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Some Wounds Don't Heal: Spirit Assassination Attempts: Tools of White Supremacy

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the Graduate School at the University of Missouri-St. Louis

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education with an emphasis in Educational Practice

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, David and Johnetta Haley, and to my grandson, Braylon Michael Douglas.

My mother instilled in me pride in my blackness, confidence in my capabilities, and the necessity of community service and empowering my community. She was quite the extrovert who attempted to push her introverted daughter into the limelight. Her efforts were futile as being in the spotlight was not a desire of mine. My mother encouraged and took pride in my commitment to improving the mental health and access to services for Black people. Two years before she transitioned, I promised her I would pursue this degree. Mother was so excited. She knew social justice was a passion of mine and she enjoyed my thoughts and writings on the subject.

My father was my rock as he schooled me in survival techniques to help me successfully navigate and survive life in a white supremacist society with my morals and integrity always intact. He was a racial realist who sugarcoated nothing. His counsel kept me grounded. My father's greatest life lesson was that using "fancy words" was "meaningless." That if I could not breakdown my education so that the common man could understand it, my education was not worth anything. He reminded me that the only thing that separated me from other Black people was "proximity and opportunity."

To my grandson Braylon, this dissertation is dedicated to you in hopes that you will learn Black history and honor your blackness by continuing the family legacy of community service and the fight for dignity, equity, and respect for Black people.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank Dr. Thomasina Hassler for giving me the opportunity to be part of this cohort. To Dr. Shenita Mayes and Dr. Robert Good, I thank you for your guidance and feedback, both which were vital in the formulation of this dissertation.

This journey was fraught with emotional, physical, and medical challenges that threatened to derail my journey. Through it all, my mentor, Dr. Shenita Mayes, was patient, encouraging, and supportive. Especially when my anxiety was high from unexpected medical complications. She maintained her faith that I would successfully complete the program. I am eternally grateful to Dr. Mayes.

I have mad love for my classmates who looked out for me and assisted me with technology support and encouragement when unexpected elderly challenges threatened my independence. Dr. Sherrie McClellan, Dr. Sharena Stevenson, and Dr. Michaela Thomas, I am grateful for our friendship. Thank You!

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to study the effects of spirit assassination attempts and whether their influence is enduring throughout life and can be linked to my emotional, mental and physical health. In 1987, the term spirit murdering was coined by Williams to describe the everyday encounters with racism and discrimination which can evoke a profound sense of powerlessness, hopelessness, and sadness in Black people. I use the term spirit assassination attempts, to describe the repeated, intentional words, body language, looks, and actions intended to remind Black people of their societal position intended to destroy hope, joy, self-esteem, and take away dignity and respect. Spirit assassination attempts are wounds whose cumulative effect can lead to spirit murdering. *The Color of Mind* and critical race theory comprise the theoretical base of this research. This autoethnography provides a personal look into my struggles to counter the negative perception of Black inferiority, and the complexities and consequences involved in navigating life in a racist society. Reasons for the failure of mental health services to the Black community is discussed. This study validates *The Color of Mind* tenet that the achievement gap is intentionally constructed and maintained and critical race theory's tenet that race is infused all aspects of life. Keywords: Spirit assassination, spirit murdering, racial trauma, White supremacy, toxic stress, culture conflict, racism

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Wounded soul is more painful than a wounded body.

Vaishali (2022)

Background

The media is rife with stories of state school districts banning books about Black people, efforts to suppress the Black vote, parents complaining that they do not want their children to feel bad about being White, sparked the efforts to erase Black history, promote perceived benefits from slavery and extort that Black people are violent criminals, to name a few. What does this do to a Black child experiencing these debates and negative characterizations of Black people as a group? How does this affect their racial, cultural identity development and future well-being? Do these experiences imprint themselves into the psyche of Black children and impact them for the duration of their existence? Is there a link between mental health and early and continuing spirit assassination attempts?

I am a Boomer. Born in 1948, the firstborn of a young Black couple aged 25 and 27, who were full of aspirations and hope. It was a time of change in the lives of Black people. The ending of residential segregation and the integration of schools represented financial and educational possibilities that my parents were excited to explore (Darby & Rury, 2018).

Nursery Foundation was the preschool that I attended. The Nursery Foundation was all Black people, staff, and students. I remember it as fun and nurturing. I even took a picture with Marian Anderson when she visited our preschool. Even during preschool, our teachers taught us some Black history, building pride in our identity. At this point, we

were unaware of White and Black identity. We just knew that the people they familiarized us with looked like us.

Kindergarten was at Cupples Elementary School, catacorner to the Nursery Foundation and across the street. I loved that school and my kindergarten teachers, Ms. Morgan, and Ms. Green. Reportedly, I was quite the socialite who knew all my classmates' names and their parent's names and learned everyone's part in any school production. Cupples was also an all Black neighborhood school.

On a Monday, as I was getting ready for school, my mother informed me I would be starting a new school that day, a Lutheran School. Our family had recently joined St. Phillips Lutheran Church—a Black Lutheran Church and congregation led by a White German pastor. I was numb and had no idea what to expect. Lutheran Schools were accepting Black children into their schools. I was the first in the Elementary Schools. In their eagerness to obtain the best education they could for me, my parents enrolled me in Mount Calvary Lutheran School.

Mount Calvary Lutheran School was also in my neighborhood within walking distance, three blocks from my home. Imagine my shock when I arrived and everyone, staff and students, was White! Now, please note that I was not afraid. I was astonished. Never had I been in the presence of so many White people. The stares made me very uncomfortable.

The teacher introduced me, yet there were no welcoming smiles or hellos. I remember feeling insecure and tentative. I wondered what was happening in their minds and was uneasy, fearing the unknown.

First recess intensified my feelings of not belonging. Being an only child, socializing with other children was a highlight. I was used to being part of the group. During recess, I spotted this girl with waist-length red hair. It was the most beautiful hair I had ever seen. Because of the way she looked at me, I dared not approach her. However, we accidentally bumped into each other on the way back from entering the school. The red-haired girl jumped back and vigorously rubbed the arm I bumped. Her reaction puzzled me. This incident preoccupied me for the rest of the day.

When my mother arrived home, I told her how my day went and asked her why the red-haired girl reacted the way she did. Her response bothered me. Mother informed me that the red-haired girl probably thought I was my color because I was dirty, and she did not want the dirt to rub off on her. The more I thought about it, the angrier I got. The nerve of her!

