers and school administrators often perceiving Black children as being older, more aggressive, and more culpable, even when they exhibit the same developmentally-appropriate behaviors as their White peers—a phenomenon known as 'adultification'" (para. 9). Adultification bias leads to Black children experiencing disproportionately harsher treatment, higher standards, more referrals to school police, law enforcement, child welfare, and juvenile detention, and higher rates of expulsions, suspensions, and arrests at school than their White peers (Dillard, 2020; Epstein et al., 2017; IDRA, 2021). The IDRA (2021) offers several concrete recommendations for reducing racial trauma in schools, including getting police out of school buildings, requiring training in trauma-informed educational practices for all staff, and using a racial equity lens to review school district and campus codes of conduct.

It is especially the responsibility of White educators and administrators who are disproportionately overrepresented in positions of power to stop the weaponization of Whiteness. White educators and administrators can consciously harness their White positional power to effect change. It requires some level of risk to challenge White supremacy, but think about the risk Black children and students live with daily when they walk through the doors of a White supremacist education system. School-based social workers are in a unique role to support these efforts in collaboration with White school officials. Additionally, White educators should seriously consider upgrading their curricula to teach the truth about Black history. The 1619 Project (Pulitzer Center, 2020) I mentioned earlier is a good source to use, and the Southern Poverty Law Center's *Learning for Justice* (formerly known as *Teaching Tolerance*) is another good resource (check out the resources for K-12 and higher education on their website at www.learningforjustice.org).

Recognition of the Legitimacy of the Experiential Knowledge of Racialized Persons

White school officials often misinterpret, mislabel, or dismiss racially traumatic events, despite numerous studies that provide ample evidence of Black students' experiences with—and resistance to—daily racial microaggressions within and outside the classroom. For example, in a study examining the experiences of Black high school students, Grinage (2019) found that students reported that they are routinely silenced, dismissed, and ignored by teachers and administrators when they attempt to discuss race-related issues. Students in the study also reported feelings of frustration and annoyance with their White peers expressed indifference to, or dismissal of, their experiences with racism.

While Black children and their families can and do engage in self-advocacy, legal recourse, and activism to address racial inequities experienced within the school system, the onus is on school officials to develop policies and practices that create a climate to support ongoing and normalized conversations with students about race and racism, to validate and affirm Black students' experiences with race-based discrimination, and to provide Black students with effective avenues for reporting their experiences and getting effective assistance. Additionally, accountability and consequences beyond mild reprimands for race-based infractions would send a signal that school officials take anti-Black racism seriously and are committed to creating a school-based culture and climate in which all students can reach their full potential with minimal stress and full support.

Commitment to Social Justice

The responsibility and commitment of social workers to promote social justice and social change to end systems of oppression is clearly articulated in the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (2021). White supremacy and anti-Black racism are structural forms of oppression that shape daily interactions across all sectors of society, including the system of education. The trauma-informed movement has garnered national attention as a comprehensive multi-tiered approach to help school administrators, teachers, and other school staff understand the impact of trauma on student behaviors and outcomes (Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016) and facilitate the creation of a racially safe educational culture for all students. Key features of trauma-informed schools include school-based mental health services for students offered in collaboration with community agencies or on campus; training and education of school personnel (teachers, administrators, staff) on the impact of trauma exposure on students; and the development of trauma-informed policies and practices that support positive social-emotional learning, positive behavior, and restorative justice interventions (Treatment and Services Adaptation Center for Resilience, Hope, and Wellness in Schools, 2021).

According to a 2017 report by the *Huffington Post*, 23,000 out of 132,000 schools have adopted a trauma-informed approach to education and have witnessed significant positive outcomes including increased test scores, graduation rates, significant reductions in suspensions and expulsions as well as a drop in bullying, truancy, and drop-out rates (Stevens, 2017). Notable to the successes experienced in these schools is a change in the behavior and attitudes of the adults: "[T]he secret to success doesn't involve the kids so much as it does the adults: Focus on altering the behavior of teachers and administrators, and almost like magic, the kids stop fighting and

acting out in class" (Stevens, 2017, para. 7).

A transformation in how White teachers and administrators see and value the dignity, worth, and humanity of Black children is a critical part of the trauma-informed approach for long-term effective change. Anti-racist social workers can collaborate with school administrators to promote trauma-informed school systems that provide education and training, prevention and early intervention strategies, and mental health services to reduce the incidence of race-based trauma in schools. These are the social justice and social change efforts necessary to advocate for and promote the creation of positive nurturing school environments in which all students—and especially Black students—can feel safe and thrive emotionally, socially, and educationally.

Conclusion

The other thing that challenged me about this call for manuscripts is the statement that "helping professionals are uniquely positioned to develop and champion effective change strategies" (Gibson, 2020, para. 2). In my experience, helping professionals who do not regularly reflect on their own racial biases are not uniquely positioned to do anything except continue to perpetuate racism. I believe that educators are helping professionals. To this end, I would recommend that White helping professionals start seeing their White privilege and complicity in perpetuating racial injustice and White supremacy and stop hiding behind the tired old useless good/bad binary. If I had a quarter for every time I heard "she's not a racist; she's a really nice person," I would be rich and retired. As a Black citizen, educator, and helping professional, I work to create a world, nation, community, and an educational system where all people are recognized and supported within a climate where racial equity is the norm. If White educators choose not to do their own work to address their racism and utilize the abundance of resources available to help them create a racially equitable world and racially safe environment for Black student learning, perhaps it is time for them to retire.

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In the Wake of George Floyd: A Reflection on Racialized Labor and White Fragility

Tabitha Grier-Reed

Abstract: *Racialized labor* is a term I coined to describe the work Black college students must do to navigate predominantly White environments—but racialized labor isn't just limited to college students. In this reflection, I apply the phenomenon of racialized labor to my own life, and I connect the concept of racialized labor to White fragility to generate mindfulness for White colleagues and allies. I hope to help everyone better recognize and name the often-invisible work of racialized labor in the lives of people of color and help to ease that burden.

*Keywords***:** people of color, racial battle fatigue, racism, therapy

I recently coined the term *racialized labor* to capture the work of navigating predominantly White environments for Black college students (Grier-Reed et al., 2020). This phenomenon emerged as I listened to students over the last 15 years in the African American Student Network (AFAM), a group I co-founded. Yet, racialized labor isn't just limited to college students. In this reflection, I extend the phenomenon of racialized labor to my own life, particularly in this moment, in the wake of the killing of George Floyd at the hands of police, and I draw connections to Robin DiAngelo's (2018) concept of "White fragility."

I, like many Black people at this moment, have been inundated with notes and messages and validations and check-ins from White students (current and former), White colleagues, White friends, neighbors, and even the occasional stranger. These notes and messages, these attempts to reach out, are intended to validate me and let me know I'm cared about, at least on the surface. Underneath the surface, I sense a hunger and need for those initiating the contact to instead be validated and comforted *by me.*

It is reminiscent of my experiences as a young Black educator teaching multicultural counseling courses. As many of my White students would begin to discover the existence of racism in society and experience an inner conflict around the negotiation of Whiteness, their tears and guilt would begin to flow. Consequently, I would feel them reaching with an almost desperate need to be comforted by me. I often felt their unconscious desire to be absolved from racism, for me to tell them it was okay; that is, they could still experience themselves as good despite the racial dynamics of White supremacy and the evils therein. It seemed as if absolution from a Black person provided the ultimate dispensation.

It is the often-unstated norm of race relations that race work and dealing with racism is primarily the burden of people of color which also includes comforting our White friends, colleagues, and even allies when the work is uncomfortable. For Black people and people of color, this is part and parcel of the work of racialized labor. I have engaged this work as best I can, minimally responding with a heart or a thumbs up to White students reaching out to let me know I'm okay in their eyes with hopes that I will also respond to let them know that they are okay and good

White allies. I say thank you to the White allies emailing me with requests asking how they can help in the struggle. I even validate the White woman stranger on the street telling me that she loves me and that she's working on her White self and trying to take a new action every day. I feel their hunger to be acknowledged and thanked for their efforts.

In all of this, I find myself struggling against reprising the role of the Black mammy in 2020. I struggle against feelings of resentment when people who I thought knew better come to me asking me for "the solution" to institutional racism, as if there was a single solution. I experience the unwanted sensations of one-way relationships, where others take and have little or nothing to give me in return. Then I remember the words of my loving Black woman friend and community organizer who once described Black women as the mules of the earth, and I endure.

Robin DiAngelo (2018) describes the discomfort that White people experience in the face of racialized realities as *White fragility*. This includes the guilt, the anger, the tears, the defensiveness, and even the need to have people of color cosign on and validate the fragile White ego, which deeply needs to be acknowledged and to elicit gratefulness from people of color. The complement of White fragility for people of color is racialized labor; that is, explaining, educating, comforting, and validating even as people of color themselves bear the brunt of racism as targets of violence and discrimination.

Speaking freely about racial discrimination in the presence of White people without feeling the need to attend to White fragility is difficult. After a recent talk I delivered on racialized labor, I had a Black colleague and therapist approach me to tell me how much this concept resonated in his work. He told me that, when working with Black clients discussing White folks and racism in the presence of a White therapist, his Black clients consistently made a point of reassuring the White therapist. He noted with some wonder how seemingly automatic and spontaneous his clients would be as they consistently turned to the White therapist to say something like, "I mean, I am not talking about you, you are okay," excusing the White therapist from any burden of racism that the client had to bear. I share this example because it is endemic of the deep socialization of racialized labor in the lives of Black people, where this labor often happens in invisible, unconscious, and spontaneous ways in response to White fragility (both anticipated and enacted). For example, even in a therapeutic encounter, Black clients may automatically "take care" to attend to the ego of the White therapist in the room—essentially reversing the role of client and therapist by becoming the caretaker in those moments!

I connect the concept of racialized labor to White fragility to underscore the consequences of White fragility for people of color and to generate mindfulness. In Grier-Reed et al. (2020), one of the results of racialized labor seemed to be *racial battle fatigue*, which includes frustration, anger, and exhaustion. For White people, this reflection is not intended to ban the act of talking to Black friends and colleagues about race or racism, but to generate mindfulness. In sum, I encourage White people to reflect on whether their need to reach out to their Black friends and colleagues is coming from a place of White fragility and whether they are potentially adding to the racialized labor of the people of color in their lives. Lastly, I hope that everyone can better recognize and name the often invisible work of racialized labor in the lives of Black people and people of color and help to ease that burden.

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Trauma Triggers and Resilience:
Reflecting on the Death of George Floyd and Its Impact on a Social Work Practitioner

Gerry L. White

Abstract: This reflection centers on the wrongful demise of George Floyd, a 46-year-old African American man murdered by a Minneapolis police officer, and how his death uncovered my memories of a childhood traumatic experience involving police officers in the San Francisco/Oakland Bay area. It begins by placing this incident within the context of three critical issues impacting 2020: social unrest resulting from the rash of deaths of African Americans at the hands of police officers, the sudden spread of COVID-19 (or coronavirus), and the controversy surrounding the presidential elections. The coverage of these events across social media produced symptoms of generalized anxiety for many Americans including me. It also gave rise to the presence of multiple triggers leading to the resurgence of my childhood traumas following George Floyd's death. My traumatic childhood encounter is discussed in intricate detail and paralleled with the death of Mr. Floyd. Resilience and the recovery process are presented followed by strategies to eliminate racial injustice involving police in three key areas: public policy, programmatic initiatives, and policing practices. Finally, implications for future research direction are presented.

Keywords: post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD), epidemic, pandemic, childhood trauma, George Floyd, police brutality

Introduction

2020 will be a year not easily forgotten. It was as fiery, contentious, and concerning as the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. From the deaths of many unarmed Black men and women at the hands of police officers to the rapid spread of the coronavirus to the controversy surrounding the presidential elections, 2020 will be a year etched in my mind and the annals of history. The impact of these events on me places my reflections in context.

Context

The sudden spread of the coronavirus infected, hospitalized, and killed hundreds of thousands in the United States. Preexisting health conditions and racial disparities emerged early in the data showing that African Americans were disproportionally represented in each of these categories (Gold et al., 2020). Distrust and skepticism concerning the virus spread, and vaccinations conjured memories of the troubling history involving medical research done by the U.S. government on the African American community. Mainly circulating were the syphilis experiments conducted in Tuskegee, Alabama (Heller et al., 1946) and The North Carolina Eugenics Program which involved mass sterilizations of impoverished Black women (Brophy & Troutman, 2015). This high level of justified paranoia in contrast with concern for personal safety has left many stressed and undecided concerning prevention and treatment. From a global

standpoint, I began to understand how the community responded to the impact of the coronavirus. From a more specific standpoint, my paranoia intensified after becoming infected and hospitalized. Suddenly any media coverage of daily hospitalizations and deaths triggered anxiety and stress reactions, including insomnia, loss of appetite, and apathy.

While the first case of the coronavirus in the United States was reported in January 2020, issues concerning police brutality and misconduct were a spillover from prior years that sharply increased during this time. The rash of killings of unarmed Black men and women at the hands of police officers who popularized the common defense, "I feared for my life," outraged me. These atrocities resulted in community uprisings led by the youth and instigated civil unrest, rebellions, and a revolutionary effort to defund the police. Several voices, including mine, demanded the reallocation of funding to promote improved police and community relations; better recruitment, training, and re-training of officers; and fair treatment of African Americans by the criminal justice system. I felt these demands were reasonable, obtainable, and necessary. In his speech during an organized protest and rally in Brunswick, Georgia, following the death of Ahmaud Arbery, Francys Johnson, activist, civil rights attorney, and former President of the Georgia NAACP, captured this sentiment by saying, "Justice is not blind; she [just] has her eyes covered. We must remove the blinds and force her to see what this criminal justice system has become, demand changes and the prosecution of rogue police officers" (personal communication, May 16, 2020). This portion of the speech empowered key organizations that I belong to in and around the state of Georgia to move to action. Groups such as Let Us Make Man, the Black Man Lab, and many others focused their energy on training youth for engaging in successful organizing. Groups also learned the principles of successful protest participation, studied the past to advance change, and began to organize efforts to remove confederate statues and symbols from all government lands and facilities in Georgia. Similar efforts occurred globally. Soon, other symbols of systemic racism met a similar fate. Events such as these did not kill or eliminate racism, but they made us question the ideals and etiology of morality here.

The year 2020 was capped off by the controversy and hostility surrounding the presidential elections. It pulled the covers back on racism and inspired right-wing radical groups and their elected advocates in the House and Senate to come out of hiding, organize, and attempt to change the election results. Their battle cry "stop the steal" was inspired by misinformation that flooded social media, conservative and radical news sites. Their followers also unquestionably believed the leader of their movement, who maintained his position throughout his second impeachment trial. The far-right wing's misinformed efforts attempted to disrupt the election process and attacked the United States Capitol just six days into the 2021 new year. Watching the mob unleashed on the U.S. Capitol and the police force's powerlessness heightened my level of panic, stress, and anxiety that carried over from the previous year. The President's failure to send support for the officers and elected officials was a stark contrast to the mass display of force shown at the Capitol during the Black Lives Matter demonstrations. This dichotomy left me perplexed and outraged. I could not fathom how the response to protest could be so radically different. On June 2, 2020, National Guard was deployed wearing full riot gear and blocked the entrance to the Lincoln Memorial to Black Lives Matter Protesters. These differences did not go unnoticed.

The coronavirus, social unrest, and the presidential elections are considered by many to be the most significant issues in 2020 that dominated America's social and political spectrum. No one, including myself, was exempt from the primary and secondary traumatic impacts these events caused. The processing of these incidents made it difficult for many as they grappled to understand each. For every family and individual, there is a story or experience linked to one of these events. For me, processing the effects of these events was not exclusive but rather cumulative.

The Triggers

America could no longer hide its family secret; its race relations efforts had become undone at the seams. The rash of deaths in the last few years hangs like an albatross around America's neck. There are too many names, dates, and incidences to recall at once, but nevertheless, I find myself compelled to call out their names: Treyvon Martin, Oscar Grant, Eric Garner, Philando Castile, Catherine Johnson, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery.

The lynching museum in Montgomery, Alabama, has large rustic plates hanging from its ceiling. The names of thousands of African Americans are engraved on these plates to remind America of its dark past. We must also immortalize those lives unjustly lost by the hands of police officers.

The protest and social unrest, particularly surrounding George Floyd's death, were the most impactful for me. Repeatedly watching the recording of the incident triggered long-buried and oft-forgotten adverse experiences with police officers during my early childhood. As I watched the officer with his knees pressed against George Floyd's neck as Floyd cried, " I can't breathe," and called for his deceased mother, the emotions intensified. As the officer placed both hands in his pocket in a comfortable posture and leaned further into Mr. Floyd's neck to apply more pressure, I became enraged. The shock from this video was not limited to me; the world became outraged. The officer's malicious, callous, and blatant disregard for another human being sparked protests around the globe. From London, Switzerland, Wales, Germany, Brazil, Rome, Hong Kong, the Netherlands, Belgium, Portugal, South Africa, South Korea, and even Sydney, Australia, to name a few, people were outraged and moved to protest. Floyd's death represented the preverbal straw that broke the camel's back.

While the effect of the coronavirus and controversies surrounding the presidential election enhanced my distrust and concern for the safety of my community, the protests resulting from police brutality created a breeding ground of accumulated anxiety from which my past childhood traumas involving police brutality emerged in full detail.

The Encounter

My first encounter with the police occurred in 1978 in Richmond, a city in the East Bay area of Northern California. Growing up in the Bay Area during this period was a combination of the very best of times and the very worst of times for police interaction and African Americans. A strained relationship between the police and the African American community already existed.