That afternoon, the girl who sat before me turned around and stabbed me in the leg with a pencil. I can still hear the plop as the pencil penetrates the side of my left shin and the vision of the pencil protruding from my leg. The scar remains to this day. My parents never revealed what was said or done. All I knew was I was back at that school the next day. I could not wait for recess. When I saw the red-haired girl at recess, I approached and deliberately touched her arm, and she began to rub. She was a rubbing fanatic because I followed her around the playground, repeatedly touching her arm. I wanted her to feel uncomfortable.

Being at Mount Calvary School was traumatic. Mount Calvary Lutheran School began my indoctrination into White supremacy and my resistance to that definition of who I was.

Because of the White flight, Mount Calvary moved further into the West County area. I was delighted to return to Cupples Elementary School, renewing old friendships that have endured. However, I was not the same girl who had left two and a half years before. I had become quiet and somewhat shy, hesitant to express my true feelings or reach out for fear of rejection. Much of my memory about those 2.5 years at Mount Calvary Lutheran School is gone.

Racial issues and racism have dominated my existence since I enrolled in Mount Calvary Lutheran School in 1954. I've been angry and resentful about the pressure America exudes to adhere to their behavioral expectations and communication codes in addition to forced compliance to their White supremacist system. Much of the anger was towards my parents, who continually threw me into White spaces where I was the only Black person or one of a few.

Early and continuing experiences of spirit assassination attempts impacted my reactions and responses in interracial encounters and communications perceived as racist.

Bettina Love (2019) calls schools a place of trauma for Black and Brown children. Patricia Williams (1987) coined the term *spirit murdering* to describe the impact of racism in schools and the personal, psychological, and spiritual injuries it causes.

In this study, I focused on researching spirit assassination attempts; intentional words, body language, looks, and actions intended to remind Black people of their powerlessness and worthlessness in this society, destroy hope, joy, self-esteem, and take

away dignity and respect (Douglas, 2023). This study explores the impact of spirit assassination attempts on this Black female throughout life.

The literature shows how school policies and practices such as exclusionary discipline, implicit teacher bias, and spirit assassination attempts affect Black children and how these factors maintain the Black-White Achievement gap (Brazil, 2022; Darby & Rury, 2018; Douglas, 2023; Little & Welsh, 2019; Riddle & Sinclair, 2019; Williams, 2022).

In a study conducted by researchers at Princeton and Tufts, Jordan Starck, one of the authors, concluded that the more biased a teacher is, the worse student outcomes are because teachers are more likely to act on their biases (Starck et al., 2020; Will, 2020). This study explored the probable reasons that despite numerous efforts to reduce racial bias in schools, those efforts had minimal impact (Starck et al., 2020).

Research began with the perception that schools were sites that promoted racial equality, and teachers taught about this topic because they believed in racial equity (Starck et al., 2020). These researchers were also aware that previous studies documented the role of teachers in facilitating racial inequality in schools (Glock & Karbach, 2015; Lorenzetti & Johnson, 2023; Love, 2019; Parker, 2021). Starck et al. (2020) noted that teachers expected to promote racial equity were from a society where racism is pervasive. Without training, providing teachers the opportunity to acknowledge their biases and begin to address them. Starck et al. felt that teachers' ability to promote racial equality in their classrooms is improbable.

They designed their research to examine the role of explicit and implicit bias. Implicit bias is assumed to be spontaneous cognitive associations about different social

and racial groups wherein the individual is unaware of their biases (Starck et al., 2020). Explicit bias is when individuals know their prejudices and attitudes towards certain groups (Starck et al., 2020). Given that both explicit and implicit bias can influence teachers' behavior toward their students, researchers sought to determine teachers' levels of both types of racial bias and to compare their levels with those of non-teachers.

Researchers conducted two studies using two national data sources (Starck et al., 2020). Study 1 used data from Project Implicit, a web-based, self-directed site that holds data from hundreds of thousands of individuals who can take several implicit association tests (IATs). A demographic survey and explicit bias measures are part of the Black White IAT. Study 1 focused on those participants who took the Black White IAT.

Study 1 had 68,930 participants from a pool of 1.6 million respondents who identified as teachers from Pre-K; 73.7% were female, and the average age was 34.9 years. The average age for non-teachers was 29.0 years. The Black White IAT measures how accurately and quickly participants pair White faces with good words and Black faces with bad words. Participants switch, associating Black faces with good words and White faces with bad words. They determined results by calculating reaction times: The mean reaction time of Black faces paired with good words and the mean reaction time of White faces paired with good words. Positive scores indicated pro-White/anti-Black bias, and negative scores showed pro-Black/anti-White bias. The magnitude of the bias was the distance from zero (Starck et al., 2020).

Study 2 used data from the 2008 American National Election Study (ANES) 2008 of over 2,000 in-person election interviews. To ensure that the sample reflected the population's demographics, targeted sampling was used to capture minority populations.

2008 was the only year the ANES included explicit and implicit racial bias measures (Starck et al., 2020). Researchers limited their analysis to those who specified their occupation, resulting in 1,983 participants. Sixty-three were pre-school-12 teachers, and 77.8% were female, with an average age of 43.2 years. The average age of non-teachers was 47.4 years, with 55% identifying as female (Starck et al., 2020).

The affective misattribution procedure measured implicit bias. Participants fixate on a focal point, then see a picture of a White or Black young adult male, followed by photographs of Chinese characters. Participants judge each picture as pleasant or unpleasant without being influenced by the previous picture (Starck et al., 2020). The number of photos cited as pleasant following White or Black faces indicates pro-White, anti-Black bias. The higher the score, the greater the bias (Starck et al., 2020).

Explicit bias used a feeling thermometer reporting warmth towards White or Black people, 0 = very cold, 100 = very warm. Subtracting the warmth score for Blacks minus the warmth score for Whites resulted in the bias score. The higher the score, the more pro-White/anti-Black bias. They also used Henry and Sear's Symbolic Racism Scale, consisting of five statements. Participants ranked their agreement with the statements using a 5-point scale with 0 = agree strongly and 5 = disagree strongly (Starck et al., 2020). Study 2 found no statistical difference between teachers' and non-teachers' levels of implicit pro-White/anti-Black bias or explicit pro-White/anti-Black bias (Starck et al., 2020).