Many complaints and several lawsuits were filed against the police department concerning their misconduct. They, however, seemed to go without consequences. During this time, a particular group of White police officers known as the "Richmond Cowboys" were infamous for their assaults and history of abuse by many in the community (Center for the Study of Political Graphics, 2021)

I was 13 years old. My parents had a domestic dispute, which resulted in my three brothers, sister, and me being taken to my mother's business. In the parking lot, we watched our father confront a person in the community. Except for my younger brother, who is three years younger than me, the rest of us are stair-stepped in age: a brother 14, a sister 15, and our oldest brother, 16 years old. My father stood about 6 feet and 1 inch tall; his arms and hands resembling that of a bodybuilder. He has dark skin and a booming voice. He had no problems commanding a room when he entered or getting us to respond to his calls.

Shortly after we arrived at my mother's business, a small-statured White police officer came on the scene to address the confrontation. It was rare for a single officer to respond to any call in this part of the community. He successfully deescalated the conflict. We began to walk away from the scene and into an adjacent parking lot toward our car. However, several other officers appeared, which seemed to escalate tensions. They surrounded my father as he leaned against the car with his massive arms folded. It was clear that they were not going to allow him to leave without taking him into custody. We all stood off to a distance and could only faintly hear their conversations while the officers were drawing in closer to him. In watching our father's body posture, which was all too familiar with us, we knew that he was becoming angrier as more officers arrived on the scene. We heard our father say, "It will take more than this to take me down." It seemed his defiant stance excited them, causing the officers to close in much faster while removing their nightsticks from their waist.

Suddenly, an officer standing off to the side of my father raised his club to strike him, and with one blow, my father swung and knocked him out. A melee ensued, and they began to strike him across his head and body, knocking him to the ground. Terrified, we ran to his rescue. My oldest brother attempted to help, but they began beating him too. At 95 pounds, I ran and attempted to help, but I was tossed like a ragdoll over a car. My other siblings did not fare any better. In what seemed to be a lifetime, they finally had my father in handcuffs. His bloodied head was forced to the ground. An officer pressed his knee against my father's neck and continuously applied pressure. I cried to my father to not move and stop resisting. I heard him say, "Son, I am not moving, I cannot breathe." Suddenly, another officer took the back of his club and struck him on the forehead, causing substantial blood to flow. I ran to him and pulled my t-shirt over his head, begging them to please not strike him anymore. Again, I was tossed to the side and restrained by a family member. By the time it was over, my father and brother were placed in the back of the police car. Their heads and clothes were covered in blood which came from the open gashes in my father's head, eyes, and the cuts on my brother's hands. The police took them directly to jail. We believed they were both going to prison for a long time. Thankfully, that was not the case. Later that evening, my father was transported to the hospital to receive stitches. My mother was frantically trying to find out where my brother was transported. Our uncle arrived on the scene and took the rest of us to his house. We were terrified and felt helpless and powerless. Within 24

hours, my brother was released from custody to my mother. He didn't say a word or leave his room for nearly three days. It seemed impossible to process all that had occurred. There were no social workers or counselors available to provide trauma-informed care, so we talked about the incident among ourselves. We acknowledged our father's treatment of our mother as precipitating the event. But the viciousness of the police was beyond our comprehension and ultimately changed our view of law enforcement.

Because of the level of brutality, the tremendous number of witnesses, the department's history of documented misconduct, and other unknown factors, the charges against my father and brother were eventually dropped. Our father returned to the house for a few months following the incident. He talked openly with us about the reputation of this group of police officers and how there would be no repercussions. Our father eventually moved out and our parents divorced. He remained peripheral in our lives as our mother continued to raise the five of us. The "Encounter" arguably shaped my need to feel safe in my community and heightened my expectations of adults as those responsible for our safety. Exposure to negative and traumatic police encounters like this, I later found out, were experiences that were not isolated to my town. It would be years before I understood how these stories and their lasting effects would shape the consciousness of a nation. I learned of the parallel between this experience and the many tales told by African Americans across the United States.

Trauma and Signs of PTSD

This encounter left an indelible mark on me. I was a thirteen-year-old male simultaneously living with the separation of my parents, the constant memory of my father being beaten by the "Richmond Cowboys," and my inability to help either situation. I believe I suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), although I was never diagnosed or treated. According to Zlotnic et al. (2008), events that transpire in childhood typically have a long-lasting impact; they purport that symptoms of PTSD have the potential to linger well into our adulthood.

The encounter brought about nightmares about the incident and intermittent flashbacks when the police walk near or drive by with flashing lights. I intentionally avoided situations where I would encounter the police. For example, when I was 15, I quit playing baseball in the Police Athletic League because many coaches and umpires were police officers or were associated with law enforcement. While many of my peers, as well as adults in the community, viewed them as role models and, to some degree father figures, I became disconnected. There was an unconscious betrayal that I felt by them, a violation that I could not put into words, but my disjointed feelings would subsequently manifest into disdain. I would probe my friends and family members about police distrust and the legacy of fear.

As random police sightings continued, I began to develop negative thoughts about myself as a young Black male. I wondered if I was destined to go to prison. I felt helpless during that traumatizing encounter and an overall sense of hopelessness for Black males in the criminal justice system. I also experienced significant changes in my physical and emotional reactions. The sudden sound of police sirens made me nervous, anxious, and unable to concentrate. I engaged in self-destructive behaviors, was always angry and irritable, but I could not understand

why. I started fighting and acting out in school. In retrospect, I was powerless during the encounter and found that power through fighting other kids. I ended relationships with some of my close White friends. My trust in relationships with that friend group dissipated.

I was always a quiet kid in constant deep thought. I used to write poetry masquerading as songs, but in truth, this encounter with the police closed the doors on all creativity. Our family suffered also. We never really talked about the incident. Counseling was never a consideration. This is perhaps rooted in my family's values of hard work for survival. A Black male therapist during this time would have provided us with the needed counseling and professional imagery to counterbalance what became our jaded reality. This need was an integral part of my choice to join the social work profession.

In my estimation, my initial "treatment" came from the security I felt while sitting around my grandmother and listening to her hum church songs. The lyrics held hope, and the tune felt comforting. My informal treatment also involved being in the living room with my grandfather as he listened to the San Francisco Giants on his small transistor radio. He always sat in his favorite chair and did not mind our presence, although his attention was fixed on the game. My grandparents created a sense of normalcy and safety for me. This safety net was encouraging, and it assured me that the emotions, feelings, and constant fears were not permanent fixtures in my life.

Resilience and the Recovery Process

"Resilience is one's capacity and ability to adapt in positive manifestations following adversity or environmental stressors and having a sense of purposeful living" (Glenn, 2014, pp. 39-40). Embedded in this discussion on resilience are solutions and strategies that aid in overcoming the trauma and countering triggers. To put traumatic events behind us, the three biggest lies we tell ourselves are to "let it ride, let it slide, and let it go." In truth, trauma, like cancer, will grow and fester if left untreated or unaddressed. Yehuda et al. (2006) studied the co-existence of resilience and forms of psychopathology; they found that there are those who survive trauma and do not develop psychopathology, thereby acknowledging resilience as a function of coping with trauma. This suggests that while forming resilience, the traumatic event(s) has the potential to ultimately impact the mind, body, and spirit. Without addressing the intrusive memories, intentional avoidance, and negative changes in thinking and mood, trauma will manifest through relationships and produce random triggers. For example, repeatedly watching racialized violence and fatal encounters between police officers and Black men on television and social media can ignite triggers associated with past traumas. In my case, it was seeing Officer Derek Chauvin's knee placed against George Floyd's neck that reminded me of my own father's trying ordeal and resurrected discouraging attitudes toward the police. Ang (2020) notes that adverse police encounters with Black male teenagers play a role in the development of their confidence in the police. Thus, resilience and recovery in this context can be understood as dynamic, changing with sudden and fragile triggers. Critical to this recovery and treatment process is innate resiliency. It is the capacity to recover from complex events, withstand adversity, bounce back, and re-channel negative thoughts, emotions, and behaviors into positive energy and outlook. Resilience can contain the impact of trauma and give one the ability to bring closure to difficult

chapters in ones' life.

My father has never forgotten the incident and could recall specific details during our interviews for this reflection. Despite being brutalized by the police and beaten to near-death during my teenage years, he insisted that all his sons become police officers or work with law enforcement in any capacity. We struggled to reconcile his persistent recommendation with our traumatic memory of the encounter until he explained his position. He provided significant clarity and unraveled our discontent with law enforcement. My father did not disregard the pain we endured. Yet, he firmly believed that the only way to change police departments and prevent future misconduct was to run for a political office, become a lawyer, or join the police force and move up through the ranks. He cautioned us not to lose our sense of identity as Black men and to weed out rogue police officers (and those who cover up for them), whether Black or White. His perspective provided the necessary avenue for me to maintain a sense of power and sustainability for change, growth, and development. He helped me understand that I had a role in creating the change.

I began my work on the accused side of family conflict and police misconduct. While in graduate school at Clark Atlanta University School of Social Work in 1993, I conducted my internship at one of Georgia's oldest and largest family service agencies. I received training from clinical social workers who were responsible for the collaboration between the Domestic Crisis Intervention Unit and the Atlanta Police Department. These clinicians traveled with police officers during domestic calls and often deescalated arguments and provided family resources. Their training and expertise were imparted to me as I entered the social work profession. I continue my work in these areas today. Within my practice as a licensed social worker, I am certified by the Georgia Commission on Family Violence to conduct court-ordered groups for men and women charged with family violence, battery, assault, and other violence-related charges associated with family members and intimate partners. I also conduct community-based anger management groups and work with high-conflict couples. I am also a member of several Black community-based organizations that address family, community-related issues, and focus on community empowerment. This reflective holistic approach re-channeled the impact of my trauma. It also has provided a mechanism for coping with the three impediments defining the year 2020.

Strategies for Change

Resilience served as the internal mechanism for recovery following my traumatization as a child and remains an essential coping strategy after experiencing secondary trauma triggered by George Floyd's death.

However, advocating for change within the criminal justice system and policing practices within the African American community is a more complex form of resilience. The timeline from my encounter, teenage years, college studies, and professional pursuits suggests that priority should be given to prevention by law enforcement authorities in their encounters with children. It begins with acknowledging the need for change and having a fundamental desire to change those systems designed to maintain the status quo.

In 1857, Frederick Douglas delivered his "West India Emancipation" speech at Canandaigua, New York. He argued, "Power concedes nothing. It never did; it never will" (Douglass 1857, p. 22). Typically, advocacy in the social work profession wrestles with decisions resulting from imbalances in power. The profile of clients does not include those with influence or access to resources. Social work advocacy supports the efforts by empowering clients with tools for enhanced lives. Yet this power dynamic is paralyzed by the magnitude of unfortunate encounters with those assigned to protect citizens. Douglas' sentiments remain relevant today when it comes to systemic change within law enforcement. The role of community mobilization was to force these controlling systems to acknowledge the need for change. The obvious conclusion is that changes are needed to improve policing practices and community relations. Like the presumptions in the Ang (2021) research, it is reasonable to focus on the impact of police violence in the community where youth live. Attention should be given to the long-term effects, not only on those with direct exposure to that type of violence but also those in close proximity to the violent event (secondary trauma). Actual change that positions youth at the center of mediating violent engagements places that effort on an irreversible course toward improvement. The change will be intentional and will redirect the current series of traumatizing events in the communities.

Employing strategies to curve the trajectory of racial injustice within police departments can be accomplished in three ways: a focus on public policy, programmatic initiatives, and policing practice.

Public Policy

Establishing sound public policy to facilitate change is not considered unchartered territory. The U.S. Department of Justice (2013), under the leadership of former Attorney General Eric Holder, published "Smart on Crime: Reforming the Criminal Justice System for the 21st Century." All phases of the criminal justice system were examined, including charging, sentencing, incarceration, and reentry. This work considered demographic disparities, which identified patterns of unfairness. The 2013 Smart on Crime initiative acknowledged a need for change by identifying critical areas of concern to those most likely to experience violent encounters with police. The initiative resulted in action by the Justice Department and acknowledged the magnitude of encounters that mirrored my early experience. Also, it indirectly provided the urgency to develop ongoing strategies of resilience.

Smart on Crime forced the nation to acknowledge that there was something wrong. As a source of guidance, the resulting policies should work to ensure that the level of inquiry through research and evaluation is strategically initiated at every level of the criminal justice system within each State and local police department.

Programmatic Initiatives

Another key strategy to deal with systemic racial injustice involves delivering programs that minimize reactive police practices while focusing on improved community relationships. Following the death of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, the public outcry

was to defund the police. The demand pushed for the reallocation of funding directed toward services for communities of color. Lawmakers across the country are currently scrambling to respond to this urgent community demand. In Los Angeles, city officials cut $150,000 from its police budget and redirected them toward community-based programs (City News Service, 2020). New York City's Mayor Bill de Blasio committed to slashing $1 billion from the NYPD's budget and redirecting it to community programs (Wise, 2020).

Increased service activities within the community are a viable strategy for improving police and Black community relations. Programs that promote positive engagement can shift the attitudes and perceptions of police and Black youth within the community. Programs such as the Police Athletic League and other initiatives promote a mentoring focus on youth and attempt to create a harmonious coexistence. For example, the Oakland Police department launched the "OK" Program in 1990.

> This initiative works with thousands of youths between the ages of 12-18. The program brings together police officers, school districts, and the faith-based community to transform lives and empower African American men and boys to improve their communities. (Oakland Police Department, 2021, About, History)

Community policing strategies may also promote organically derived solutions by conducting community engagement workshops. For example, I once conducted a youth-centered interactive workshop with the Atlanta Police. The purpose of the workshop was to develop better lines of communication between the police and Black youth. My workshop's portion centered on getting youth to identify potential solutions to end police brutality, racial profiling, and improve police and Black community relations. The youth recommended that we reverse the roles and allow them to train the officers on how to interact with them. This was indeed innovative thinking. Perhaps such an intervention following our family's encounter would have salvaged my trust in police or at least created an avenue to allow my voiced concerns to be heard.

Other essential programmatic strategies include the establishment of Community and Youth Advisory Boards, whose task can be to independently review complaints, make recommendations, and play an advocacy role on behalf of their communities.

Policing Practices

Eliminating racial injustice with strategies such as community-based policing has its merits but also represents a paradigm shift for many officers who may see their role as exclusively policing, serving, and protecting. Buy-in from the affected communities is likely to require approaches where designed programs are implemented and evaluated in phases, homing in on the impact of the program on youth in the community.

One critical strategy for change in policing practices begins with recruiting from the communities they serve. Recruitment can be at local community colleges, churches, civic and fraternal organizations. Beyond local efforts, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are also a great recruitment source, as they have both undergraduate and graduate

criminal justice majors and other social science programs.

Also critical to the recruitment process of African American applicants is ensuring that the law enforcement representatives reflect the population they are recruiting. Increasing the African American law enforcement population will likely build trust within the community and promote cultural competency within the department. During my childhood encounter, there were no officers of color on the scene in any capacity. Leadership should also reflect the community in which it serves or at least promote diversity to reflect the spectrum of neighborhoods. Leadership sets the culture for the department, particularly leadership that reflects a strong and persistent belief in community policing and fair justice.

Community programs, such as Restorative Justice, offer principles for returning the community to the residents. According to Karmen (2015), these programs draw upon non-punitive methods of peacemaking, mediation, negotiation, dispute resolution, conflict management, and constructive engagement. This shift in philosophy can change policing approaches that have historically played out with tragic consequences in communities. For example, in my case, the initial officer on the scene successfully deescalated the domestic conflict. It was only when masses of officers arrived at the scene that collective aggression and use of force took place. This same type of aggressive encounter was played out in the George Floyd, Eric Garner, and Michael Brown incidents, just to name a few. It reasons that non-punitive (and non-deadly) approaches must be considered as an alternative.

Conclusion

In sum, the protests and political and economic disruptions of 2020 have made visible the pleas for change. Changes in public policy, programmatic initiatives, and policing practices are critical for dismantling structural and institutional racism which creates the culture for police brutality and misconduct. These strategies hold law enforcement accountable and promote racial equity at every level within the criminal justice system.

Implications for Future Research

Without question, George Floyd's death triggered a national and international uproar. For many Black youths, this incident, combined with the death of other Black youth at the hand of law enforcement, may have had lingering effects. Further research is needed to understand the impact of these repetitive images in social media on their attitudes toward law enforcement and the criminal justice system. Additionally, studies may focus on anticipated versus actual encounters with law enforcement to determine differences in stress and anxiety.

It is equally critical to explore Black parents' experiences talking with their children about law enforcement interactions. Is this talk anxiety-producing for both parent and child? Does the level of parental concern differ where there has been less exposure or fewer encounters with law enforcement?

Investigating resilience factors among youth reporting adverse encounters with law enforcement

is also a critically needed area of focus in research. Such a qualitative approach would provide a voice for youth and clarify the nature of their recovery.

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For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Leaving Academia When the Pain Was Too Much: Strategies for Black Survival

Norissa J. Williams

Abstract: Black women (BW) in academia experience inordinate amounts of stress and challenges to their well-being. Surviving is a constant, often painful, struggle. In this paper, I share two personal stories of events that have transpired in my academic department in the aftermath of the racial reckoning of 2020. Both stories elucidate key points about the experiences of BW that are further elaborated on in the discussion of strategies for self-survival in academic institutions (i.e., understanding one's experience through the lens of trauma, practicing self-care, finding community, addressing internalized oppression, adjusting expectations and practicing self-advocacy, or if all else fails, leave) and what institutions can do to increase equity and belonging for Black survival (i.e., understanding the experience of BW in academia through a trauma-informed lens and institutionalizing equity and belonging in real and measurable ways).

Keywords: Black women in academia, race in academic departments, Black survival in academia, trauma in academia, retention of Black women in academia

Invisibility and Exploitation in the Academy

2020's Racial Reckoning

Though I had worked at an esteemed University in the Northeast, as a social worker in a Department of Applied Psychology since the spring of 2016, I am pretty sure the majority of my colleagues did not become aware of my existence until one irregularly scheduled faculty meeting in June of 2020. Though the academic year was over, our chair had scheduled a faculty meeting in an effort to plan for the coming semester in the midst of the unpredictability of COVID-19. However, the meeting was repurposed as the world was caught in the inevitable racial reckoning that came to be in the wake of the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and countless others.

I had known this meeting was coming. I was on the Chair's Advisory, a group of program directors who updated the Chair on the happenings in their program and also provided ideas about the forward movement of the department. As such, the Chair had asked us what our thoughts were about repurposing the meeting this way. She, a Black woman (BW), knew it was important for us all to dig in and feel the gravitas of the moment. We were all in agreement. When the meeting started, my Chair made mention of all that was going on beyond the borders of our Zoom room and suggested that there might be some work we had to do internally as well. Yes, we had students to think about. However, what might we have to do amongst ourselves? It was a question of whether race had shaped the experience of any among us and what we could do about it. As there were not many Black people in the room, it felt like a now-or-never moment, for me. Though I am typically more reserved and had been resigned to my role as a quiet and even invisible member of the faculty, I knew I had to speak up. I didn't know where I

was going with my speech, but in the first round of discussion, I made mention of the fact that although there is a pretense that there is no difference between clinical and tenure-track/tenured faculty, there is a stark difference. For one, clinical faculty tend to largely be women, and women of color more specifically. Further, clinical faculty are the ones that carry the department, in inordinate ways.

I stopped there without giving the full description I had wanted to, because I felt the emotion welling up in me and I was afraid of how unbridled it might be. In my pause a white woman spoke. This tenured professor, who had been at the university for as long as I had been alive and benefitted from many of the things I was referencing, discussed how problematic the system was. She suggested that at the school level (rather than the department level) something really needed to be done! However, I couldn't hear her knowing that she was one of the biggest offenders, and that nothing would change—no matter how involved administrators were at the school level—if every individual in the room did not investigate the degree to which they were complicit. I did hear though that she made mention of a time clinical faculty (myself and another white male who had left after his first year) applied for a tenure track position as our visiting lines were not secure. She made mention of the fact that the Dean of Faculty Affairs said that she would not let someone apply for a tenure track position that she knew would not get tenure.

As she spoke, I sat there hurting, because here again I was invisible. Initially, I thought she was speaking in support of me. However, I realized she wasn't even talking about me. They had all forgotten I even applied. My application had not even risen to the attention of the Dean. They, "my colleagues" on the hiring committee, thought even less of me than the Dean would and never presented my application to her. She was talking about the white male. Why hadn't *he* been considered worthy? She did not see or remember me, though my words were those that reminded her of the salient point she was trying to make? I then raised my hand again wanting to say aloud the things I was thinking and remind them that I had also applied—*but*…I couldn't. I swallowed my words. I was struck again with feelings of being an imposter. I sat there—both feeling and fearing that I probably was never worthy of the position anyway. Even worse, I feared if I said anything they would think, "*You?* Seriously?"

Instead, I said something that took just as much courage but was less direct of a challenge. I said, "In September, I will have been here for five academic years. Yet, many of you don't know me. I left a tenure track position where I was a big fish in a small pond to come here and assume a clinical position, thinking I wanted to be among the greats, because I could learn so much more just from being around you. However, that has not been the case. Instead, I have had to introduce myself to some of you as many as five times. You don't even see me. I have been in the elevator with some of you and though I have said hi, you have looked directly at me and not even returned the greeting… I do so much service that I have no career to be proud of and now every day I ask myself how long I am going to be able to stay here because of how this place makes me feel about myself…." I could then feel the cry choking me as it was making its way out onto my face. And since I had no sure direction of where I wanted to go with the discussion, I just stopped. Someone quickly jumped in, making a joke that none of us would make that kind of a mistake any time soon because we would not be in any elevators together because of COVID.

I turned off my camera and muted my microphone. The emotional pain had become physical and vibrated throughout my whole body. I was shaking. I started sobbing until I felt weak. I could barely see through my tears, and though many people were sending me private messages, thanking me for my bravery, it had no effect. My trauma had already been triggered, and my mind and body were doing their own things. Further, I was mad at myself. My last sentiment, "I ask myself how long I am going to be able to stay here *because of how this place makes me feel about myself*," was not true. I was actually growing stronger in my self-love and self-respect and beginning to see how much I was worth and that what I was being offered here was beneath me. I did not deserve the exploitation that was happening—and yes, it was exploitation. Exploitation, in my understanding, is when the benefits of the labor of a few (or the marginalized) are transferred to the dominant class. What I wanted to say was something bolder and more direct that indicted them for their complicity and gave voice to how they benefitted from the work I and the other clinical faculty did. Instead, much like the ways in which I was indoctrinated as a Black woman in a white man's world, I protected them at my own expense. I made myself small, and seemingly weak, by suggesting that how I thought of myself, rather than the corrupt white supremacist system that shaped my entire existence, was to blame for my dissatisfaction.

It was only a few weeks later in a conversation with a white colleague and friend (who also occupied the role of clinical faculty) that I further realized the weight of it all, on me. For one, I had just assumed a leadership position over a program with more than 700 students. This program was one that had grown rapidly without much infrastructure and development and needed more than just one director. Smaller programs with 50 students had two directors. Those directors were most often white. My program sorely needed resources in the form of more faculty and advisors. Moreover, I was taking this position at a time that a lot of changes were occurring with respect to COVID, in addition to the rightful demands of students that the program be more inclusive in light of the social awakening that was occurring in the world. Then, there were various student issues. I was working 12 to 13-hour days during our stay-at-home COVID orders, at a time when I read emails from other faculty (mostly male, mostly tenured) about finally having time to play frisbee in the back yard or hang picture frames on the wall. I started waking up early every morning because the churn of my stomach prevented me from sleep. There was just too much to do. I ran through my days with my heart racing and heaviness in my chest because it was all just too much. So, as I sat one-on-one with my colleague, and she asked how I was doing, I told her (without considering the parallel), "I feel like I can't breathe." She looked at me genuinely and with love before saying, "Norissa…how could you?" I realized immediately that she was making a reference to all that was going on in the world and what that would trigger for me, as a BW. However, she was also making a direct reference to the murder of George Floyd, who also, quite literally *could not breathe*. Although, my experience is not directly comparable to George Floyd's murder, in that he had a physical knee on his back, I had also been feeling crushed under the weight of white supremacy. My death would not be in 9 minutes and 46 seconds, but as studies of John Henryism inform us, the high effort coping required to deal with prolonged experiences of inequality and racial discrimination ultimately damages ones' health through stress, resulting in higher rates of cardiovascular disease, heart attacks, depression and other problems, including early deaths (Felix et al., 2019). As such, the suffocating environment of a predominantly and historically white institution promised to kill me too…*eventually*. Racism in law enforcement is not unlike

racism in the academy. Neither have been good for Black people.

The Weight of the Work

Eight months later, I can assuredly say that given what was happening in the world, my words held more impact than they would any other time, and they served as a catalyst for change efforts that are still underway, however clumsy those efforts may be. Yet, even as I write, I write with sadness. This week in a Chairs' Advisory meeting, a wound that was healing, was ripped open again. Having heard what I had said back in June, the new Chair came in with a mission to make things fairer and more equitable across races, genders, and faculty lines. As such, he presented to the advisory group the truth of how things were supposed to play out between clinical and tenured faculty. The preexisting policy indicated that the only intended difference between the clinical and tenured track faculty was that clinical faculty taught twice as much. In the time saved from teaching, the tenured were expected to have been doing research. They both were expected to do the same amount of service and have the same amount of time for professional activities. However, the truth of the matter is that clinical faculty do so much service that they don't have time for professional activities. This has great impact because when clinical faculty go up for promotion, they are less likely to get it. In addition, when clinical faculty go for promotion, they are at a systemically constructed disadvantage because when performance is assessed in yearly reviews, only teaching and service are considered, not professional activities.

This conversation would have been great and validating in so many ways. It would have given me hope for a changing landscape. However, before the Chair had a chance to get into the details, he was interrupted by a tenured faculty member, known for how opinionated she is. She dominantly asserted, "That's what *they* were hired for. You have to keep that in mind." Given that I had an extreme amount of work and stressful happenings just the day before and the fact that I thought we had long passed this kind of argument, I was at a lower capacity to handle such an assertion. I did, however, write in the chat box that those kinds of statements reinforce the privilege of the tenured and result in the continued imbalance. I stated that I would have spoken verbally but the sentiments both angered and saddened me. I saw her read it and stretch back on her chair completely unbothered, and it infuriated me. Again, my body behaved in ways against my desire. Tears began to roll down my eyes. I turned my video off, and I disengaged, answering minimally when called on. Days later my visceral response made sense to me. Across several days, I went from angry to sad and wanting to completely withdraw from everything but my family. Given what I know of trauma, I realized I was having a traumatic response to the trigger of the present oppressive experiences I was having, as well as the many years of violence inflicted on me in historically white academic institutions—not to mention all that transpired for those who came before me. People of color in institutions steeped in white supremacy endure violence regularly, but it often goes unnamed for so long that it is not unlike silent toxins that erode our tissues and cause cancers by way of a long and steady process. If one isn't careful, they may miss the preliminary signs of illness or question their appraisal of the symptoms, concluding that it was only a small thing—a cold, perhaps—that can be fought off with home remedies. It is a while before they learn otherwise.

This story provides a clear description of some of the insidious ways in which white supremacy exerts its influence in the workplace and shapes the experience of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) in higher education. Some, if not all, of the aspects of the story may resonate with many. Yet, I know it is one of many stories that depict the one-down position BW faculty and staff are made to assume in such contexts. Therefore, the remainder of this paper will review strategies for survival in these oppressive contexts. It will begin with a discussion of what BW can do for their own self-survival and conclude with a discussion of what institutions can do to increase equity and belonging for BW in academia. Though much of this can be applied across genders, the focus of the discussion targets the experiences of BW because of the ways gender roles and socialization intersect with race and create a yet more unique condition. Women are socialized to be self-sacrificing nurturers; BW, who were once responsible for nursing slave master's children, self-sacrifice even more so than others. Women in academia are responsible for more service than their male counterparts, even when those counterparts are Black or other men of color (Walkington, 2017). As such, the focus on BW in this paper extends to those who identify as women, have been socialized as women, and are related to as women.

Strategies for Black Survival

Self-Survival

Although there is a range of experiences across higher education contexts, for most BW, academia is like infertile soil. Of course, if tended to and an extraordinary amount of time and attention is given, the soil can eventually be revived and even thrive. Then one could plant seeds, water, weed when necessary, and wait for harvest. That would be fine, if all were given the same soil to grow their harvest, but that is not the case. Those who were given fertile soil, flourish almost immediately, having only to plant seeds, weed minimally and wait for harvest-time. As such, they reap the harvest much quicker (i.e., scholarship, research, publications, conference presentations, gaining notoriety, the opportunity to be a thought leader in their field, tenure and/or promotion). However, those who are not, not only wait for harvest, but spend years continuing to cultivate the soil because it takes many years to bring soil to a most inviting and rich place. The obstacles and experiences of the two groups are not the same; neither are the outcomes.

This mirrors the experience of BW in academia. BW have less career satisfaction because of their labor and toil, and this labor is often unseen and undervalued (Patton & Njoku, 2019). There are decreased opportunities for scholarship deemed meaningful or opportunities for promotion and tenure (Walkington, 2017). Disproportionately, they provide mentorship and training opportunities for students and spearhead diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Despite this, they are more likely to be perceived as incompetent and unintelligent (Harris, 2020). Structural factors like those that have been mentioned are not often considered in their evaluations, resulting in a decreased likelihood for promotion and tenure. Equally as important to this discussion is that BW are not often invited to decision making spaces in which they can impact change (Patton & Njoku, 2019). When they are, they are often the minority in their opinion and expression, and the cost of advocacy wears on them. Many BW leave academia, and rightly so with all the adversity. However, this perpetuates the problem as there are no

challengers of dominant discourse within the system, though this is necessary for structural change to occur. In order to survive in these contexts, BW in academia are advised to understand their experiences through a trauma-informed lens, practice self-care, find community, address internalized oppression and its manifestation as imposter syndrome, adjust expectations as a means of coping, practice self-advocacy, or if all else fails, leave.

Understand One's Experiences Through a Trauma-Informed Lens

Trauma, by definition, means wound, or injury (Herman, 1997). People do not experience trauma just by virtue of being wounded or injured. Trauma is experienced when one's circumstances have exceeded one's ability to cope or make sense of. When we do experience a trauma, our bodies help us by facilitating a fight, flight, or freeze response. When we are not able to fight or flee, we are not able to discharge the energy of our charged nervous systems and experience a freeze response. The energy gets trapped in our bodies and can be triggered later on in time (van Der Kolk, 2014). An important contextual factor to consider in the context of this discussion is that power restricts the degrees to which individuals can fight or flee. There are intra-institutional consequences for getting up and leaving a meeting or directly challenging peers or those in a higher position about something experienced as racist or sexist. As such, it stands to reason that BW in historically and predominantly white institutions are in situations in which they cannot adequately resolve the activation of their nervous systems (by fighting or fleeing) and ultimately freeze with this unresolved trauma in their bodies. This must also be considered against the backdrop of cumulative traumas that have occurred historically, in ones' personal life, in the community, in the larger society and in prior academic experiences. Oppression is not often spoken about as traumatic, but it most certainly is.

Some factors that influence the degree to which someone is able to bounce back from a traumatic experience include the immediate aftermath of the traumatic event (i.e., Was support provided or offered?), post-traumatic circumstances (i.e., loss of job or status, having to immediately return to work, etc.), the ways in which the larger community received them and their experience (i.e., Was the experience validated? Were structures within the community modified to allow for optimal recovery?), or repeated exposure to the stressor (i.e., Was this the first time the individual has had to deal with this stressor? If not, how many other times have they had to deal with it? What were the outcomes of those times?) (van Der Kolk, 2014). Due to the fact that Black faculty and staff employed in historically white institutions are often the numerical minority and have less power within the institution, when they discuss issues of prejudice, discrimination, or systematic racism and sexism, they are often met with defensiveness and skepticism. These responses often prohibit responses necessary for healing and posttraumatic growth. Instead, superficial topical healing may begin, akin to scabs on a physical wound. However, repeated injuries and microaggressions pick away at the scab, exposing raw skin and preventing healing. This further reduces one's capacity to respond to the racial and gendered inequities and slights experienced. Similar to the experience I described in the recent Chairs Advisory meeting, where I found myself swimming in a sadness that seemed disproportionate to the circumstance, one whose trauma has been triggered relives the trauma all over again (Herman, 1997; van Der Kolk, 2014). It is experienced the same as when it happened the first time. Our nervous systems are activated with stress hormones preparing us for fight or

flight, taking us physically and emotionally to various extremes in a short amount of time. It can do so without explicit recollection of the earlier trauma, making it difficult to trace the origins of our emotions. Though these physiological responses have an adaptive quality to them, repeated activations, without opportunity to fight or flee, eventually wear on the body and manifest in various ways including anxiety, depression, and other physical ailments (van der Kolk, 2014). If these experiences are understood through a trauma-informed lens, self and community interventions can be employed to mitigate the impact of such events, which leads to a discussion on the importance of self-care.

Practice Self-Care

Self-care is an incredibly necessary part of the survival toolkit for BW in academia. Self-care does not imply indulgence in expensive rituals but requires a habitual self-check-in where one asks themselves how they are feeling and faring. Am I overwhelmed? Do I need a break? What can I do to feel and *be* better? Self-care calls for being proactive. One cannot wait until a time of crisis to decide to prioritize and center wellness. It must be cultivated such that there is a readily available toolkit to help decompress and achieve a sense of wellbeing. Self-care can be divided into prevention and intervention measures. Prevention speaks to those things you do on a regular basis to ensure that you are ready for daily challenges. They include such things as eating a healthy diet, sleeping the required hours, exercise, engaging in activities outside of work, cultivating healthy support system(s), regular prayer or meditation, practicing mindfulness, regular staycations or vacations, taking naps when needed, and speaking kind words to oneself. Interventions are those things you do in the midst of a crisis to be able to respond to a present stressor. They include intentional activation of any preventive strategies previously mentioned, seeking a counselor or therapist, utilizing members of your support network inside and outside of academia, outreaching to your union or faculty senate, going for a massage, enjoying a date night, or taking some time off from work. The impact of intervention strategies depends in large part on the degree to which prevention strategies are regularly practiced.

Self-care is not only necessary for the challenges BW personally face in the academy; it is also necessary because BW are more likely than their peers to mentor and do more service-oriented activities (Walkington, 2017; Patton & Njoku, 2019). In so doing, they are more likely to hear of the traumas and experiences of students of color and are more likely to be engaged in activities to help these students navigate oppressive systems. As such, there is an increased likelihood for burnout and vicarious (also called, secondary) trauma (Harrison & Westwood, 2009). Vicarious trauma is not simply witnessing the experience of others and feeling empathy or compassion for them. It is greater than that. Those who experience vicarious trauma actually experience the same symptomology as those who endure it themselves. As such, their nervous systems are expended in the same ways as if they themselves endured the trauma. Additionally, they are changed by the experience and have a reduced capacity to engage life and work in the same ways as they could pre-trauma. Movement is an exceptionally important preventive component of self-care. Movement is cited as being necessary in resolving traumas that linger in our body (Perry & Szalavitz, 2006; van Der Kolk, 2014). Activities such as dancing, drumming, massage, running, yoga, and acupuncture all help to regulate a dysregulated nervous system in the aftermath of trauma.