Both studies showed that teachers' explicit and implicit bias levels mirror the same levels as the general population (Starck et al., 2020).

Starck et al.'s (2020) results challenged the notion that teachers are equipped to bring about racial justice and can encourage positive racial attitudes in children. They conclude by recommending that training teachers to shift or reduce the impact of their racial biases is vital to successfully promoting racial equity in schools.

Research also showed that long-term consequences can result from an accumulation of spirit assassination attempts, living with the effects of structural racism, and how this translates to illness and health disparities (Brondolo et al., 2008; Gamble, 2023; Nemeroff, 2016; Rogers, 2023; Shonkoff, 2021; Williams et al., 2019).

The literature also highlights the disturbing fact that indoctrination into White Supremacist ideology begins in preschool (Armstrong, 2019; Brogle, 2021; Kinard et al., 2021; Stegelin, 2018; Wong, 2021). Although Black children make up just 18% of preschool children, they make up half of the suspended preschool children (Owens, 2020). Gilliam et al. (2016) uncovered considerable evidence of implicit bias among preschool teachers. The teachers' expectation that Black boys are more disruptive correlates to the disproportionate rate at which those students receive suspensions and expulsions.

The conclusions regarding the persistent adverse outcomes for Black children in the education system have been consistent for at least the last 53 years (Darby & Rury, 2018; Dulin-Keita et al., 2011; Haley, 1972; Hascher & Hagenauer, 2010). During that period, studies noted exclusionary discipline and teacher bias as the prime culprits for the Black-White achievement and assessment gaps (Assari et al., 2021; Darby & Rury, 2018; Dhaliwal et al., 2020; Haley, 1972). Nevertheless, recommendations regarding teacher preparation needs have not materialized nationally (Breese et al., 2023).

The Color of Mind (Darby & Rury, 2018) and critical race theory provide a theoretical underpinning for this research. *The Color of Mind* holds that our educational system was built on the idea that there are racial differences in intelligence, behavior, and character and that it never intended for Black children to succeed (Darby & Rury, 2018).

Critical race theory educates about the enmeshment of racism into every structure of our society. It offers the concept of “interest convergence” to explain the lethargic pace of transformative change in United States Education to significantly reduce racism in school staff, policies, and practices (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

The research design is qualitative, and the method is autoethnography (Merriam & Tisdell, 2021). Autoethnography is relational. It uses the researcher’s personal stories to illuminate and shed additional light on the continuing maintenance of spirit assassination attempts in our schools and daily lives and their effects throughout the lifecycle (Poulos, 2021). It provides the opportunity for a different level of engagement where the reader can enter the researcher’s world and gain a different perspective and understanding of the social phenomenon under study (Méndez, 2014).

The importance of this study is the individual tracking of the experiences of spirit assassination attempts and their impact over the life cycle through the lived experiences of the researcher. The problem is that continued school policies, practices, and teacher biases are documented through research to harm Black people’s early development, health, mental health, and life outcomes, yet these practices endure (Gilliam et al., 2016; Hines & Wilmot, 2018; Shonkoff, 2021; Starck et al., 2020).

Society would benefit from this study by reducing the incidence of spirit assassination attempts in schools and in our daily lives, recognizing that spirit

assassination attempts are tools to maintain White supremacy. The United States could shift from demonizing Black people to enabling them to view Black people as the unique and resilient people they are by implementing changes that would promote eradicating White supremacist practices in schools.

Problem Statement

The problem is that spirit assassination attempts have not been acknowledged as an ongoing occurrence that begins in schools, contributing to Black people's continued marginalization, nor has it been viewed as a tool for White supremacist indoctrination (Douglas, 2023). The school system reflects one of the ways the legacy of slavery manifests itself (Darby & Rury, 2018).

There is another aspect of the problem of spirit assassination attempts. Spirit assassination attempts are wounds to the spirit that leave scars that remain influential throughout life (Douglas, 2023). Accumulated spirit assassination attempt injuries can lead to spirit murder, wherein the person just gives up and is not a productive member of society (Douglas, 2023).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to use the lived experiences of this researcher to demonstrate the enduring influence of spirit assassination attempts and their impact on life outcomes and coping strategies, focusing on the mental, emotional, and health consequences of this racist practice.

The study aims to research the phenomenon of spirit assassination attempts and their impact on identity formation, coping choices, relationships, and health (Shonkoff,

2021). The study also aims to connect this phenomenon as a legacy of slavery (Darby & Rury, 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

The goal is to illuminate the need for immediate and intentional use of strategies recommended in previous studies to significantly minimize spirit assassination attempts in learning institutions from preschool to graduate school and their subsequent effect on health, mental health, and life, which leads to positive systemic change (Gara et al., 2019; Ryberg et al., 2021; Shonkoff, 2021).

The study hopes to help this researcher and others who have struggled with spirit assassination attempts to find meaning in their struggles, get relief from emotional pain and internal conflict, and begin to heal (Custer, 2022).

Significance of Study

This study analyzed the impact of spirit assassination attempts and shed light on potential legal and educational policies emphasizing the need to reform or intervene to address systemic issues, and to advocate for implementation of recommendations for change made at least 52 years ago (Alvarez et al., 2021; Haley, 1972; Starck et al., 2020). These practices constitute spirit assassination attempts.

This study emphasizes the enduring influence of experiences of spirit assassination attempts depicted in the lived experiences of this Black female researcher and the role they play in sustaining White supremacy.

This research added to the investigations to identify individual-level strategies for coping with interpersonal and institutional racism (Brondolo et al., 2008).

This study may spur studies on the resilience dynamics of Black people, given the known consequences of racism and discrimination. Studies researching why the United

States has not embraced recommendations from numerous studies outlining the causes for the maintenance of low achievement for Black children might also interest researchers (Assari et al., 2021; Darby & Rury, 2018; Gilliam et al., 2016; Hascher & Hagenauer, 2010).

The reflective experiences of this researcher over a 65-year period may inspire co-conspirators into immediate transformative action. The study draws attention to the occurrence of spirit assassination attempts in the preschool setting and the damaging effect on children's development, emotional/mental well-being, and future functioning (Armstrong, 2019; Shonkoff, 2021). This study supported the argument that the legacy of slavery impacts the daily lives of Black people today (Darby & Rury, 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

This study explored how individuals affected by spirit assassination attempts engage in resistance, advocacy, and activism.

This study can foster a holistic understanding of experiences of spirit assassination attempts emphasizing the structural, intersectional, and historical dimensions, and contribute to a deeper understanding of the impact of spirit assassination attempts contributing to social awareness and change.

Most importantly, by sharing my personal narratives others can feel validated by seeing their struggles reflected and acknowledged in a broader context (Poulos, 2021). Individuals may feel empowered recognizing that their challenges are not solely personal but rooted in larger societal structures reducing feelings of isolation and promoting shared understanding (Lamichhane & Luitel, 2023). Sharing my personal narratives could

contribute to individuals redefining their experiences contributing to feelings of empowerment and a positive sense of self (Méndez, 2014).

The desired audience comprised educators, policymakers, support service personnel (i.e., social workers, school psychologists, and individuals struggling with racial experiences, racial issues, and White supremacy).

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

1. How can emotional/behavioral/ mental health or medical symptoms be directly linked to my experiences of spirit assassination?
2. Have experiences of spirit assassination attempts continually impacted my life?
3. In what ways have my experiences of spirit assassination attempts been traumatizing?

Limitations

The primary limitation was that the researcher is also the subject. The stories can evoke intense and uncomfortable emotions in the reader and the researcher (Méndez, 2014). Being both the subject and the researcher presented challenges to be introspective, transparent, and honest about the feelings, people, and events involved (Poulos, 2021).

Periods of the researcher's life involved sensitive issues and situations, and holding up a critical mirror evoked feelings of guilt, shame, and vulnerability, and re-traumatization (Méndez, 2014). Considering that individual reactions and responses to the same racial experiences will vary due to age, personality, and context, caution was required when generalizing data analysis and reporting results. Hence, no harm befalls those mentioned in the research or the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2021).

Delimitations

This study allowed me the opportunity to reflect on and share my struggles, triumphs, mistakes, and growth journeying through the complexities of life in a society built on White supremacy. The process of recalling painful and traumatic memories and my reactions and responses during these historical moments brought new insight and understanding and the ability to heal from emotional pain (Custer, 2022). It is my belief that the telling of my stories might be helpful to others trying to make sense of their struggles with spirit assassination attempts and help them begin to heal.

The study limited itself to identified spirit assassination attempts experienced and the ways they continue to impact future functioning, the consequences of cumulative spirit assassination experiences on mental, and physical well-being over time (Goosby & Heidbrink, 2013).

Research Plan

Autoethnography was the qualitative research method chosen for this study. Autoethnography uses narrative descriptions and recalling of memories in the written stories of lived experience (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018). Autoethnography is a reflexive research method that offers stories of cultural and social life to illuminate the complexities of human theoretical, political, emotional, social, and cultural actions to shed light on a particular phenomenon (Poulos, 2021).

This method was appropriate for this study because of the assumption that spirit assassination attempts caused lasting wounds to Black people's emotional, behavioral, and physical health throughout life and because the lived experiences of the researcher comprised the data for this study.

Autoethnography was the best method to engage readers in my feelings, emotions, and struggles associated with the life-long consequences of spirit assassination attempts and to provide insight into schools' role in perpetuating and sustaining White supremacist ideology to Black people for decades. (Poulos, 2021).

The notion of Black inferiority, promoted by the purposeful exclusion of Black history and the erasure of valuable contributions by persons of African descent from the school curriculum, supports racist ideology (Darby & Rury, 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Definitions

Critical race theory. One of the tenets holds that racism is woven into every aspect of American life (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Cultural conflict. When two conflicting value systems become simultaneously internalized (Haley, 1972; Stonequist, 1937). It occurs when different beliefs and values clash.

Spirit assassination attempts. Spirit assassination attempts are intentional words, non-verbal looks, body language, and other actions intended to remind Black people of their powerlessness and worthlessness in this society, destroy hope, joy, and self-esteem, and take away dignity and respect. Spirit assassination attempts occur interpersonally and structurally and are experienced repeatedly throughout life (Douglas, 2023)

Spirit murdering. Williams coined the term in 1987 to describe the impact of racism in schools. Spirit murdering addresses the personal, psychological, and spiritual injuries racism causes (Love, 2016, 2019; Parker, 2021). Spirit murdering results in

disbelief in a better future, the ability to set goals and the destruction of motivation to strive for success, causing some people to give up (Williams, 1991).

Racial microaggressions. Professor Derald Sue defined *microaggressions* as everyday slights, indignities, and insults committed against marginalized groups because of their membership in those groups (Alinor, 2022; Sue et al., 2007). Reportedly, these are considered harmless, unintentional, disrespectful, and demeaning behaviors that communicate negative slights and insults toward people of color (Alinor, 2022).

Racial trauma (race-based stress). The cumulative effects of racism on an individuals' physical and mental health (Resler, 2019; Rogers, 2023).

Racism. One group having the power to carry out systemic discrimination through the institutional policies and practices of the society and by shaping the cultural beliefs and values that support those racists policies and practices. (Shonkoff, 2021).

The Color of Mind. A theory that our educational system was built on the idea that there are racial differences in intelligence, behavior, and character and that it never intended for Black children to succeed (Darby & Rury, 2018)

Toxic stress. The body's alert system, known as the fight or flight response, keeps us safe when frightened or threatened (Sima, 2023) If there is no relief from the stress and the body stays on high alert, releasing adrenalin and cortisol continuously, this is called toxic stress (Shonkoff, 2021).

Trauma. An emotionally disturbing or life-threatening experiences caused by one incident, or a series of experiences that have lasting adverse effects on the individual's mental, physical, social-emotional, and spiritual well-being, describes trauma (Center for Health Care Strategies, 2024).

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

I don't think anyone anywhere can talk about the future of their people or of an organization without talking about education. Whoever controls the education of our children controls our future.

Wilma Mankiller (n.d.)

Introduction

To thoroughly understand how spirit assassination attempts impact this researcher's life and possibly other Black people's lives, it is crucial to understand what constitutes spirit assassination attempts and how these experiences influence life outcomes and contribute to health and mental health illnesses. According to Love (2019), spirit murdering is a slow process built on racism, intended to humiliate, and destroy people of color by murdering their spirit.

Spirit assassination attempts are intentional words, non-verbal looks, body language, and other actions intended to remind Black people of their powerlessness and worthlessness in this society, destroy hope, joy, and self-esteem, and take away dignity and respect (Douglas, 2023). Spirit assassination attempts occur interpersonally and structurally and are experienced throughout life. Spirit assassination attempts are wounds. These wounds accumulate and can lead to spirit murder if no positive support deflects the internalization of the injuries inflicted (Douglas, 2023).