Find Community

It is essential that BW in academia have established and developed communities they can rely on in times of need. Informal networks made up of family and friends are good because individuals can relate to the people in these groups without having much relation to their work experiences. In addition, often a similar value system is shared, love and warmth are reciprocated, and one's value is seen and appreciated. It counters ivory tower experiences and can nourish in ways that prepare for the challenges of work. Academic networks should be sought as well. There are various groups targeting the needs of people of color within academic institutions today. Within colleges and universities, diversity, equity, and inclusion offices may help one access additional resources and mentors. These offices are often called different things such as the office of global inclusion; the office of equity, belonging and community action; or some variation of this. In addition, some schools have multicultural centers, affinity groups, or, at best, in-house equity and diversity lawyers. Academic affinity groups outside of one's home institution should also be cultivated. There are specific groups such as the National Association of Black Social Workers, American Association for Blacks in Higher Education, and many others that may prove to be a good resource. In addition, there are informal groups that can be found on social media. At the time of this writing, there are private groups one could request access to, like Binders Full of Black Women, Black Women in Higher Education, and Black Nonbinary People in Academia. Similar groups can also be found on LinkedIn.

Address Internalized Oppression

Internalized oppression refers to the adoption of dominant culture narratives about who people of color are. Frantz Fanon (1961/2007) calls it auto-oppression and says it is when the oppressor without becomes the oppressor within. In this conceptualization, the oppressor no longer has to daily navigate the lives and experiences of people of color to make them do what is desired. The oppressed have internalized the ways, norms, and practices of the oppressive group and act according to the unspoken scripts laid out for them. These scripts keep in place the same dynamics as those actively pursued in the initial domination of a people.

Institutions operate according to Eurocentric values and norms. Standards of promotion and the criteria by which certain behaviors are praised over others are predicated on the standards assumed to be superior and are rooted in white supremacy. As such, marginalized individuals judge themselves according to the standards and critiques of that dominant cultural group. For women and people of color, it often manifests in internalized inferiority, more notably identified as "the imposter syndrome." The imposter syndrome, first coined in the 1970s, refers to the feeling that one does not measure up (Mullangi & Jagsi, 2019). One does not really believe they deserve the praise and accolades bestowed upon them and does not see themselves as being as good as their white or male counterparts. Further, there is a fear that it will someday be found out that they don't really belong. The imposter syndrome is a stressful way to live, yet many know it well—and it often results in self-defeating behaviors. One might be discouraged from applying for a higher position, seeking promotion, presenting at a conference, or even doing research because they believe (and have been told in many ways) that they do not have what it takes. An important aspect of this discussion is the consideration that internalized oppression and

the imposter syndrome often make us complicit in our own oppression. BW might not even notice that we are being asked to do more work than others or that some get to say "no" or choose the kinds of service they do, while some cannot. Moreover, if it is noticed, we often do not challenge the dynamics. We might even continue to accept or even volunteer for an extraordinary amount of work that is sure to result in our own downfall. Training our eyes to see inequities where they exist and saying "no" are practices that will result in self-preservation.

Beginning to learn one's own worth by choosing to judge oneself by standards consistent with one's own cultural values rather than Eurocentric cultural norms is a great first step in the direction towards liberation. For example, quantitative research and linear thinking is more consistent with patriarchal, western ways of knowing and is often valued more than qualitative research. Qualitative research and the act of knowing and teaching by way of storytelling is more consistent with the cultural norms of people of color. Despite my knowing this, when I say that I am a researcher, the immediate self-critique that often follows is, "No, you're not. That's not really research. Don't even say that out loud." These thoughts taunt me because, in my doctoral training, the perceived inferiority of qualitative research was explicitly stated. Proposals were rejected because "qualitative research was not real research." Instead of succumbing to the internalized voice of white supremacy, challenge it: Storytelling is a valid way of knowing. I tell and explore various stories and learn and teach about human behavior in a way that cannot be captured in quantitative work. They are two complimentary modes of knowing. Regular exploration of the ways in which these messages have been internalized will increase awareness of how they manifest in the individual experience. Challenging them will ensure that we override oppressive messages we have unknowingly internalized.

Adjust Expectations and Practice Self-Advocacy

A few years ago I went to a conference session and the presenters detailed how exhausting it can be going against the norm, being on high alert, noticing and fighting injustices. This understanding has never left me and is in fact something I think and talk about regularly in my classes. This work is not easy. When our expectations lead us to believe that fighting the status quo will be easy and provide immediate rewards, we set ourselves up for failure. Though we do live in a time of cancel culture, where surface level attempts at justice do *seem* to vindicate wrong doings against Black people, this swift and speedy response is not as readily experienced behind closed doors and in issues that do not result in immediate loss of revenue or status. As such, we have to know, like the title of Angela Davis' (2015) book, *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle*. Countering the norm and shifting cultures, especially when we are individuals who have been traumatized repeatedly, hurts. There are many who talk-the-talk of social justice but do not walk-the-walk. When the tables turn and people learn that in order for equity to exist the privileged have to give something up, even the most liberal feel threatened. Believing in the myth of scarcity, that is at the heart of oppression, they often fight to preserve their privilege.

Leave

The final option individuals have is to either leave their current institution or to leave academia altogether. Though I still have a few months left, I chose the latter. Just a year ago I found

myself saying to a prospective Black male, queer student who was skeptical about coming into a cohort of 100 students where he was the only Black male, "You have to be in the system to change the system." At the time, I had not realized what I was up against. I believed the people who sat beside me and sent me encouraging emails after the large faculty meeting where I bore all. I believed we were in this fight together, that all realized the cost of equity is often a loss of some power for the privileged. However, it was not long before I realized I was pushing hard, very hard, against a fortified brick wall. Though I have managed to change a lot and served as a catalyst for many changes in less than a year, the internal cost has been one that is too great to bear. And so, I had to reconsider my earlier sentiments and question the truth of whether I had to be in the system to change it. I now say, "You have to *had* been in the system to change it." Meaning, it is very necessary to have been in a system and to understand its inner workings in order to properly critique it. However, once you know that, you are prepared to change the system from outside if you so choose. I love teaching and I will never leave that, but I am not bound to be full-time faculty. I recognize this is easier said than done for some, and it might be a longer-term goal for others. However, the point is, academia is not the end-all-be-all, and purging oneself from the ugly that can exist inside the walls of the ivory towers might be what is necessary for Black survival. I tend not to advocate for absolute thinking, so while at the moment I do not intend to return to academia full time, I hold space for the possibility that I might; as institutions differ and as more equitable policies and practices are enforced, the landscape could drastically change. I held this as the last option for self-survival because I think it is important to try to employ all the other strategies before deciding that things cannot work. If all Black scholars left the academy, where would we be? Black scholars would not be heard from, nor would they get to influence the thoughts of future generations. Black students, as well as other students of color, would miss out on the privilege of being mentored and taught by BW. So, it is necessary for BW to be within those walls, for as long as it can be tolerated. The remaining section of this paper will review actions that can be taken to increase equity and belonging for BW from an institutional standpoint.

What Institutions Can Do to Increase Equity and Belonging for Black Survival

Discussing what Black scholars can do to survive in states of violence against themselves, as occurred in the previous paragraphs, is problematic on some levels. Although it is necessary, the truth of the matter is that Black scholars should not have to endure what they endure, such that they have to develop a special cadre of coping skills. Higher education, as a tool of white supremacy in a country rooted in racism and colonialism, is what should be addressed. To think of it any other way is a distortion of reality that serves to further enable white supremacy. Yet the discussion was necessary as things are not changing with much immediacy, and BW are still within these institutions. They can employ as many of the strategies suggested as they please, but if change does not exist on the macro level, we will continue to see the same results. In broad strokes, the remainder of this paper seeks to identify and address the ways in which academia can strengthen their capacity for Black survival within their institutions.

Understand the Experience of BW in Academia Through a Trauma-Informed Lens

Building on the earlier discussion of trauma, it must be understood that BW by way of their

existence in America have endured multiple traumas. Healing has been impossible in contexts in which there are continued offenses. Trauma-informed systems understand that safety is the first and most basic need for those who have endured trauma. As such, higher education establishments should provide safe spaces both at the school and university level and within departments and programs. In my observance, many institutions are checking the box by providing these opportunities at the school and university levels, but there is much less oversight around how these principles are enacted at the program or department level. Trauma-informed care and principles are most frequently discussed within the arena of mental health, physical health, or child welfare. However, they are applicable in every context that people engage in. To truly be trauma-informed, systems or institutions must incorporate knowledge about trauma at every level of functioning within the system (Yatchmenoff et al., 2017). As such, from facilities management to students, staff and faculty, thought should be given to racial trauma and how it has impacted the lives of individuals. Thought should be given to ensuring the system is less triggering, and efforts should seek to minimize revictimization. In order to examine the degree to which this happens, the voices of BW should be sought in the form of surveys, focus groups, town halls, or other community forums. In order to feel safe, safeguards against retaliation for truth telling should be considered and developed. Finally, the impact of trauma is often disconnection. As such, the antidote is connection and collaboration. Institutions can seek to foster academic communities in which individuals are deeply engaging and caring about the scholarship and work of each other, rather than coexisting in silos where people barely know each other.

Institutionalize Equity and Belonging in Real and Measurable Ways

One would be hard pressed these days to find a higher education institution that does not have a department that addresses diversity, equity and inclusion. Affirmative action won the hard, first part of the battle related to getting people of color and women into institutions. However, efforts were limited beyond that, as there was little consideration of the degree to which people felt a sense of belonging in these institutions or the degree to which these institutions demanded whiteness and maleness from those who entered them. Implicit and explicit messages normalizing and making the white way the superior way ensure that Black people who enter the institution have to employ a double consciousness (Du Bois, 1968) and have to code switch, frame switch, and change in order to be accepted, praised, and promoted. In a revolutionized academia where there is belonging and equity, every policy and practice—at every level—should be inspected for the degree to which it normalizes and rewards whiteness and maleness over other ways of being. Further, fostering the establishment of networks such as professional affinity groups, racial and ethnic identity affinity groups, and those specifically for women of color should be fostered and provided with a budget to enrich the developmental experiences of BW within the institution. Retention efforts should be targeted and strengthened as well because while institutions like the one where I am have done a better job at increasing diversity in the faculty and student body, there is a low retention rate for these individuals. Climate assessments can provide meaningful data about career satisfaction, experiences with peers, barriers to success, and needed opportunities for growth and development. Moreover, BW need to be paid their due. Despite increased labor and greater responsibilities, BW are paid significantly less than their white male counterparts (Patton & Njoku, 2019; Walkington, 2017).

If the voices of BW in higher education are to be nurtured, there must be a concerted effort of non-Black faculty to ensure that non-Black people are not making decisions for BW without their fair and proportionate representation. This means racial equity committees and things of the like should not be predominantly white people or people of color more proximal to whiteness. While it is admirable that many recently developed racial equity committees did not solely compose themselves of people of color because the work is heavy labor, Black people, women in particular, should be well represented. Not doing so poses the risk of reproducing the same dynamics of power and privilege, even though it somehow manages to look different.

Fostering specific opportunities for BW in the institution to develop and maintain self-care practices would go a long way towards addressing traditions of BW providing the nurturance, care, and service to others at the expense of their own. While it is great that these opportunities are encouraged, if the workload is not such that it can be enacted without consequence, it will not happen. Further, when incentivized and enculturated, the likelihood of use will increase. Universities have done creative things such as the creation of meditation rooms. However, one meditation room on the other side of campus when there is limited time is not likely to result in increased usage. Being strategic and employing knowledge about the lived experiences of BW in academia would allow for a tailored approach that could result in more career satisfaction.

A major point to make in ameliorating institutional conditions for BW in academia is with respect to the enormous amounts of seen and unseen emotional and physical labor. Service across departments should be considered differentially. Membership on a racial equity committee, when you are a person of color, is not the same as labor on a once-per-semester student refund committee and should not be counted equivalently. Emotional labor such as student mentorship and other often taken-for-granted labor should be considered and counted in annual reviews and considered in tenure and/or promotion. In addition, in systems that seek to create a culture of equity and belonging, the interruption of dominant discourse should be normalized. For example, in the story I presented earlier when the faculty member asserted, "That's what *they* were hired for. Keep that in mind," someone other than me should have challenged and even stopped her and pointed out the flaws in her thinking. It was excessively laborious for me to have to do so, given than I have already addressed it, and my lived experience is often invalidated in these contexts. Finally, the most important consideration is whether or not exploitation is being allowed in the institution. Constant assessments and use of outside consultants should be used to consider the degree to which this is happening. Everyone will say they are busy within a department, and they will be. However, people are busy doing different things, and that should be considered. One could be busy advancing their personal careers, while another can be busy advancing the academic programs that fund the schools. External consultants will allow people to express themselves without fear of retribution and can offer expertise that will enable them to see things differently from those embedded within the system.

Conclusion

BW are critical to the essential functioning of academia, yet very little within institutions of higher education affirm their value in policies or practices. In order for academia to be an

equitable place, it must pay attention to all the citizens within its borders. As a result of the degree to which harm is inflicted in these institutions, BW are charged with taking survival into their own hands, prioritizing their own well-being, while institutions are charged with meeting and exceeding those efforts by enacting short- and long-term strategies to attend to the lived experiences of BW in historically white institutions.

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Reflections from Facilitating Difficult Social Justice Conversations: Utilizing African Concepts of Restorative Dialogue

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Abstract: Following the death of George Floyd, other racial killings that had preceded him and the others that followed, the USA and the world witnessed increased racially driven conflict and tensions. For us as Black immigrant professionals from Kenya now living and working in the United States, this specific incident was especially stupefying, mind jarring, and grotesque to say the least. We felt angered, enraged, and extremely upset by that violent incident. In our attempts to make sense and comprehend the dehumanizing racial violence displayed, the seemingly rising racial tensions around us, the vulnerability we felt, and what this act of violence meant to our own lives, we realized we could no longer remain silent and on the sidelines—we needed to act. This essay is our reflection of the journey we've taken since. We discuss some of the activities we've engaged in, the conversations we started, and the strategies we have embraced as we co-facilitated interracial conversations in various circles and continue to grapple with the social injustices we witness in this nation every day.

Keywords: immigrant women, Ubuntu, racism, social justice, restorative dialogue

Introduction

As two immigrant scholars who are originally from Kenya, we have experienced different facets of racism and discrimination, and have been victims of stereotyping, but we have also been in positions to teach courses on diversity at our respective universities. However, we were raised in communities that were homogeneously Black African, communities that shared the same ethnicity, traditions, language, culture, and values. As such, the color of our skin or racial discrimination was never an issue we had to think about or contend with growing up. In fact, our first encounters and interaction with a "White person" was in our early 20s when we moved to the city to go to college. There were no White people in the rural areas where we grew up; we had only seen them in books and television. As a result, overt and covert discrimination based on the color of our skin was something that we were first exposed to upon our immigration and arrival in the United States and it was a foreign and new concept for us. It has therefore been a journey of learning and re-learning about the nuances of racism and discrimination, and we expect to continue to learn. Overall, our experiences with racism in this country have not been any different from that of Black Americans who are born and raised in the United States. However, because of the difference in our experiences and upbringing, we have been on a learning curve that may slightly differ from that of our brothers and sisters who grew up here and who have experienced racism and discrimination since birth (and before).

As we grappled with the grotesque and violent murder of George Floyd and the racial violence we had just witnessed, this quote from Dr. Reverend Martin Luther King's speech in Selma, Alabama in 1965 resonated with us: "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about

things that matter" (Human Coalition, n.d.). In our conversations with each other, we pondered questions such as: What are we going to do about this? What can we, two Kenyan immigrant Black women, contribute to this struggle? Do we know enough to do anything? How do we heal from this? We finally mutually agreed that we wanted to start a social justice conversation and invite others to join and engage with us. We felt the need and urgency to play an active role in advancing social justice for us and those who look like us, who also must contend with racism based on the color of their skin every day in this nation.

Additionally, as social work professionals, we are obligated by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) code of ethics to respond to social injustices in our communities and globally. The clearest and compelling evidence of our professions' unique commitment to social justice is in the preamble to the NASW Code of Ethics (2021):

> The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. (para. 1)

Despite knowing this, we felt we were charting into new territory, as these were conversations we are not accustomed to leading or even engaging in authentically, except within our small social circles with friends who look like us. As such, we spent a great deal of time discussing how to approach these conversations productively and without losing ourselves. In our attempts to create a framework and structure, we examined and discussed our separate previous experiences in facilitated interracial trainings we've been part of. In reflection, our observation and experience are that these conversations are characterized by strong and powerful emotions and are approached ambivalently by most participants. We had observed that many interracial interactions leaned towards binary views, a dictated structure on how dialogue should occur and, in a few of them, we witnessed expressions of resentment, anger, shame, guilt, strong disagreements, and even racial conflict. Further, from our own experience living in the United States, we've observed that complex relationships exist between people in this nation based on racial and ethnic differences. This creates conditions that have resulted in structurally entrenched racial inequalities and power imbalances that influence and dictate ways of relating with one another.

We acknowledge that there are nuances and an intimacy to this dynamic that remains elusive to us as immigrant women, having arrived in this country as adults who grew up in a different environment. Growing up elsewhere means we experienced a different upbringing, worldviews, and beliefs about how we ought to relate to each other as humans, and we experienced no racial discrimination and interracial conflict and therefore had to learn about it as immigrant adults. Nonetheless, we mutually agreed we could no longer remain silent, accepted that we will probably lead these conversations in a manner that is different from what we've experienced previously, and that we will best serve this course by staying true to who we are and our ways of being. Without taking away from any of these past trainings and history, our conversations led us back to our upbringing and the customs, traditions, and practices that were familiar to us, in which we had grown up steeped in. We traveled back to the conversational tools that we had

witnessed our elders utilize repeatedly to deal with interpersonal conflict in our communities of origin. These were conversational and conflict resolution tools our elders utilized when situations that required to be addressed through difficult conversations to restore people's sense of well-being arose. It is within this context that we gathered our first interracial group of women with the goal of engaging in genuine and authentic social injustice conversations.

Background

According to Kendi (2019), "racial inequality occurs when two or more racial groups are not standing on approximately equal footing" (p.18) and in such situations, conversations on these matters are likely to mirror and take on the same unbalanced footing. Further, Taylor (2013) asserted that discourses on social justice cannot be delinked from the contextual realities in which people exist. Social justice as a concept is underpinned by values of universal human rights, and there is a great need to focus on how people perceive and make meaning of issues of social justice/injustice and racial inequality. In our view as two Kenyan-born women, addressing social injustice calls for engagement in uncomfortable and often difficult conversations. This dialogue would only be fruitful when people practice and center humanness and respect for the human dignity and worth of the person. We envisioned a space where all individuals can authentically grapple with their feelings, perceptions, and belief systems with the goal of fostering honest connections with each other. We were however cautious to not ignore the wider attributes of the power differentials in the larger society. As noted by Kendi (2019), failure to acknowledge muted voices in conversation spaces tends to reproduce forms of exclusion that continue to privilege some over others.

We have separately participated in interracial trainings in the past where difficult racial conversations happened. From our own observations of these past experiences, we concluded that racial injustice conversations are often characterized by strong and powerful emotions and are approached ambivalently by many. Facilitating difficult social justice-oriented conversations in our perspective would therefore require more than adopting politically correct "woke" terminology; it calls for honest, authentic, and open dialogue. This foundation provided the background of our conceptualization on how to structure and facilitate conversational circles, with the awareness that we wanted to cultivate spaces where we could all authentically engage. In framing these conversations, we agreed to embrace and adopt the African concepts and techniques we had grown up witnessing our elders and community use to engage in conversations on difficult topics. Concepts of African restorative dialogue techniques have been utilized to promote restorative healing on the African continent for thousands of years. These tools have especially been used in situations that require engaging in difficult conversations with a goal of healing and bringing reconciliation to the mind, heart, and soul of the individual and therefore the community. In facilitating these conversations, our goal is to cultivate an environment where we model the power of tolerance and listening with kindness and compassion. We demonstrate how embracing others without judgment can be of mutual benefit and lead to change and healing within the individual and the community.

Applying the African Restorative Dialogue Approach

In formulating conversational circles and facilitating these dialogues, we have employed the principles, values, and restorative strategies that we observed in our communities growing up in rural Kenya. Our first social justice conversational circle comprised a group of fifteen women. This group constituted Caucasian and African immigrant women who committed to meet once a month to engage each other on matters of racial violence and the social injustice we found so troubling. African restorative approaches are grounded in the African philosophy of "Ubuntu" (Houshmand, 2019). The Ubuntu philosophy centers on our universal human bond, respect for the humanness and worth of every person, and the dignity and worth of every person. The Ubuntu philosophy also places emphasis on our interconnectedness, interdependence, mutuality, and the importance of the wellbeing for the individual and community. As such, we wanted to emphasize and show that as interconnected and interdependent beings who share the human bond, country, and community, what happens to one affects us all. Further, our conversations actualize storytelling as a strategy and emphasizes the importance of dialogue in facilitating healing and restoration (Ukwuoma, 2016). In embracing the Ubuntu philosophy, human interactions become a genuine and powerful dialogue where power differentials get broken down and mutual respect for each other's humanness gets centered. The masks of being judged or being judgmental are removed and individuals engage in respectful and open conversations that foster healing, compassion, and a desire to be part of the change. As explained by Houshmand (2019), Ubuntu does not ask individuals to erase their differences and become the same but rather asks them to interpret and appraise each other positively, build understanding and consensus through dialogue, make meaning of their communal experiences, and therefore forge a way forward that would be best for the whole. These are the philosophical foundational values that we have adapted and applied to these group conversations that have been going on for over a year. These social justice conversations have provided a space to process the emotional burden we have experienced individually and to express our feelings and thoughts in a mutually supportive environment.

We've allowed the conversation to flow organically and have guided our interactions in an inquisitive manner geared towards hearing each other and developing compassion for ourselves and each other through our shared humanity or Ubuntu. As the facilitators, we stayed away from providing much of a structured environment but focused more on modeling interactions in ways we saw our elders do. Each conversation has been built on practices rooted in techniques that provide a space to "lean in" and engage in these difficult conversations, with the goal of creating social injustice awareness, fostering compassion for self and others, and in turn bringing forth healing to the heart, mind, and soul, which in turn has driven many of the group members into action.

This group of women journaled and shared personal reflections and experiences with racism, as well as shared readings to enhance our understanding and help us locate ourselves in the tapestry of America. We have also relied on materials from Black racial scientists and authors as a starting point, then allowed the dialogues to unfold organically.

The journaling was guided by prompts to reflect on racism provided by Kendi (2020). These

prompts included:

> Have you ever described yourself as "not racist"? Why do you think so many people are invested in believing they are not "racist"?
>
> List and describe five major experiences that have most influenced how you relate to racial issues.
>
> Describe the first time you challenged (or thought about challenging) racism. (para. 3-6)

Other conversations have started with Brené Brown's (2020) podcast interview with Dr. Kendi (2019) on his book *How to Be an Anti-Racist* and how structural racism and COVID-19 has disproportionately affected Black communities. The organic parts of the conversations have included questions posed by us (African immigrant women to our White counterparts) where we've asked questions such as "How often did your family have conversations about race during your childhood?" "As a parent and a mother, how and when do you have these conversations with your own children (if at all)?" "Are you aware of your own family's history?" "Did your family own Black slaves?" and "Do you discuss this in your own homes and at your dinner tables?" among many other questions.

The White women in the group have voiced that they have benefitted from these conversations and that the facilitation strategies we've utilized have allowed them to reflect and engage with the topic in a manner that they previously did not. One of the sentiments expressed often within the group is that the environment we've cultivated has allowed vulnerability in manners they haven't experienced before. One participant described her experiences and observations of interracial conversations: "People tend to be over conscious on how to say things in order to avoid being offensive as opposed to being authentic." Other participants agreed, with another voicing that "people are so afraid of saying the wrong thing—even when they care." We've also processed and talked at length about the price of saying the wrong thing, which is going to happen if we all continue to actively engage in these and similar conversations and where this fear originates—including the fear of being labeled racist and what this would mean. We've also discussed the need for us as members of this society to talk openly about the historical roots and contemporary manifestations of social inequality and discrimination. Most participants agree that learning how to communicate on topics such as social injustice, racial violence, White privilege, police violence, economic inequality, and mass incarceration requires practice, and that engaging in these difficult conversations demands courage and skill—regardless of who we are or what our intentions may be. One of the facilitators utilized this conversation to point out the White privilege demonstrated in the act of choosing to be silent in the name of being afraid of saying the wrong thing or being judged as racist and the damage this silence causes. In reflection, one participant shared that "there is a collective indifference among White people. For White people, reflection is optional. They don't have to reflect because they want to believe this country is good, that it's an ideal and perfect democracy." Participants were challenged to dig deep into their true feelings, beliefs, values, and even their possible own contributions to social injustice. We also utilized Brené Brown's (2012) description of vulnerability as

"uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure" (p. 34). We encouraged the group to embrace vulnerability as "a source of hope, empathy, accountability, and authenticity" (Brown, 2012, p. 34). As a group, we came to an acceptance that being wrong and saying the wrong thing is probably going to happen, but that we can't afford to collectively stay afraid. We mutually agreed that there are times that participants will do harm and act in racist ways, but that it's important that they not be stuck at feeling ashamed but rather use this as a growth point they needed to work on. We have also discussed how members of the group can approach conversations with family members who sometimes act or demonstrate racist behavior. Further, this conversation circle has become a space to practice how to model how to effectively engage in difficult conversations regarding race and racism with our children/grandchildren. We have valued authenticity and the importance of genuinely starting where we each are in our own social justice journeys. A participant expressed that "if people are not vulnerable then our society will continue down the same path of systemic racism and racial inequalities." Another participant pointed out the danger of continuing to not do anything about social injustice and shared that "until you become aware of your own assumptions, you continue to justify that you are not racist." We spoke about the fact that we live in a racist society where racist thoughts have been passed down for generations, and that often we are not aware of them. A participant encouraged all to be willing to engage with their thoughts which may be racist and that "when we do become aware of them, we acknowledge that we were wrong in our beliefs and thinking. It's this truth that will lead us to becoming more anti-racist individuals." This part of our conversation ended with the conclusion that it's possible for White people in this country to acknowledge the history of oppression and that they have benefited from White privilege—without necessarily feeling shame and guilt.

This conversational space has provided us opportunities to process the racism we encounter on an everyday basis as two African Black immigrant women, but it has also given us another perspective of how others who may not look like us view issues of racism. As Black women, one of the discussions we found most troubling was Caucasian group members sharing that they never discussed slavery or race issues in a meaningful way with their own parents and/or with their own children. We struggled to understand how an issue that is ever-present and so entrenched in the fabric and all facets of American society can be completely muted from the dinner tables of the majority of its citizens. This specific conversation was very eye-opening to us as immigrant Black women. It was a good moment to dig into our own wrong assumptions about racism, White people, and White privilege. When we first began our conversations, our Caucasian participants were attentive and listened, and were sympathetic to our anger, pain, and disgust about the status of Black individuals in this country. One participant reacted to our pain, frustration, and vulnerability by stating that "I am feeling ashamed that people of color are living in fear in 2020." In our earlier conversations, they allowed us to talk without interruptions, validated our feelings, and acknowledged how grave the situation is for us as Black people in this land. As the conversations have progressed, they started sharing more about their own experiences, their ignorance, and their denial of the reality of this country's legacy of oppression and discrimination—but also regarding their own journeys of wanting to be and do better. As these conversations have progressed, all the group members have had opportunities to discuss our personal levels of awareness of racist incidents that we now encounter every day in the many spaces that we occupy.

Whereas many of our conversations were focused on reflecting on what was happening around us, and processing readings and podcasts we came across, some sessions have naturally moved towards talking about what to do now that we know what we know. Members have shared their experiences and perspectives on the importance of continuing to engage in social justice conversations by stating, "Groups like this are so important as I'm getting an awakening in my 60s," and "It's going to take all of us to shift and make changes related to race and social justice." Some members also recognize that it's going to take collective action to make a change. One participant started us on this journey by stating, "The history may not be your fault, but it is your responsibility to learn about racism and do something about social injustices." Another participant added, "We need to stay engaged in difficult conversations of inequalities, racism, and injustices by remaining vigilant and having these difficult conversations with coworkers, family, and friends."

With time, the conversations have naturally evolved to discussions of the need to advocate, identify inequalities, and push for change. Some participants have utilized the group as a platform to process some of the actions they have personally taken in personal and public spaces to challenge racism. As facilitators, in helping the group formulate possible actions they can personally take to deal with racism, we have again relied on Dr. Kendi's (2019) *How to Be an Anti-Racist* work. We acknowledged that it's not unusual to feel uncomfortable as we tackle structural racism and the inequalities in this country and its history but asked participants to reflect on this question: "After reflecting on your own comfort level, how will you stay engaged in difficult conversations of inequalities, racism, and injustices?" Below are some of the excerpts from that conversation on strategies that participants shared they will utilize as they engage in difficult conversations about race and racism in their own families, circles of friends, and acquaintances:

> One participant described her thoughts and approach by pointing out that "The heart of racism is denial. To be anti-racist, we must acknowledge our beliefs and actions, be vulnerable, and have honest confessions."

> Another participant added that "We must admit when we are being racist, instead of being defensive. Anti-racist work is never-ending and requires constant self-reflection. We must be constantly growing, and growth requires self-awareness."

> One other participant stated that "Like Dr. Kendi and Dr. Brown stated, it is important to hold people accountable for their words and actions that are racist. I think this is something I can continue to do in my personal life."

As Black women, our personal feelings, thoughts, and interactions as we engaged in these difficult conversations with this group of White American women deepened our interest in Black racism science and social justice, and our own anti-racist endeavors were amplified. These conversations and materials challenged some of our own preconceived notions that once we speak up against racism, we will be labeled as "angry Black women." We came to acknowledged that the situation we are confronted with is dire and we must act without fear of

what labels others may apply to us. We also came to the realization that we can facilitate difficult conversations by approaching it utilizing the Ubuntu philosophy that centers our universal human bond and respect for the humanness and worth of every person. As such, we have gotten to a point where we recognize that we have something to contribute to this fight and that we do not have to alter ourselves to be able to pursue and participate in social justice. Getting to this place did not come without our own struggles; we spent lots of time debriefing after every conversation. Sometimes we were dumbfounded by confessions of being White, having White privilege, and navigating life without the burden of having to think about one's skin color in a racist society. In other instances, we were shocked by the realization that race and slavery was not a dinner table discussion among the group members during their own childhoods and subsequently with their own children—despite the significance of this phenomenon in the history of this country.

Personal Impressions and Conclusions

African restorative dialogue techniques have been used in the African continent for thousands of years for conflict resolution, facilitating healing, and reconciliation. These techniques are effective strategies of resolving conflict; restoring a sense of peace, wellbeing, and reconciliation; and building interpersonal relationships. Adapting these techniques to the difficult dialogues we facilitated provided appropriate and relatively comfortable tools for us to use. It also provided an avenue to process the emotional burden we experienced individually and collectively after the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent killings that have followed. By centering Ubuntu (our humanness), members become comfortable with expressing feelings and thoughts in a mutually supportive environment, which in turn organically builds community and compassion for one another. Some of the strategies we utilized to create a comfortable space included building rapport and trust with the participants and establishing interpersonal relationships. This involved starting the conversation without any set agenda and allowing the dialogue to flow organically which then allowed participants to start the conversation by talking about what was important to them at that given time. The only reminder at the beginning of our conversations was for all to listen with openness without judgment, to be authentic in expressing their thoughts, and be willing to challenge their own misconceptions. Immediately after completing each conversation, the authors spent time debriefing and processing their reflections of the content of the group dialogue. This acted as an outlet for emotions that were triggered by these difficult conversations.

As social work educators of color, our experiences with these conversations reaffirmed that this is a promising approach for us to utilize to join the social injustice conversation in a manner that fits with who we are as individuals. The strategies could be utilized in advancing antiracism in social work education and practice. We have also learned as social work professionals that the Ubuntu philosophy and the accompanying restorative approaches can be adapted to facilitate genuine and powerful dialogue where power differentials are broken down and mutual respect for each other's humanness is centered. This would also be utilized by social work professionals who are engaged in advancing antiracism in social work education and practice. As we continue to fine-tune this approach, we hope to continue to finesse our strategies and techniques and feel encouraged that there is space for us to join this social justice fight.

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Black Males' Plight to Breathe in America—Black Racial Injustice

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Abstract: In this reflective narrative, I discuss the Black Male's plight to breathe in America; that is to live in the world, be creative, and exercise agency of self in the face of structural racism and White supremacy. Furthermore, I discuss the Psychology of Cruelty and how this mindset and its actions impact the overall well-being of Black Males. Finally, this reflection provides practical corrective social action in the form of societal engagement to address structural racism and White supremacy through an Afrocentric Perspective in social work practice to bring about policy advocacy and change so Black Males might breathe freely in America.

Keywords: structural racism, Psychology of Cruelty, historical trauma, Black Males, Afrocentric perspective, equity, inclusion

Black Males Plight to Breathe in America—Black Racial Injustice

The Black Male's plight to breathe in America, that is, to live in the world, be creative, and exercise agency of self, has manifested into ongoing adverse interactions with structural racism and White supremacy ever since being brought forcibly to America. Since then, each generation of Black Males, including myself, have struggled with the impact of historical and ongoing trauma associated with the Psychology of Cruelty manifested under White supremacy and structural racism. The Psychology of Cruelty occurs when the dominant group persuades oppressed groups through fear and other forms of propaganda to preserve the way of life of the former by espousing that the latter is less than human and worthy of being oppressed (Magwaza, 2020).

My Personal Experience with the Behaviors of the Psychology of Cruelty

We all have a unique life story, and mine is no different. I was born in Brooklyn, New York, to an Afro-Trinidadian mother and African American father. I relocated to Trinidad with my mother at an early age, where I grew up within a Trinidadian culture, which is a pluralistic, multi-racial, and ethnic society where race was not the dominant factor in one's day-to-day interactions. When I returned to the United States as a young adult, I immediately experienced a sense of racial paranoia I had never experienced while living in Trinidad. I went from being a young man whom my immediate family and broader society in Trinidad reinforced as "the future" to a natural-born suspect in America. While I overlooked some of the behaviors and attitudes displayed to me in non-black communities, I was bothered and annoyed by the behaviors of suspicion or over scrutiny displayed towards me.

The psychological breaking point for me occurred when I watched, on the local news in 1986, the coverage of an African American of Trinidadian background, Michael Griffith, who was attacked by a group of White teens in Howard Beach, Queens, New York. Michael tried to flee

across the Belt Parkway and was fatally struck by a car while attempting to escape his attackers. I recall being angry and saddened by this event. As a result, I decided to join the protest marches calling for justice for Michael. My trip to Howard Beach was terrifying as mobs of angry White residents tried to physically assault us as they hurled insults such as "go back to Africa, you Black monkeys," and other racial abuses which I will not repeat.

As a result of this experience with the Psychology of Cruelty, I became conscious of my "blackness" and perceived otherness, that "Double Consciousness" Du Bois (1903/1968) so eloquently described in his book, *The Souls of Black Folk*. From that encounter, it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was perceived as less than human and a dangerous outsider to be controlled or neutralized through violence, if necessary, by this angry White mob. After that, I became ambivalent and developed a sense of self-doubt about my self-worth as a Black Male and an American citizen in my country that did not fully value my presence or humanity. That experience developed within me a sense of anxiety and racial paranoia around my safety and well-being in spaces where I was a noticeable minority by race and gender.