The literature review of this study consists of topics that illustrate how spirit assassination attempts exist in educational policies and practices, how these experiences shape our views of self and group affiliations, and the health and mental health complications that may arise from living a life steeped in White supremacy (Brondolo et al., 2008; Darby & Rury, 2018; Hemmings & Evans, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Racism is an enduring problem in America, and critical race theory states that understanding how power and privilege influence institutions is necessary to understand how racial disparities affect societal outcomes (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Critical race theory suggests that ending racism can only be accomplished by changes to primary societal structures (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In other words, our present systems, policies, and laws require a total transformation.

The Color of Mind

The Color of Mind (Darby & Rury, 2018) and critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) constituted the theoretical framework of this study. *The Color of Mind* (Darby & Rury, 2018) examined the connections between race, education, and inequality.

The Color of Mind believes that no educational reform can succeed without school leaders and teachers acknowledging that Black children were never supposed to achieve or learn by the same standards as their White counterparts (Darby & Rury, 2018). The principal tenet of *The Color of Mind* is the belief that racial differences exist in behavior, intelligence, and character, which determines the nature of schooling and achievement for Black students (Darby & Rury, 2018).

Discriminatory practices in American Schools have systematically denied Black students' equal dignity and respect for their minds and lives, and these beliefs and practices are accountable for the persistence of the racial achievement gap between Black and White students (Darby & Rury, 2018).

The Color of Mind provided an understanding of the educational systems and the societal structures that foster the repeated experiences of spirit assassination attempts in

the lives of Black people. Darby and Rury (2018) targeted the impact of racial dynamics on individuals' psychological and cognitive functioning and the significance of race on educational and mental health outcomes. This lens can foster a greater understanding of racial injustice's systemic and personal aspects.

The Color of Mind, as a theoretical framework, provided a comprehensive understanding of the societal structures and educational systems contributing to spirit assassination attempt experiences and the consequences of repeated attempts (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). It drew attention to the significance of race in influencing psychological, cognitive, and educational outcomes (Williams et al., 2019).

Using the framework of *The Color of Mind*, this study aimed to provide an understanding of the psychological and emotional toll of systemic racism on this Black female because of experiencing numerous spirit assassination attempts and their lasting impact throughout life, which is the focus of this study (Darby & Rury, 2018).

The Color of Mind explores the intersections of education, inequality, and race and how they impact the minds and experiences of individuals experiencing dignitary injustice (Darby & Rury, 2018).

Exploring the intersections of race, equality, and education allowed the researcher to understand the implications of experiencing spirit assassination attempts on my dignity and feelings of self-worth by exploring my lived experiences.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory emerged amongst legal scholars in the late 60s and 70s, disillusioned about the slow pace of change utilizing traditional civil rights practices

tackling racism in American society and the persistence of racism despite legal reforms (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017), critical race theory comes from the field of critical legal studies. These scholars focused on understanding the intersections of race, law, and power dynamics and the belief that historical injustices, slavery, and segregation have perpetuated systemic racism that has left lasting impacts on communities and individuals.

Critical race theorists believe that racism did not cease because of legislation (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). They attest that racism contaminates every aspect of our lives, personally, socially, politically, educationally, psychologically, medically, and legally. Critical race theory views racism as a permanent feature of American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Derrick Bell (1980) developed the concept of racism as permanent because of his experiences during the civil rights movement that demonstrated that legal reforms did not address systemic issues of racism. Bell argued that racism is an enduring structural feature.

Bell (1980) also developed the concept of interest convergence. Bell used interest convergence to refute that social and legal advances occur primarily due to a commitment to justice and equality. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017), Bell argued that historically, significant gains in civil rights occurred because the interest of the majority coincided with the push for racial equality.

The term intersectionality originated by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, who, with Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado, were among the initial legal scholars responsible for developing critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Crenshaw (1989) felt that

the feminist and anti-racist frameworks did not account for the experiences of people who, due to their multiple social identities, encounter intersecting forms of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989).

This concept of intersectionality includes an awareness of how the intersections of one's identities, power structures, and systemic inequalities affect individuals differently and impact experiences of oppression and privilege. (Crenshaw, 1989).

Storytelling is deeply rooted in critical race theory: counternarratives challenge and present an alternative perspective to dominant narratives perpetuating inequalities and stereotypes (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Poulos, 2021).

Bell, Delgado, and Crenshaw recognized the power of personal narratives in presenting the portrayal of authentic experiences of racism of marginalized groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

According to Stefancic and Delgado (2017) personal testimonies of those who have faced discrimination and oppression humanize the impact of racism, aid in the understanding of the multifaceted nature of racial experiences and provide a platform for marginalized voices.

Critical race theory argued that formal legal equality does not address systemic issues of racism (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Critical race theory demonstrated how colorblind laws and policies fail in dismantling ingrained racial inequalities (Bell, 1992).

Using critical race theory as a framework helped to identify systemic factors that play a role in spirit assassination attempts, how these spirit assassination attempts intersect with other aspects of my identity and help in understanding the power dynamics

and how racism is perpetrated or resisted (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 1989). The permanence of racism illustrated the lasting and enduring impact of spirit assassination attempts, emphasizing that these experiences are part of a broader and historical social context and not isolated incidents (Bell, 1992).

The frameworks of *The Color of Mind* and critical race theory shed light in this study on the power dynamics and systemic influences and how societal interests converge or diverge from my experiences with spirit assassination attempts (Darby & Rury, 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). They helped me understand the enduring nature of racism and how it manifested in the persistent attempts to undermine my spirit and their enduring influence on my identity, health, and psychological and emotional well-being.

My autoethnography allowed me to highlight unique characteristics of my spirit assassination attempt experiences and challenge dominant narratives about race and how my multiple identities influenced my encounters with spirit assassination attempts (Crenshaw, 1989).

Review of the Literature

Spirit Assassination Attempts, aka Spirit Wounding

When someone breaks another person's spirit, they emotionally traumatize them to the point that their self-worth diminishes, and they become worthless in their own eyes. Spirit assassination attempts can leave a person in a state of despair with feelings of worthlessness (Douglas, 2023). These feelings can cause a person to lose hope, courage, and motivation through repeated experiences of spirit assassination attempts undermining self-esteem, self-worth, and confidence, by criticizing, shaming, or belittling (Douglas, 2023).