Eventually, my paranoia increased when I became a father to a Black Male child. When my son began elementary school, I was concerned about him being labeled or pathologized for engaging in normal childhood and adolescent behavior which could be perceived differently by his teachers, who were mostly White. I found myself being overly preoccupied, concerned, and protective of him and his well-being. Over the years, I have tried to gain a fuller understanding through self-reflection and research on the impact structural and interpersonal forms of racism have had on the gene expressions resulting from historical and ongoing trauma unique to most people of African descent in America.

The Unaddressed Impact of Racialized Trauma on Black Males

A recent study by Carter et al. (2017) has shown that prolonged incidents of racism in some individuals can lead to symptoms like those experienced with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD can look like depression, anger, recurring thoughts, physical reactions (e.g., headaches, chest pains, insomnia), hypervigilance, low self-esteem, and mentally distancing from the traumatic events. I reflect on my experiences over the years with structural racism, interpersonal racism, and other forms of implicit biases. I have had to suppress my anger and feelings of always having to prove my self-worth or downplay my worthiness as a Black Male by being hypervigilant under the faulty notion that I should not express my feelings because "Black people are resilient." This notion tends to downplay the oppressive behaviors inherent in structural racism by normalizing racial pathology in others as an unfortunate individual act and not calling it out as a problem among people who classify themselves as being more worthy than others within our society.

Practical Steps Towards Corrective Social Action

Du Bois' (1903/1968) poignant statement, "the problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line," (p. 8) still rings accurately in our society. In my opinion, the primary issue of the 21st century amid the COVID-19 pandemic remains that of race in this country. The dominant group uses its perceived and absolute power to control and universalize its experiences, history,

and interpretations as the only reality. One way to address this issue of universalization is through the continued implementation of corrective social action. Black Males and the broader African American community should take social/political actions to promote inclusion and diversity for African Americans and other marginalized groups. These actions would consist of strategic protests that incorporate our social-political organizations, such as fraternities, sororities, churches, community, and professional African American organizations engaged in collective action.

Secondly, there is a need for African Americans to *heal* from historical and ongoing racial trauma and racial paranoia through candid, open dialogue. First, African Americans must fully address our suppression of internalized oppression and its manifestation as Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (Leary, 2005) and the impact it continues to have on us as a race if we are to regain agency of self. We can no longer afford to engage in cognitive dissonance on this serious matter.

Just acting like racism, racial trauma, and White supremacy are in the past and have no bearing on our present or possible future is not working. Then, White Americans must gain the moral courage and fortitude to address the pathology of White supremacy and structural racism in America. We cannot move forward as a nation and as a human family until this elephant in the room is addressed candidly and forthrightly with action steps to redress these wrongs, such as the residual impact of the legacy of enslavement on African Americans, racialized segregation, mass incarceration, police violence, and unequal medical care, etc.

An Example of a Macro Corrective Social Action

A macro corrective social action would look like the following two concepts that I am proposing from an Afrocentric mode of thought: The first concept being Humanistic Values and the other Universalistic versus a Targeted approach to policy formation and advocacy from an Afrocentric Perspective in social work practice (Wright et al., 2018). As discussed by Asante (1980), Afrocentricity is a theory of thought and action that advocates for the centrality of people of African ancestry within the context of their own personal and historical experiences as a subject and not as an object, not as a victim but as a subject who can create an environment that will allow themselves to develop positively in the world. The theory's fundamental concepts are human agency, location, centeredness, and subject. As a mode of thought, Afrocentricity seeks to redirect the discourse on phenomena associated with people of African ancestry away from Eurocentric attitudes and conceptual frameworks, which are most often rooted in racism towards inaccurately understanding the contributions made by people of African ancestry throughout the course of human history up to the present. Afrocentrist practitioners use a strength-based approach to advance human agency in every given place where the examination, critique, or analysis of people of African ancestry occurs (Asante, 1980; Saleebey, 1992).

As such, Humanistic values as a concept in Afrocentric social work practice are values that place a priority on eliminating human oppression and enhancing human potential by valuing humanistic principles that advance equity, fairness, and social and economic justice concerns, whereas the Universalistic versus a Targeted concept is an approach to policy formation which examines the degree to which focus is placed on problems and situations that occur both within and without the African American community (Schiele, 1997). From a macro level standpoint,

the Universalistic versus a Targeted approach to policy advocacy provides an excellent framework for policy formation, analysis, and implementation because social policies in society should aspire towards the same universal goal, but each group in society may require a different policy strategy to help them reach that desired social policy goal (Schiele, 2000).

Public policy is generally understood as the broad area of government laws, regulations, court decisions, and local ordinances. Since all politics are local, African Americans as stakeholders in the governance of our affairs as citizens along with all Americans who stand against White supremacy and structural racism must become more informed about public policies and evaluate all policies within these two concepts as a lens to ensure that public policies are humanistic, fair, and seek to empower Black Males within the context of their families specifically and the broader African American community generally rather than delimiting people from living to their fullest potential by being overly punitive in their directives and implementation strategies to hinder or discourage Black Males specifically and African Americans in general from their full rights as members of the human family.

An Example of a Micro and Mezzo Corrective Social Action

A micro and mezzo corrective social action would look like community stakeholders engaged in the policy formation process to ensure social policies are created to empower Black Males within the context of their families and communities through government and private sector organizations in human services, banking, business, housing, education, and the criminal justice system, to address equity, inclusion, and the delivery of services at the micro and mezzo level. These services must be culturally appropriate and rooted in the communities' strengths rather than their perceived deficits for positive outcomes as part of our collective responsibility as a human family.

In sum, the Black Male's plight to breathe in America, that is, to live in the world, be creative, and exercise agency of self, requires collective leadership from us all to address this moral impasse of White supremacy and structural racism.

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"Chop It Up!" A Clinical Reflexive Case for Barber Shops as Safe Havens for Black Men During the Pandemic

Khabir Williams and Juan Antonio Rios

Abstract: The year 2020 was full of unfortunate events such as the outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) and the apex to the reiteration of Black racial oppression in the United States of America (USA). Both events have resulted in death, systematic health, and financial disparities for Black people living in America. Due to ongoing Black racial oppression, there continues to be limited engagement of Black people within the helping professions, which can lead to acute symptomology. The phrase "reiteration of Black racial oppression" is coined by the authors as over generality to identify the generational, cumulative oppressive experiences of Black/African Americans in the United States. As history teaches, similar experiences of oppression have echoed throughout generations and communities (Goosby & Heidbrink, 2013). This reflective narrative depicts lived experiences and provides insight as a Black male [Khabir] working in the helping profession during the apex of Black oppression and COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Black racial oppression, African diaspora, mental health, barbershops, Chop It Up program

Introduction

It was March 2020, and I was inside my office at my former place of employment, sitting in silence after I had just completed my morning affirmations. I pivoted my office chair toward the window and admired the horizon, reflecting on my humble beginnings in life. To my surprise, this day was different from the traditional beautiful sounds of emergency vehicles racing down the streets, impatient drivers honking their horns ferociously, and music piercing through someone's car stereo as if they were having a concert inside their car.

On this day, the streets were empty; it was quiet, eerie, and felt unusually hollow. As I was pondering my tranquility, I heard rigorous pounding on my office door. *Boom! Boom! Boom!*

My heart rate rapidly increased, my palms got sweaty, and my fight or flight instinct kicked in. I had to evaluate the situation; what was my plan of action going to be?

Onset of Trauma

The intense knocking reminded me of the time I sneakily went to a co-ed house party sometime in high school when I was supposed to be at my school's basketball practice. Three friends and I were walking to school after waiting for one hour and the 70 bus had not arrived. While walking, my friend informed us that he heard of a house party that he wanted to attend. "It's gonna be fun; it's gonna be a lot of girls. We gonna chill and relax…what's the worst that can happen?" said my friend. As I contemplated all the possible scenarios and consequences, my ignorance and immaturity got the best of me. Deep within my soul, I knew the right thing would be to go to school and basketball practice.

I consistently convinced myself, one day won't hurt. All you do is go to school, basketball practice, basketball games, study, repeat. Looking back, I would say I was yearning for self-care and the opportunity to spend time with my peers in a setting that was not the classroom, study hall, or basketball court, even if it meant taking a risk and dealing with consequences.

Collectively, my friends and I came up with a foolproof plan. We decided to attend the party and for me to arrive back home around the same time I would if I had attended basketball practice. Next, I would send a text message to my coach and inform him I was not feeling well and could not attend practice, and I did just that. Minutes later, my coach texted me back, "No worries, feel better soon, watch some film." To my surprise, the plan was working!

As we were walking to the party, we stopped at the corner store. Before walking in, we greeted our peers with handshakes and head nods. At the corner store, we bought some chewing gum and miscellaneous items. When we came out of the corner store, we noticed three unmarked—but obviously—police cars with dark tinted windows driving in unison. The police pulled up to the store rapidly and jumped out of their vehicles; they quickly pulled their guns out and shouted, "Freeze!"

There was an intense moment of silence; it was so silent; I could hear myself think. It seemed like I was able to freeze time, and my senses and thought process were heightened. I could feel my body temperature as it increased, and I could feel my toes clinch the soles of my sneakers. My heart rate rapidly increased, my palms got sweaty, and my fight or flight instinct kicked in.

Suddenly, all the young Black males that were playing dice in front of the corner store dispersed so fast, as if they were running in a track meet. One of the men threw what appeared to be individually packed capsules of drugs in the air, possibly as a diversion to escape. My heart rate rapidly increased, my palms were sweaty, my eyes were shifty as I looked for an exit and tried to evaluate the situation. "Carry on… Carry on," one officer yelled at us. I was shaken but relieved. We continued to walk down the block. Looking back, it was probably foreshadowing the events of the day.

We arrived at the house, and we could hear the music from the front doorsteps. We waited for what seemed like eternity for someone to open the door. In my mind, I was thinking, "Yes, we made it." My guard came down, and I began to relax. As I was walking through the house, a musk of sweat and cigarettes hit my face as hard as a proud parent clapping for their child at graduation. There were cigarette burns in the brown carpet that was supposed to be white, and cat furballs glided along the floor when someone walked in the room. As I walked through the house, I greeted my peers with handshakes, head nods, and hugs. As I got deeper into the apartment, I noticed more than thirty of my peers inside the home and an overwhelming smell of Axe and Victoria's Secret body spray. The party continued, and everyone was dancing, smoking, drinking, laughing, and having a good time. I was overwhelmed with joy, as I needed this time to relax. However, outside of the walls of the house, trouble waited.

On my way to the bathroom, I heard *Boom! Boom! Boom!* As I approached the back of the apartment, *Boom! Boom! Boom!* "Search warrant!" The back door flew to the ground, and within seconds, law enforcement stormed inside the house with their guns drawn.

"Everyone, get on the ground now! Face on the ground, praise the lord with your hands up high!" one officer said. Again, my heart rate rapidly increased, my palms got sweaty, and my eyes looked for an exit as I tried to evaluate the situation. I noticed everything around me slowed down and my senses were in overdrive. With a pistol in my face, an officer said, "Don't even think about it!" The officer grabbed my shirt and threw me to the ground as if I was a meaningless piece of lint from a sweater he wanted to dispatch.

As I looked around, my peers were on their knees with their hands behind their heads, sitting as if they were about to get executed. One by one, each of them was zip-tied like cattle preparing to be slaughtered. Mascara was running down faces, and everyone was crying, nervous, afraid, and asking for their parents. The officer said, "Your parents are not going to save you…where is your ID?" There were sobs and fear in the atmosphere. I summoned my confidence and bravery to inform the officer that, "We are only high school kids having a party." The officer seemed confused and startled. He began to talk on his police radio to someone I assume was his superior, based on the tone. At this point, the intensity in the room made it difficult to breathe, and my friend started to turn pale as if he was about to faint.

"They are free to go… free to go now!" The officers apologized and made partially successful attempts to console us. The officers identified that they had a search warrant, but it was for a different house. We were all shocked, and I was forever traumatized from this event and many more throughout my life. Reflecting, this would have been a perfect situation for a social worker linked to the police department to be able to offer support, education, and counseling. It was a situation where a police officer could have noticed the potential impact of underage drinking and high-risk behaviors and how this traumatic interaction with law enforcement could have adverse consequences for us, including psychopathology.

Trauma is something I continue to cope with and heal from to this day, due to this event and several others. To feel grounded, I must consistently be aware of my surroundings and possible threats and devise a preventative plan of action to manage the situation or threat. I always wonder how the house raid impacted my peers. Do they have ongoing trauma, depression, anxiety, and mood symptoms from this event? Were they fortunate enough to have access and utilize avenues of healing? Only the higher power would know.

Within my community, it is an emotional roller coaster where you are conditioned to survive by *any means necessary*.

Back to the Present

Boom! Boom! Boom! My heart rate rapidly increased, my palms got sweaty, and my fight or flight instinct kicked in. I had to evaluate the situation; what was my plan of action going to be?

After I cautiously opened the door, prepared for anything on the other side, my former co-worker yelled, "We are remote!", indicating the organization I worked for at the time had transitioned into providing mental health, substance use, and behavioral health services to the clients (community members) fully online, using telehealth services. I thanked her and closed the door, pondering what the next few seconds, days, months, or even years would look like for

myself, my family, and community members.

My initial thoughts were there would be several challenges; for example, there was no identified workflow or notice provided to the community members or staff. I thought about the technology barriers for the community members and expected challenges to adjusting to telehealth. I pondered on the outcomes for the housing insecure community members who could no longer walk in for appointments and have a safe place of refuge when they were forced to leave their shelter every morning. As I sat in my office soothing my anxiety with my fidget spinner, there was an email sent for an emergency staff meeting; it confirmed what my co-worker informed me regarding telehealth.

Surprisingly, in this staff meeting, the organization's leadership was present. This was the first time I met many of them in person. All staff sat in a decent-sized conference room, practicing social distancing, approximately six feet apart with masks on their faces. Within each six feet of spacing, the air was filled with tension, anxiety, worry, anger, fear, and a deep silence as if we were mourning the death of a loved one or close colleague. Leadership preferred to stand in front of everyone instead of sitting at the table in solidarity which consciously or unconsciously highlighted their position of power, thus increasing staff insecurities further. I looked to the front of the room and noticed that there were few people on the leadership team representing the majority African American community we served.

Having diversity in leadership can lead to a positive effect on patient care (Becker's Hospital Review, 2016). For example, if an individual on the leadership team is from the community they serve, they can possibly have increased insight and a direct voice to represent the community when decisions are being made on behalf of the community. I identify this approach to be the "boots on the ground approach." This approach signifies that those who are closest to the problem often are the ones closest to the solution. If, in fact, organizations build more professional capacity to Black professionals with lived experiences, and provide them with the resources to be placed in positions of leadership, agencies would have a perspective from those directly affected. Furthermore, helping professionals with lived experiences can provide insight to some of the barriers and challenges that can prevent effective care.

I began to conceptualize how this error in leadership can indirectly contribute to the Black racial oppression. I asked the question, "How can an organization serve a community and make decisions for the community when there is limited representation from the community in decision-making?" More times than not, the decisions can be expected to be driven from data rather than combined with people's voice. This results in an ineffective, "cookie cutter" model of care due to the ongoing barriers to obtain effective client satisfaction surveys (Gayet-Ageron et al., 2011).

As the leadership went on to inform staff about productivity expectations and policies to follow, I could not help but drift off and think about the racial climax in the United States at this time. I thought about the Black Lives Matter movement and the global impact it had on society. I dwelled on the senseless deaths of George Floyd, Eric Garner, Botham Jean, and many others. I thought about how, through the Black Lives Matter movement, people from different cultures, backgrounds, ethnicities, social statuses, and tax brackets were united to fight for human rights

and equality through peaceful protests and awareness against the reiteration of Black racial oppression.

Retracing History

As I got deeper into my thoughts, I began to realize that the reiteration of Black racial oppression is not a new phenomenon in the United States. There has been a prolonged period of suffering, injustice, and systematic oppression of Black people that fizzles like Coca Cola soda and then explodes as if you added Mentos candy. I reflected on the Stono Rebellion of 1791, where over 100 slave masters were murdered by Black Americans in response to racial oppression (Thornton, 1991). Throughout this narrative reflection, the terms Black and African American are used interchangeably as to include various ethnicities of the African diaspora. I thought about when Nathaniel "Nat" Turner, in the year 1831, led a slave rebellion against slave owners; it resulted in tragic deaths of over 100 people, both slaves and slave masters, primarily due to Black Americans being exhausted with ongoing systematic Black racial oppression, where they were denied basic human rights and liberties (Beaulieu, 2000). These rebellions and several others are crucial to history and we (Black people) honor Black leaders for the courage to stand up for their rights; however, Violence Begets Violence. When oppressed people use physical force against the oppressor, it typically leads to insignificant outcomes, like a nil hand in spades. In addition, physical force can lead to unwanted, unforeseen consequences and limited success due to the majority having more resources.

Moving forward, in the 1960s, Black Americans also faced more severe, yet somewhat similar, injustices as today. Black people living in the south had to endure ongoing injustice such as Jim Crow laws; segregation; and insecurities in housing, education, and employment, primarily due to the color of their skin, ethnicity, and nationality (Darity & Mullen, 2020; Feagin, 1999; Fremon, 2000). Pioneers such as Southern Christian Leadership Conference, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the honorable el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz (Malcolm X), Martin Luther King, Jr., and many other ancestors saw value in working with allies, mostly non-violently, for the common cause of human rights for all (Blake & Cleaver, 1969; McDonald, 2016; Ovington, 1924; Reagin, 1968).

In 1965, led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., several allies of various cultures, backgrounds, ethnicities, social statuses, and tax brackets united to fight for human rights and equality. Allies locked arms and walked side by side, marching from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, for the purpose of creating awareness to the challenges Black Americans faced when attempting to vote (Garrow, 1990) Often, there were barriers that would prevent Black people from voting, such as intimidation at the polls by White Americans, poll taxes, and even competency tests. On one attempt, the allies were brutally assaulted on national television. This tragic event can be understood as the apex of Black oppression during this time. The world witnessed the horrific events, which were pivotal for change. Several participants were verbally and physically assaulted by law enforcement agencies. The innocent people sacrificed their lives to force the United States government to revisit, discuss, and answer to the systematic Black racial oppressive policies that fueled the hate exhibited towards Black bodies. Shortly after, the 1964 Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act of 1965 outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, and sexual orientation.