Gillson and Ross (2019) cited the work of John Pierrakos, an American Psychiatrist, who identified five wounds of the soul: rejection, abandonment, humiliation, betrayal, and injustice. Pierrakos believed childhood wounds create barriers to becoming our authentic selves (Gillson & Ross, 2019). Pierrakos was the co-founder of Bioenergetics, a body, mind, and soul psychotherapy. He died in 2001.

A psychologist, Lesi Bourbeau (2020), expanded on and popularized Dr. Pierrakos's work.

Following is a summary of the five soul wounds relevant to this study, as described by (Bourbeau, 2020). Although not formulated with people with racial trauma in mind, we can benefit by recognizing the causes of the wounds and the resultant behavioral responses and coping styles that could develop from spirit assassination attempts in the examples given.

According to Bourbeau (2020), the fear of rejection uses the mask of withdrawal. As a child, he may have questioned his right to exist due to parental rejection, and as an adult, he wants to be perfect to feel loved. Bourbeau (2020) stated that he will reject and exclude himself at the slightest rejection to avoid feeling rejected again. According to Bourbeau (2020), this person believes their existence is insignificant and copes by escaping using alcohol, drugs, and solitude. He does not ask for help and speaks little to avoid the possibility of rejection (Bourbeau, 2020).

The person with the wound of humiliation as described by Bourbeau (2020) makes every effort to stay busy at the expense of having no time for himself. He feels he must atone for his humiliation and will often sacrifice himself to keep from being judged by others to hide the shame and guilt they feel. Food is often used for compensation and

self-mockery to protect himself from the risk of others humiliating him (Bourbeau, 2020). According to Bourbeau (2020), those with the wound of humiliation wear the mask of the masochist.

The person wounded by betrayal as a child most likely had parents who did not care for his needs and used lies to manipulate him (Bourbeau, 2020). He maintains his wound by his inability to trust others and he wears the mask of the controller. This person is described by (Bourbeau, 2020) as often suspicious and authoritarian. He will tear down others if he feels his reputation threatened. He blames others for his failures and can be aggressive if things do not go his way. Being taken advantage of is his biggest fear.

According to Bourbeau (2020), the wound of abandonment signals a lack of emotional warmth as a child resulting in a sad child who becomes a needy adult. This person as described by Bourbeau (2020) has difficulty surviving on their own and requires attention and needs to be cared for. Abandoned souls suffer a deep sadness and a paralyzing fear of loneliness (Bourbeau, 2020).

The mask of rigidity is worn by the person with an injustice wound Bourbeau (2020). Bourbeau (2020) describes this person as experiencing the disinterest of his parents. This person as an adult, seeks to conform and do what is expected and appears jovial and optimistic, but can appear insensitive when controlling his discomfort (Bourbeau, 2020). Bourbeau (2020) theorizes that behind the wound of injustice, the wound of rejection is present.

Although the creator of these wound categories did not have the racially marginalized in mind, developing a mask and operating contrary to our feelings is relevant and is an adaptive survival behavior (Bourbeau, 2020). Enslaved people often

had to repress their true feelings to avoid redress, physical punishment, and or death. Indeed, this behavior transmits through the generations for safety.

Scholars such as Hines and Wilmot (2018) and Love (2016) highlight how the U.S. education system commits daily acts of spirit assassination attempts against young Black children instead of creating affirming, nurturing, motivating, and engaging learning environments. Black children experience spirit assassination attempts in the following ways:

- Acts of physical violence towards Black children by school resource officers
- exclusionary discipline practices, intentional erasure of Black contributions from the school curriculum
- demonization of Black culture
- over-representation in special education classes and under-representation in gifted classes (Parker, 2021)

Spirit assassination attempts or woundings as a child can persevere and impact adult behaviors and responses (Douglas, 2023). The development of coping skills is protective and defensive. However, the ability to recognize when those coping methods are no longer effective or warranted is noteworthy so those maladaptive survival behaviors can cease (Bridges, 2004). True healing can begin once one recognizes they are reacting to an internal wound to avoid reliving the initial wounding experience. Repeated and cumulative spirit assassination attempts can lead to serious mental health and emotional issues, which can severely compromise activities of daily living (Chen & Mallory, 2021).

This study was conducted by Gilliam et al. (2016) that involved 135 preschool teachers. There were two phases to the study. In the first phase, the researchers said they were interested in learning how teachers detected challenging behavior in the classroom and how teachers noticed a behavior before it became problematic. Gilliam et al. (2016) did not inform the teachers that the study was on implicit bias. Teachers viewed videos of children involved in various activities. Each video included four children: a Black boy and girl and a White boy and girl. Their job was to press the enter key whenever they saw a behavior that could become potentially challenging. The deception was that there was no challenging behavior. Eye scan technology measured the trajectory of their gaze. The researcher wanted to know when teachers expected terrible behavior and whom did, they watch.

According to Gilliam et al. (2016), teachers looked at the Black children more than the White children, and they looked specifically more at the Black boys. After the study, results coincided with the data on preschool suspensions. The data showed that Black children were 3.6 times more likely to be suspended than White children (Gilliam et al., 2016; Turner, 2016). Gilliam et al. (2016) concluded that the numbers are so high because teachers spend more time focused on their Black students, expecting bad behavior. Gilliam et al. also asked the teachers to identify the child they felt most needed attention. Forty-two percent identified the Black boy, 34% identified the White boy, 13% identified the White girl, and 10% identified the Black girl (Gilliam et al., 2016).

The second part of the study involved teachers reading a paragraph vignette describing a child disrupting a class (Gilliam et al., 2016). The vignette described hitting, toy throwing, and scratching. The child was randomly assigned a stereotypical name.

Teachers rated the severity of the behavior from one to five. Black students' behavior was rated less severe than the exact behavior of White students. Gilliam et al. (2016) concluded that these results supported previous research that people may shift standards and expectations of people based on stereotypes and implicit bias. Black teachers, however, consistently rated the behavior of Black students as more severe than White students (Gilliam et al., 2016). The researchers explained these surprising results as Black teachers holding Black children to a higher standard, though the rationale for this is unstated. One could also theorize that Black teachers had become part of the system and shared some of the same views and behavioral expectations as their White counterparts, and internalized oppression was operating.