Black Racial Oppression Today

The trend continues to be a prolonged period of suffering, injustice, and systematic oppression of Black people that reaches the apex and explodes with riots, peaceful protests, and calls for action. On May 25, 2020, George Floyd died while in police custody for reportedly attempting to use counterfeit currency. The arresting officer placed his knee on Mr. Floyd's neck for well over eight consecutive minutes while Mr. Floyd was on the ground in handcuffs. The world was able to witness the ongoing Black racial oppression.

Unfortunately, George Floyd's death was not an isolated event. There have been similar cases such as Eric Garner, who was placed in a chokehold for minutes by law enforcement, which resulted in his death; he was allegedly selling loose cigarettes (Hays & Sisak, 2019). Botham Jean was shot and killed inside his own home by a police officer who reportedly mistook his apartment for hers (Kallingal et al., 2020). I reflected and wondered if my peers and I would have faced a similar fate if we would have reacted differently during the search warrant?

The reiteration of Black racial oppression has been ongoing for centuries, and the use of technology (media, cameras, audio, and video recording) has been pivotal in magnifying the issues, which usually trigger intervention or at least dialogue. In the events such as the March on Selma, deaths of Mr. Floyd and Mr. Garner, and many others, video and audio recording combined with eyewitness testimony have been crucial to force the USA to revisit, discuss, and answer to the systematic Black racial oppression. Their lives will not be lost in vain, as society will hold individuals and institutions accountable for their actions and use the power of unison as leverage to obtain justice.

Why is There Always a Reiteration of Black Oppression?

There continues to be a reiteration of Black oppression due to the systematic culture of oppression that is embedded in United States. This retelling of horrific injustices experienced by Black male bodies manifests itself across space and time. The names may change, the dialect may sound different, but the stories and accounts are far too similar. The transgenerational traumatic experiences of oppression that Black men across the diaspora living in America face transcends beyond geographical space and temporality. It depicts a sense of universality that one could argue repeats oppressive instances from social power structures. It is the continuum of oppressive acts by power structures that abuse Black bodies by dehumanization tactics shrouded by policies and minimization of the value of Black male bodies. Although there is monumental legislation such as the Voting Rights Act (1965) and Civil Rights Act (1964), disparities and insecurities for Black people continue to be prevalent in terms of health care, employment, housing, education, and resources (Jacobs, 2011; Kohli et al., 2017; Moy & Freeman, 2014). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020), in November 2020, the unemployment rate in the USA was 7%, and for Black people the rate was at 10%. According to Gold et al. (2020), the Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported total COVID-19 deaths from May to August 2020 as 114,411. From the total deaths, Black people accounted for 18.7% of the cases, despite being 12.5% of the total U.S. population. This ratio continues to represent the disparities. If systematic oppression of Blacks was not ongoing and prevalent, the statistics would represent equal distribution amongst all races and ethnic groups. If disparities exist, there

will continue to be a reiteration of Black racial oppression in the USA.

Impact of Oppression

Oppression leads to lasting psychological and physical implications, which present barriers for Black males to address mental health needs (Banks & Stephans, 2018). Arguably, mistrust for African Americans began during slavery, where they were experimented on. Since this time, the United States health care system has continually proven to be mistrusted by African Americans due to egregious experiments such as the Tuskegee Syphilis Study (Wasserman et al., 2007). In fact, Hankerson et al. (2015) explain that institutional racial oppression can limit socioeconomic mobility, which leads to psychopathology. There is clinical research and data available that highlights African American women's oppression and linkage to psychopathology, while there is limited data for men (Carr et al., 2014; Windsor et al., 2010). There have been promising recommendations to increasing treatment engagement for African Americans such as using faith healers, primary care physicians, and mental health providers (Hankerson et al., 2015). Yet, African American men continue to be underrepresented within mental health programs (Harris et al., 1996). To bridge the gap between Black males increasing their insight and engagement in mental and behavioral health services, I propose using the "Chop It Up" program.

As a native of the city of Newark, New Jersey, I am honored to work for the ground-breaking Office of Violence Prevention and Trauma Recovery (OVPTR). This office is a model for change created by the honorable Mayor Ras Baraka in response to the ongoing systematic oppression of Black people. Mayor Baraka diverted funds from the city's public safety budget to provide resources and the creation of the OVPTR. The Office provides resources and opportunities in education, housing, finances, and health for communities that are identified to have historically been impacted by crime, poverty, oppression, and trauma. Furthermore, there are counseling services to victims of violent crimes provided by Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs) and Licensed Clinical Alcohol and Drug Counselors (LCADCs) to address trauma, mental, and behavioral health through dynamic, diverse, and creative programing. The programing includes, but is not limited to, virtual technology trauma-informed therapy, restorative justice, circle processes therapy, and complementary and alternative medicine techniques. It also includes using sports and movement for healing, coping, and behavioral skills along with substance use and mental health focused barber shops and beauty salon talks to increase community members' insight and engagement into mental health and case management services. This collaborative approach is unique, as it also links the majority of the nineteen additional grassroots organizations (housing, advocates, youth programming, violence prevention, etc.) under one entity (OVPTR), which enables fluidity of care and an abundance of available resources, knowledge, and expertise. Finally, at the foundation of OVPTR are credible messengers (outreach workers) who are trusted within the community, and they provide education and linkage to services offered through OVPTR.

The Chop It Up program (inspired by the Confess Project [n.d.]) is offered through OVPTR; it can be effective in reducing treatment barriers and increasing insight and engagement into mental health and substance use services. The Chop It Up program is a community-based program where barbers are trained as non-clinical mental health first responders to raise awareness, identify, and support community members with addressing their mental health and

accessing social services.

The Chop It Up Program

Through a six-week program curriculum, barbers are trained how to use positive language to advocate for mental health services and use active listening. Additionally, they are taught how to link community members with community resources, identifying early warning signs of suicide, depression, anxiety, alcohol and drug abuse, trauma, and emotional dysregulation. The overall goals would be for the barbers to be able to identify (psychopathology/addictive behaviors/case management needs), educate (community members), and refer with a *warm handoff* to service providers. The warm hand off is a term often used within the team system to describe a friendly referral provided by one trusted informal support partner to another formal support, trusted provider. This enables the client to be more receptive to therapeutic services. Furthermore, Chop-It-Up-trained Barbers offer safe space for mutual support shop talks, where collective coping can be offered like circle process groups, which can be effective (Mehl-Madrona & Mainguy, 2014). Moving forward, shop talks would be expanded to include a trained mental health or addiction specialist to further educate and provide supportive therapy and linkage to ongoing mental and behavioral health services.

Significance of the Barbershop

Black barbers can be effective with facilitating change within communities due to their established trust and rapport within the community. From my lived experiences within Black barbershops, there is a sense of camaraderie amongst several generations of men, and it is traditionally a designated space to obtain knowledge, feedback, advice; learn life and social skills; buy products; obtain resources; and get a haircut (Wright & Calhoun, 2001). Black barbers tend to cater towards Black men and the individuals who patronize the shops and who would rather seek help from men who share the same characteristics or socioeconomic status (Plowden et al., 2006).

Past Use of Black Barbers and Barber Shops

Using Black barbers to increase health outcomes within the Black community has been effective in the past. There is research to suggest the effectiveness of using Black barbershops and Black barbers as resources to increase specific mental health outcomes for African Americans within their community. Moreover, there is research that supports the notion that Black barbers are effective in increasing awareness of the importance of physical activity, hypertension, and cancer (Hess et al., 2007; Hill et al., 2017; Linnan et al., 2011). In fact, Brawner et al. (2013) have shown that Black barbershops are well respected within the community, are willing to help community members address medical health concerns, and are effective sources of resources.

Implications of the Chop It Up program

The Chop It Up program could possibly have some implications, as there is a heavy reliance on the effectiveness of the barber. There are expected situations where trained Barbers may relocate, there may be limitations on effectiveness of the six-week curriculum, or COVID-19

restrictions could limit face-to-face contact. To minimize the implications, OVPTR offers fully online continuing education trainings, access to remote curriculum, and an online peer support network to stay connected. In addition, there are ongoing refresher courses and advanced level curriculum for barbers who wish to increase their competency and skill level. Further explorative and longitudinal research would provide data to demonstrate the areas of improvement and success.

Social Work During the COVID-19 Pandemic

After a few weeks, my practice as a social worker changed dramatically. The organization I worked for moved to telehealth, and I initially struggled to adapt to the new way of life. First, my former employer did not provide me with adequate resources in terms of internet and telephone, which caused financial challenges, as I had to pick up the cost to work remotely. Secondly, community members were resistant to talk via telehealth due to their psychopathology and/or limited resources to have telehealth sessions. At the agency that I formerly worked for, there were limited internal resources to negate the barriers, and sadly, many community members decompensated, relapsed, and/or were hospitalized as a result. In my experience, an overwhelming majority of Black male community members dropped out of services due to the access barrier. I was constantly reminded to increase my productivity without the resources to do so and without consideration for the pandemic or community members. The assumption that the community members had available resources came from a place of privilege and further confirmed the notion of systematic oppression. In fact, I recall a supervisor suggesting, "They have time for Facebook, they can make time for therapy." I internalized this as a cognitive distortion, being ignorant, and the ongoing Black racial oppression. This is an example of disconnection and total lack of compassion for the community we serve.

The community members who did not have access barriers also faced challenges. Most of the earlier sessions were geared towards education on new dynamics of therapy or teaching them how to use telehealth platforms, which took a lot of convincing. I found that my long-term community members struggled with telehealth the most. There is something special, unique, dynamic, and intimate about having face-to-face sessions: being able to connect to each another's energy; identifying slight changes in body language, whether it's rapid foot taps or clenching hands when emotions are intense; and feeling the vibrations of your voice bounce off the wall with guided relaxation imagery.

Moving forward, to reduce the access barrier, I propose that Assurance Wireless Lifeline customers can have their talk minutes and data extended indefinitely to continue with mental and behavioral health and substance use services, to reduce relapse or decompensation. A possible implication of this would be misuse of services. To minimize misuse, there can be a requirement for community members engaged in mental and behavioral health services to provide proof from their mental health providers. To their credit, Assurance Wireless Lifeline did expand their services to some extent, allowing for increased access and deferral of recertification (Federal Communications Commission, 2020). However, access continues to be a barrier to services for the community members I serve.

As time shifted forward, the community members and I began to adjust to telehealth. About four

to five months into telehealth, it became easier to navigate and adjust despite some barriers. At times, the video communication platforms crashed, or they were not compatible with the community members' phones or devices. Within my household, family members had to attend work or school virtually, which resulted in slower internet speeds, family pets making cameo visits, and impromptu learning curves of virtual learning environments.

As time progressed, I found that many of the community members looked forward to sessions. The community members preferred to use telehealth audio only for sessions. They, too, were going through the COVID-19 trauma in addition to the anxiety, depression, audio and visual hallucinations, substance use problems, and, at times, suicidal thoughts with a plan. Due to their intense isolation, many times, I served as their only escape and insight to the outside world, like a prisoner who just spent several months in solitary confinement, hoping to speak with someone.

Week after week, someone would inform me of their challenges with COVID-19 restrictions, fears of going outside of their homes, or someone they knew died or tested positive for COVID-19. During this same time, I had to be mindful of my countertransference, as I, too, shared similar fears related to COVID-19. Every time I left my home for groceries, I would fear I would get infected by COVID-19 and could be a carrier, bringing COVID-19 to my family, who would face fatal health consequences because of me. Our fears and anxieties were warranted, given the limited and, at times, conflicting information regarding COVID-19 at the time. Frequently, I felt helpless when community members asked me about the virus, and I could only refer them to the local government, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, or the World Health Organization websites. I didn't feel confident or competent enough to provide guidance. One of my community members informed me, "You are who we trust…why would I get information from them?" Those words remain with me today, as they humbled and reminded me of the privilege it is to work within my community.

Call for Action: Strategies for Change

It was the year 2020, and Black Americans are continuing to fight, protest, and advocate for some of the same basic human rights, as they did since the first African was trafficked to the United States of America for the purpose of slavery. Black Americans in the U.S have made some notable progress. However, tragedies such as George Floyd's death and countless others continue to be a reminder of the long road ahead. As Lee (2016) explains, one of the most difficult things is to change the culture of organizations. The United States institutions were built on the ideology of Black Americans as slaves and indentured servants, giving people from European descent a conscious or subconscious advantage in finances/resources and opportunities, which is an underlying issue of oppression (Chen, 2017; Walters, 2012). It enables power, control, privilege, and opportunities for people who are not of color. To bring about change, there must be a shift in ideology and culture. There is hope in knowing that awareness dialogue is present; however, it is time for movement towards legislative action.

I am proposing communities identify early warning signs and begin to intervene prior to the next critical incident to occur by establishing a comprehensive national task force and/or governmental offices that have legislative power to implement programming and provide immediate resources and opportunities in education, housing, finances, and health for

communities, which have been identified to have historically been impacted by crime, poverty, and oppression, like those incorporated by OVPTR. I propose that the American society identifies Black racial oppression as a national public health crisis like the "war on drugs" or "opioid pandemic," to shift the attention and focus on making immediate, effective, long-lasting, and equitable changes.

Black Americans have made major progress in the United States of America; however. there is still a long road to travel, as we are consistently reminded by the systematic disparities. However, the United States is at the apex, and the time has come to make change! The changes will come from several allies of various cultures, backgrounds, ethnicities, social statuses, and tax brackets, who are united to fight for human rights and equality. It happens when we empower informal community support systems such as barbershops and hair salons, it happens when we provide sustainable resources to reduce the revictimization of Black male bodies, both from the systems of oppressive power structures and the interpersonal violence that occurs within under-resourced communities. It begins by divergently identifying allyship in non-conventional spaces, where Black men find safety, fellowship, and community. It is this unified support paradigm where we will move towards sustainable change for us to survive, thrive and be unified—in and out of any pandemic.

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The Transformation of a Jewish Girl from Brooklyn: Reflections on the Meaning of Jacksonville and Other Life Experiences, Moving from Ignorance and Innocence to Awareness and Action

Terry Mizrahi

Abstract: This essay is a reflection on my growth and development as a Jewish adolescent girl after unexpected encounters with segregation. It explores a series of events that transformed my understanding of systemic racism growing up in a virtually all-white working-class community in Brooklyn, New York. It also covers more subtle antisemitism that I experienced during that period without realizing its impact on me until years after. These deep and emotional remembrances surfaced in 2020 after the Republican party had chosen Jacksonville, Florida, as the site of their political convention. Ironically, the date was on the anniversary of the day that there had been a violent "lunch counter" riot years earlier as a result of Black customers being barred from a local diner. This reflection concludes with lessons learned as part of having chosen a career as a social work activist and professor of community organizing and policy.

As a professor of social work, I have been teaching community organizing and social policy for 40+ years as well as leading social work organizations at different periods, all of which have been geared toward social justice and progressive social change. For many reasons, 2020 became a crucial time for me to speak out with both a personal and political agenda—presenting the connections between my personal experiences and public issues. There was one particular news event that resonated deeply and unexpectedly for me and opened up a floodgate of memories, simple but profound ones, with lessons learned that I would like to share with colleagues. It was this:

In August 2020, President Trump and the Republican leadership announced they were going to Jacksonville, Florida, for their convention on August 27. It was subsequently cancelled by Trump noting that it was due to the coronavirus (Smith, 2020) (whether this was the real reason or not), but that didn't lessen the impact of its having been scheduled there in the first place. Hearing about that city and the date selected was an assault on my memory. I immediately flashed back to my first airplane trip from Brooklyn, New York, to Jacksonville, Florida, as part of my high school senior spring break in 1959. Jacksonville was the place where my dad had a small children's clothing store in the downtown area, on Forsythe Street to be exact.

While working that week in my dad's store (named for me: "Terry Togs"), I took one particular lunch break and walked around what I recall was a beautiful, well-kept park nearby. I was thirsty, so I found a water fountain. Well, actually, I found two: one marked for "coloreds" and one for "whites only." It wasn't just the words that startled me then—it was where they were and how they got there, presumably. The wall around the park that contained the two water fountains had obviously been built recently. It was made out of granite or marble, an aesthetically

beautifully designed structure. And chiseled right into the stone itself above the sinks were those words. I remember going back to work incredulous and telling my dad what I had just seen. It wasn't just the signs, as bad as they were, but the fact that some official "Body" had defaced the stone by making those instructions permanent. There was no way to erase "colored" and "white" or cover those words over without destroying the whole façade.

Recall that segregated public accommodations had been deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court five years earlier. Separate but equal is inherently unequal was the outcome of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case (1954) and applied to all public spaces (Van Delinder, 2004). I learned subsequently in 1960, one year after I observed that segregated structure in person, that there were violent confrontations in Jacksonville not too far from my dad's store. It all began when a group of young members of the NAACP tried to integrate a lunch counter that still refused to serve Black people. This event became known as "Ax Handle Saturday," so named because a group of whites had attacked them outside the venue with axes and other weapons (Trent, 2020). And the day that it occurred was August 27th, 1960, the very day Trump was going to accept his party's nomination, 60 years later!

I do not know how long those two fountains remained intact, or when the structure was taken down or the words obliterated, and by whom or under whose authorization. I do remember going back to New York that year and thinking how glad I was that we did not have that type of segregated system where I lived. But boy was I wrong! We sure did.

In the New York City of 1959, both physically and culturally, de facto segregation existed—unbeknownst to me, I'm embarrassed now to admit. Can you imagine that I lived for 16 years in Brooklyn, with its population of two million or so people then, and had not interacted with any Black people of significance? Growing up in a working-class neighborhood of Brooklyn, my all-white high school of 5,000 students was divided in half between Jews and Italians, most of whom were the children of immigrants who came from Eastern and Southern Europe only one generation earlier. (I will talk later about the subtle antisemitism prevalent among my Italian American counterparts and their institutions.) Reviewing my high school yearbook of 1,500 senior classmates years later, I noticed the photos of two or three Black and Asian students, but I don't remember ever meeting them or being in class with them. So how did I come to learn that there were actually one million Black people (half of the population of Brooklyn) living in the same borough at that time? Well, that's an interesting and important story in my political awakening.

It was a fall day and my high school, Lafayette, was playing football at Boys High. As its name conveys, Boys High was a single-gender school. That autumn, I was a newly minted cheerleader excited for my first outing by school bus across Brooklyn. We got off the bus and entered the stadium, and lo and behold, there was a sea of Black faces in the stands. That's what I remember so vividly all these years later. Given my sheltered naïveté, I asked the teacher who had accompanied us, "Mr. S, where did all these Black people come from?" He replied, "The neighborhood we are in is called Bedford-Stuyvesant. Actually, Terry, I believe it is one of the largest Black communities in the country." I learned that its population was four times the size of the better-known Harlem in Manhattan, New York; indeed, it was the largest Black

community in the U.S. Those million Black people were so close geographically speaking, but so very far away from the bubble in which I had grown up. Brooklyn was almost as racially segregated—and to a lesser degree, religiously segregated—residentially as the Deep South (and with a few exceptions, remains substantially that way today).

I experienced another important cultural revelation that transformative autumn afternoon. I was curious as to how an all-boys high school would handle cheering. All the cheerleaders I knew in the co-ed Brooklyn High Schools were girls, and enviably so as dictated by the teen culture back then. But on that day during the first time out of the football game, there came a group of boys, all dressed in the same Boys High uniform, tumbling out onto the field, doing cartwheels, flips, and other fantastic gymnastic maneuvers set to rock music that was breathtaking! For the duration of the game, we girls stood in awe on the sidelines waving our pompoms, enthralled as we watched this stellar performance.

Why do I interpret that scene now as a cultural movement? It was because that community led by Black adolescent boys and young men was ahead of the times in 1957. The performance was truly groundbreaking and deserved our attention and admiration. Think of what cheerleading has become since then: a viable, competitive sport for young people in high schools and colleges across America. But reflecting back on that encounter, I now realize that what we were admiring was the creative, groundbreaking nature of that activity and is a reflection of what we hear today from many African American pundits as a critique of American life that America loves and appropriates Black culture but doesn't love Black people.

My coming of age in relation to racial awareness continued right after I returned from Jacksonville; whether that was coincidence or fate, I'll never know. I was asked to join a senior youth group comprised of selected students from all the high schools in Brooklyn, sponsored by the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ), one of the few organizations at the time devoted to "intergroup relations," as I later learned. Its goal was simple but profound: to bring together diverse groups of teens who lived in different neighborhoods in Brooklyn. Almost all the public schools had enrollment systems based purely on proximity, so you went to school in the neighborhood near where you lived; the few exceptions were the citywide specialized high schools. And because neighborhoods in Brooklyn (and in so many places in New York City and beyond) were segregated (and still are), there was little opportunity for social contact between Black and other students of color and white students. Private high schools, the parochial ones, were also segregated then by religion and, in some cases, by gender. NCCJ was one of the few organizations who organized these events in different urban areas at the time.

I learned so much from the Black students who attended those NCCJ meetings. I can recall us addressing stereotypes and prejudice as we learned about each other and told our personal stories in a safe space. I later realized as I pursued social work that this was a process of structured dialogue facilitation (Schoem & Hurtado, 2001). Through that program, I was exposed to insights into the private side of "the Black experience" from these students' unique perspectives—perspectives I may never have gained otherwise.

One particular conversation stands out to this day from those impactful NCCJ weekly sessions.

We were asked by the leader, "Are there any things that bother you about your own identity group, being Negro or Jewish?" (Those two groups were specifically named, and "Negro" was the term commonly used then.) Carolyn, one of the few Black students who attended, answered, "Yes. I am dark-skinned, and there is discrimination. The boys favor the lighter-skinned girls who are called 'high yellow,' and there are names for the other shades also. I can't tell even my friends how hurtful that is." (That cultural description, obviously personal and hurtful to Carolyn, is still used today in Black culture, I am told.)

Her candid admission allowed me to reveal an antisemitic[1] incident from the eighth grade that confused me four years later, which I revealed to the group. Tommy, my eighth-grade Italian "boyfriend," had given me a gold-plated heart necklace for Valentine's Day. I was so flattered, and then he asked me, with a puzzled look on his face, "Tell me, Terry. I heard you were Jewish, but I told the person who told me: 'That couldn't be true; she is so nice!'" I don't recall whether I thanked him or said anything other than "yes." The bottom line at the time, and for many years subsequently, is that I thought that was a compliment! I was glad to be different—to be an "exception" from what presumably were my peers', and no doubt their parents' and families', views of Jews.

That semester-long experience allowed me to focus on an understanding of antisemitism, historically and as it affected me personally, in addition to intra- and inter-minority conflicts. Because I had grown up for the first 10 years of my life in an all-Jewish neighborhood, I thought the world was Jewish. It wasn't until I moved to a largely Italian American neighborhood that I encountered antisemitism for the first time from my classmates, although I hadn't recognized what that was yet. I remembered during another NCCJ session that some students in the 8th grade used antisemitic slurs against our Jewish teacher, words that I had never heard before and didn't even know the meaning of then—such as the "K" word.

The following year I began college with a full scholarship to New York University (NYU), which took me by subway and elevated train into Manhattan. (Some of you may recall the end of the movie *Saturday Night Fever* when John Travolta's character leaves a provincial white working-class Brooklyn neighborhood where he lived for the cosmopolitan "City"—meaning Manhattan.) That's the way I felt as I was exposed for the first time to white, Jewish affluent students from assimilated families and realized that there were Jewish counterparts, and for that matter Italian/Christian young people, who did not come from working-class immigrant families.

The diversity of students opened my eyes to many facets of isolation and segregation. I met and interacted for the first time with a white male student named Sean who had cerebral palsy, walked with braces, and spoke with difficulty. I admit it was jarring at first when he stopped to talk to me in the student center, because there were no visibly disabled students that I recall in high school. Meeting him stimulated a vague memory, though. In a flashback, I remembered a

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[1]Readers should note that even this term that usually means an expression or act of distain, discrimination or disrespect, has its complexities and challenges. There have been different spellings with different contexts and history: alternatively, Anti-Semitism verses Antisemitism (one word capitalized) or antisemitism (one word lower case if used in middle of the sentence). The Southern Poverty Law Center and the U.S. State Department now use antisemitism as one word so as not to imply that there is such a thing as "semite" or "semitism."

group of disabled ("handicapped" was the term used then) students with different visible signs of difference (such as Down's syndrome, wheelchair usage, and other physical disabilities). They were completely segregated from the rest of my elementary school in a room next to the cafeteria, hidden away. No one ever explained who they were, let alone introduced us to them or had us interact with them. This was 20 or so years before the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibited discrimination based on mental or physical disability (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2020). As a post-script, Sean and I became part of the same social network, and I respected his ability to overcome extraordinary challenges. It still amazes me how prevalent ableism continues to be—and how people avoid or limit interaction with people who are differently abled.

There was one profound experience in college that raised and expanded my consciousness beyond the "-isms" to the concept of "privilege." It falls under the heading of "conversations that I wish I had with a professor and fellow students that I never had." It will reveal how complicit so many of us are in our own oppression and provides an example of "white male Christian privilege." It is the Christian part that is particularly relevant here, as we are continuously reminded in the right-wing media especially that America is a Christian country usually presented in contrast to the politically liberal perspective that America is a multi-cultural society.

I took a course in "The History of Art" at NYU, a wonderful place to view art firsthand, taught by a famous white male Christian professor. When we came to the section on the syllabus titled "The Middle Ages," my understanding of what was being presented faltered. I was confused and, quite frankly, feeling dumb. As the professor lectured and showed slides of famous paintings, I kept asking myself, "What am I missing?" Questions like: How could a woman be a virgin and still have been the mother of Jesus Christ? What was the ascension of Christ? Who were apostles? Who were Luke, Matthew, John? Why did "the Last Supper" keep using Judas as an adjective and a noun? What was the conversion of Paul about? So many so-called masterpieces depicted white angels and Jesus was portrayed as a white male. Most of the magnificent structures shown were cathedrals built by millions of peasants over decades. The professor was constantly quoting the "New Testament."

Coming from a rather sheltered traditional Jewish upbringing, I had never even been in a church. Indeed, we were not allowed to go into one by my parents' edicts. Besides, as my 8th grade Italian-Catholic friends once told me when I asked to join their Saturday night dances at St. Finbar's church, "Sorry Terry, only Catholics are invited." I never expressed to any of them how hurt I was.

I should have asked those and so many other questions to the professor. I should have asked him to give those of us who were not Christian a primer in the context and history of the beginning and growth of Christianity. (Indeed, the class was probably one-third to one-half Jewish, and we often joked among ourselves that NYU should be called "NY Jew.") Still, everyone remained silent. I should have asked my fellow students: "Do you understand the meaning and symbolism of these paintings, sculptures, miniature icons? Are you feeling as ignorant as I am?"

I never did. I assumed that I was the only one. I felt isolated and ashamed. I passed the course by

memorizing the facts related to the art we were tested on. Those high school and college experiences, limited as they were, were profoundly formative for me and certainly impacted my beliefs, my subsequent reading, and pursuits toward social work graduate school. Ultimately, they guided my actions and choices in my professional and personal life.

As the 1960s evolved, I learned the difference in college and graduate school courses between terms like "de jure" and "de facto" segregation. The South, as I had seen in Jacksonville, was full of the former back then. Remnants of "Jim Crow" were still clearly visible beyond those water fountains I had seen years ago. And while the legal walls slowly began to fall in the South after the 1954 Supreme Court decision (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954) it took another decade of protests and policy advocacy before the 1964 Civil Rights Act was passed under President Johnson, to be followed by the Voting Rights Act (1965) a year later. And that was just the beginning of a slow march toward addressing racial inequality that continues today!

Sadly, communities today are still as segregated as ever, in spite of housing rights and anti-redlining policies being signed into law under both the administrations of Presidents Johnson and Nixon. Attempts were made to desegregate public schools years later into the 1970s by rectifying geographic segregation through "busing" across neighborhoods. Unfortunately, this strategy was resisted all too often by much of society—Black and white—largely because of the violence and conflicts, and the unfairness it placed on working-class and poor white and Black communities. People in the more middle-class and affluent suburbs were largely spared of forced integration (NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, 1972).

In the Aftermath: 60 Years Later

So, fast-forward 60+ years later. Trump continued to stoke the fire of segregation within suburbs, and between suburbs and cities. We know that disparities and discrimination by race and gender still clearly exist on an individual and systemic basis. Yes, we've come a long way from the 1950s, although we still have such a long way to go.

And back to Jacksonville, 2020: How much progress has really been made in 60+ years? Look at one example of what happened in the midst of racial and social justice protests across the country: the demand for the removal of the Confederate flag and monuments from public spaces throughout the South. How should the following event be interpreted? Too little, too late, or another sign on the road to transformative change?

As protests in the aftermath of George Floyd's fatal arrest continued, Jacksonville officials Tuesday quietly removed a statue of a Confederate soldier that stood for more than a century outside of its City Hall ahead of a protest in the city. Mayor Curry who in the past apparently had avoided taking a stance on the issue of such monuments indicated that other statues would soon be removed (Reid et al., 2020).

My response is that you do not have to choose. Yes, it's been a long time coming and the statue is just one symbol of dark Civil War history. On the other hand, to use an expression that President Obama used to quote from the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. (which is where I first

heard it): "We shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice" (CNW Network, 2018, para. 64).

The important point to be recognized here is that it took and takes social activism and activists, a social movement, perseverance, patience, and organizing to bend that arc. Some events along the way to removing those symbols were spontaneous, others were intentional strategies of change. It is a "both/and" approach. It is often called "seizing a window of opportunity." However, without having built an infrastructure, without organizations and without a strategy, there would be not enough people to climb through the window; both are needed to make transformative progressive change. The curve may zigzag, so we need to be steadfast in the struggle, and vow to be in it for the long haul.

Strategies of Influence

The lessons learned and solutions for those who are seeking their place and role in the quest for racial and social justice, presented here as part of this final section, are based on theory and practice; that is, they are based on my years of scholarship and experience as a scholar-advocate (Johnson, 1994; Mizrahi, 2022), and on the practical wisdom of other social workers (Pyles, 2021; Staples, 2016).

- We need people both inside and outside. We need informed, committed people at the table *and* at the door. We need people with integrity at the "top" in positions of authority on the inside *and* people at the "bottom" on the outside holding leaders accountable for their actions. [I will add now: We also need people at the polls! Voting is the first and foundational step of a democracy (University of Connecticut School of Social Work, 2021).]

- In building coalitions needed to influence policy, negotiation and compromise are not dirty words. There is much one could give up or postpone without violating one's basic values and principles. There are times to capitulate and times to resist, but most of our work will be in between one extreme and the other (Greenawalt et al., 2021).

- Be mindful of the "7 D's of Defense" identified by Lee Staples (2016) that are used by opponents and adversaries to stop progressive change: deflecting, dividing, delaying, deceiving, denying, discrediting, and destroying (in no particular order of priority). Always anticipate opposition to any significant change proposal, and plan to address it by building allies and supporters and not alienating adversaries unnecessarily and/or prematurely.

- Understand the difference between explaining and excusing behavior. Cultural humility includes understanding why a person or a group does something seemingly against your community's norms. It does not mean exonerating destructive behaviors, but it does mean respectfully acknowledging differences that exist with groups and communities. Sometimes it is enough to introduce

different norms, customs, laws, and procedures to people not familiar with or who have not come into contact with other cultures, even those from the same country. For those times, a harder line will have to be drawn as to what acceptable behavior is and what is not in your culture and in our society.

- Understand that stereotypes usually come from valid generations. That's why they are dangerous to use. Learn or teach the historical context as to where and when a stereotype first emerged. Be cautious of the slippery slope in depicting a group a certain way—and remember that not all stereotypes may be perceived as negative. Still, using them minimizes the rich diversity within a particular group or identity and objectifies them.

- Find a friend or colleague willing to be generous and answer your naïve questions, those things you always wanted to know but were afraid to ask about their background or identity.

One Solution of Many

One important solution in beginning to address racism and the other "-isms" is what the NCCJ provided me over 60 years ago on the intergroup level: facilitated structured dialogues (Schoem & Hurtado, 2001). Dialogue requires mutual respect, not easy in these times. As I've often heard said, *when emotions are high*, *cognition is low*. Remember there are two sides to a conversation: speaking and listening, and the latter may be more important than the former. Fostering a climate of tolerance and appreciation must be a foundation for this work, as difficult as those are to implement. Lots of people say they want listening and respectful dialogue, but it takes hard work, plus the willingness to take risks, make mistakes, and to forgive yours and theirs.

I learned from others and attempted at times myself to apply what was originally called *intergroup contact hypothesis*, described by Gordon Allport (1955) in the 1950s, to lessen prejudice. And now over a half-century later there is much evidence of its effectiveness if it is deliberately applied to different groups and structures. For example, a meta-analysis with 515 studies and more than 250,000 subjects demonstrated that intergroup contact did reduce both negative attitudes and behavior toward "others" (Pettigrew et al., 2011). The authors' research supported—as well as modified—Allport's original "Contact Theory," which was widely misunderstood and simplified as merely bringing different groups together. When it failed, it was because those promoting and attempting to implement it omitted or could not control for Allport's identified conditions for optimal contact: equal status among the individuals or groups, accentuating common goals and minimizing intergroup competition, and authority sanction, meaning support for the program and process by organizational, corporate, or government leadership.

Moreover, Pettigrew et al. (2011) posit that there are other positive outcomes of intergroup contact, such as greater trust and forgiveness for past transgressions. These contact effects occur not only for ethnic groups, but also for such other groups as the LBGTQ+ community, and people with disabilities or mental illness. Furthermore, the study's results show that effects

typically generalized beyond the immediate outgroup members in the situation to the whole outgroup, other situations, and even to other outgroups not involved in the contact. These results also appear to be universal—across nations, genders, and age groups. The major mediators of the effect are basically affective: reduced anxiety and empathy. And even indirect contact, Pettigrew et al. (2011) found, reduced prejudice such as vicarious contact through the mass media and having a friend who has an outgroup friend. This counters, at least to some degree, a perceived view that one can be racist while saying: "Some of my best friends are…."

These results are continuing to hold in new environments and circumstances. Harwood (2017) reports that indirect contact through social media can also increase positive attitudes and behavior towards other identity groups. He notes, counter-intuitively, that some evidence suggests that contact is most effective for people with higher levels of pre-existing prejudice. Yet, he also points out that contact can have some ironic negative effects on progress towards societal equity. In particular, considerable evidence suggests that harmonious intergroup contact can reduce perceptions of inequality and suppress the motivation for structural social change for dominant and subordinate groups. The question is whether that outcome is good or bad. You can guess my answer, that it is not "either/or." Perhaps, if a critical mass of people—particularly young people—are exposed and interact on real-life projects as well as contrived exercises (as was my experience with the NCCJ), the results may also positively affect organizational structures and systems—making change occur from the bottom up.

It seems like the best way to end this reflection is with a series of "truisms" (which are cliches that have merit): As others have pointed out, the journey is as important, perhaps more important than the destination as long as we have our compass with us to steer us in the right direction—keep our eyes on the prize.

Acknowledgements

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