There was one more twist to this research. Several teachers received information about the children living in dysfunctional environments to see if they would be more empathetic (Gilliam et al., 2016). Teachers that received the information were more empathetic and lowered the severity rating of the behavior if the teacher and the student were of the same race. Interestingly, severity rates skyrocketed when the teacher and student races differed (Gilliam et al., 2016). The difference may have prompted them to perceive the students negatively. Gilliam et al. (2016) determined that the disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates that began in preschool for Black boys and young men and continued throughout their school years were accountable for America's school-to-prison pipeline. Gilliam et al. concluded that implicit bias haunts every corner of society.

Gilliam et al. (2016) uncovered considerable evidence of implicit bias among preschool teachers. The expectation that Blacks boys will be more disruptive correlates to

the disproportionate discipline rate those students receive. Gilliam et al. suggested teachers focus more on their Black students, expecting bad behavior.

Does preschool education participate in the spirit murdering/spirit assassination of Black and Brown children? Yes, spirit assassination attempts occur in preschool.

According to Brogle (2021), in April 2021, a Black father stopped by the daycare to check on his 2-year-old after his sister alerted him about a disturbing situation, she viewed on the daycare center's live stream. Brogle (2021) reports that after the father arrived, he observed that the White children were eating, and the Black children were sitting without food. Daycare staff was observed on the live stream skipping over the Black children as they passed out lunch. Brogle (2021) reported that the Black kids had to watch the White children eat and wait for the White children to finish eating before they ate. Reportedly, the Director claimed that it was a dietary thing. The corporate office terminated the franchise and assisted the families in locating other daycares near their residences (Brogle, 2021). However, what lessons do White and Black children receive and take away from this practice? Corporate action will not erase the emotional experiences of those children, or the damage done based on skin color.

The literature indicates that experiences of racism at an early age lead to poor academic performance, poor health, and adverse social and emotional outcomes throughout the lifecycle (Gamble, 2023; Shonkoff, 2021).

Spirit assassination attempts are damaging and long-lasting (Douglas, 2023).

Racial Achievement Gap

Inequality in education due to race and ethnicity has an extensive history in the United States (Darby & Rury, 2018).

My Master's thesis, *A Comparative Analysis of Ethnic and Class Differences of Elementary School Students on a Culture Fair Test*, was completed in 1972. At that time, there was heated controversy over using standardized IQ assessments as predictors of academic performance for Black children (Williams, 1974).

Four popular theories attempted to explain the cause of ethnic differences in measures of intelligence Haley (1972). Those theories were:

- Innate inferiority theory
- Cultural deprivation theory
- Educational deprivation theory
- Culture conflict theory

The innate inferiority theory promoted the idea that differences in performance were due because some ethnic groups were innately inferior to other (Haley, 1972; Jensen, 1969). According to Jensen (1969), his studies on twins and several kinship studies produced an estimate of heritability. Heritability represented that part of the I.Q. attributable to genetic variation (Jensen, 1969). According to Finot (1906), "a belief in inequality is a science of White people who have set it going and seek to maintain it." (as cited in Haley, 1972, p. 3). One of the earliest proponents of racial differences in mental abilities was Count A. de Gobineau the father of racism theory and the Aryan race theory (Gobineau, 2015). Gobineau (2015) was an anthropologist best known for using scientific race theory to legitimize racism. He believed races are arranged in hierarchies of mentality, with the Negroid at the bottom., and advocated that Black people be limited to a narrow circle of intellectual activity (Gobineau, 2015).

Cultural deprivation held the premise that a child who lacks toys and books and has yet to visit a zoo or museum should not expect to achieve in school on the level of a more fortunate child (Bernstein, 1975; Lewis , 2000; Raz, 2013). Clark (1989) placed the responsibility of low academic success upon the school system, stating that stimulation at home does not affect a child's ability to read.

According to Clark (1989), educational deprivation holds that children do not learn because teaching is ineffective because the people teaching them do not believe they can learn, do not expect them to learn, and do not act in ways that will help them learn. Clark was responding to definitions of educational deprivation that focused on race and class as the reasons for low academic achievement in comparison to White students.

Bernstein (1975) believed that educational achievement was based on social class and the language of different groups theorizing that they played a role in the ability to have educational success.

Lewis (2000) felt that the impact of poverty on education and other routine areas of life and as a response, those experiencing poverty develop different attitudes behaviors and values which negatively impact educational success.

Knowles and Prewitt (1969) wrote that Black children in the current educational system suffer from institutional discrimination in IQ testing, classroom ability grouping, and negative teacher attitudes.

The theories cited above failed to look at the totality of the situation. They attempted to isolate specific factors as operating alone that cause the differences in a test of mental abilities (Haley, 1972). They overlooked that they were dealing with two distinct cultures and try to lump them together (Haley, 1972).

Most test developers are White middle-class. Any given test frame of reference interacts with the person's frame of reference who is taking the test - and, ironically, to whom the test was designed (Haley, 1972). According to Harris (1971), attempts to analyze diagnostic test findings without a knowledge of the history and the cultural setting the person comes from and where he finds himself at the time of testing invites serious error.

The administration of a test should discontinue when subcultural differences in tests repeatedly evidence consistently low performance by one group; the resulting interaction should be noted (Haley, 1972).

The Color of Mind states that the Jim Crow laws disseminated the message that Black people were inferior in intelligence, conduct, and character (Darby & Rury, 2018). They stated further that schools are sending this message through educational policies and unequal educational opportunities formulated on the assumption of Black inferiority. Darby and Rury (2018) labeled the failure to recognize the equal dignity of all persons as dignitary injustice, which helped to explain the Black-White achievement gap in schools.

Even though racial disparities in education lessened between 1965 and 1975 after the Brown vs. Board of Education ruling in 1954, between 1988 and 1994, the racial gap increased for Black students from 2.5 years behind in reading to 3.9 years. In math, the gap rose from 2.5 years to 3.4 years behind their White counterparts (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1998). There was much speculation about the reasons for the decline. The rise in single-family households, unwed births, and continuing poverty was central to the rationale for the decline, even though the poverty rate had not dropped as the gap

lessened and had not risen when the gap began to increase in the late 1980s (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1998).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assesses American children's math and reading scores. Every few years, 9, 13, and 17-year-olds nationwide receive math and reading tests. According to the Center for Education Policy Analysis, the NAEP provides a key measure in monitoring the equality of educational outcomes by measuring achievement gaps. The NAEP has been using the same tests since the 1970s, enabling them to compare reading and math scores with their parents. The U.S. Department of Education (2022) noted that although the White-Black and White-Hispanic achievement gaps are 30-40% lower than in the 1970s, they are still substantial.

Exclusionary Discipline

The notion of Black inferiority, promoted by the purposeful exclusion of Black history and the erasure of valuable contributions by persons of African descent from the school curriculum, supports White supremacy (Darby & Rury, 2018). The use of exclusionary discipline seems a reasonable indicator of that trend.

Ryberg et al. (2021) reported that in 2017-2018, schools continued to suspend their Black students at rates more than twice as high as Whites and Hispanics. They also show decreased suspensions against Black and Hispanic students over time, although slowly for Black students. Repeated suspensions and expulsions for Black children considerably influence Black-White achievement gaps (Assari et al., 2021). Continued missed days out of school result in students falling further and further behind with no mechanism to help those students catch up on what they missed, denying the opportunity

for learning (Dhaliwal et al., 2020). According to Williams (2022), school suspensions do not deter future problem behavior and often lead to dropout.

A study by the University of California, Irvine, found that high school students with a history of being suspended or expelled are twice as likely to be charged or convicted of a crime, earn less income, require food assistance, and are less likely to pursue college (Brazil, 2022; Davison et al., 2021).

According to Brazil (2022), this study sought to analyze how much inequality in young adults relates to experiencing suspension and expulsion in school. Davison et al. (2021) compared school disciplinary records with educational enrollment, employment, criminal justice activity, and income of 40,000 Oregon students who began high school in 2007. They used data from the following sources to trace students to young adulthood: the Department of Corrections, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Internal Revenue Service Department of Education, and the court system. They found that being suspended or expelled in school had more significant impacts on Black students later in their lives, and those students suspended or expelled as students did worse as adults than students who had not been suspended or expelled in school.

Glaring disparities existed in the types of students who received discipline, specifically Black students, who were more likely to be disciplined by suspension or expulsion (Brazil, 2022; Davison et al., 2021). Davison et al. (2021) found that 30% of Black and White disparities in criminal justice outcomes, use of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs, and college completion, connected to disproportionate school discipline.

Most of the studies on spirit murder focus on adolescents and young adults. Owens (2020) noted that Black children represent only 18% of preschool enrollment but represent 48% of preschool children who receive one or more school suspensions in comparison to White children, who represent 41% of preschool enrollment but only 28% of such children receive one or more out of school suspensions. Although Black children make up just 18% of preschool children, they make up half of the suspended preschool children (Owens, 2020).

Researchers also cited the restorative justice movement as a strategy to reduce the disparities in using exclusionary discipline with Black students (Marsh, 2017). Davison et al. (2021) noted, however, that despite a substantial drop in suspension rates, the number of suspensions and expulsions Black students faced was unchanged.

Teacher Implicit Bias

Teacher attitudes and behaviors toward children of color are considered spirit murdering (Wright-Mair & Pulido, 2021).

A teacher's opinion influences the view of self. Jane Elliot's Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes experiment demonstrated how a teacher's influence impacts a child's identity (Fallon, 2020). By dividing the class by eye color, treating the brown-eyed children with privilege, and imposing restrictions on the blue-eyed children, each group displayed behaviors relative to the teacher's treatment. Blue-eyed children began to doubt their self-worth and rebelled against the treatment they received. Brown-eyed children gained confidence, became oppressive, and glorified in their favored position (Fallon, 2020). The experiment aimed to illustrate what it felt like to be discriminated against but invariably demonstrated the powerful influence of teachers on a child's self-esteem.

Owens (2020) cited Dr. Iheoma U. Iruka, Director of the Center for Early Education and Evaluation at High Scope Educational Research Foundation, on implicit bias in early childhood education. Dr. Iruka stated that, in some ways, unconscious bias forgives teachers for having this bias, which she feels is just racism in the classroom (Owens, 2020). Dr. Iruka made a distinction between institutional and interpersonal bias. Dr. Iruka believes that teachers' implicit bias is interpersonal racism, meaning one-to-one interactions, whereas institutional is structures and policies (Owens, 2020).

Teachers must acknowledge that they play a role in perpetuating racial inequality in schools (Will, 2020).

Lorenzetti and Johnson (2023) examined the connection between how teachers label classroom behavioral disruptions and teachers' implicit racial attitudes. The study examined the relationship between labels teachers attach to disruptive behavior challenges and teacher attitudes. Lorenzetti and Johnson (2023) asserted that labeling of classroom behavior, responses to that behavior, and the perceptions of the student's abilities can reveal teacher attitudes. The focus of the study was on the interpersonal theory of attribution. Attribution theory is that regardless of reality, what a person perceives is what they believe to be cause for others and themselves Lorenzetti and Johnson (2023). Interpersonal attribution is when one seeks to understand the cause of others' behavior and environment to explain those actions and outcomes of the other (Lorenzetti & Johnson, 2023).

Research has shown that a teacher's perception of a student's behavior, such as behavior and academic attributions, affects how students are treated in the classroom (Little & Welsh, 2019; Riddle & Sinclair, 2019).

Cherng (2017) published a study that provided additional evidence of how teacher bias affects students. He concluded that teacher estimations harm students, especially students of color. Underestimating students' abilities causes students to have lower expectations of themselves. Cherng (2017) stated that teacher perceptions were essential for children of color because research has shown that when teachers have confidence in the academic abilities of children of color, they achieve more significant benefits than their White counterparts.

Gilliam et al. (2016) conducted a study that involved 135 preschool teachers. There were two phases to the study. In the first phase, the researchers said they were interested in learning how teachers detected challenging behavior in the classroom and how teachers noticed a behavior before it became problematic. Gilliam et al. did not inform the teachers that the study was on implicit bias. Teachers viewed videos of children involved in various activities. Each video included four children: a Black boy, a girl, and a White boy and a girl. Their job was to press the enter key whenever they saw a behavior that could become potentially challenging. The deception was that there was no challenging behavior. Eye scan technology measured the trajectory of their gaze. Gilliam et al. wanted to know when teachers expected terrible behavior and who did they watch. This research revealed that teachers "looked at the Black children more than the White children, and they looked specifically more at the Black boys (Gilliam et al., 2016).

After the study, results coincided with the data on preschool suspensions. The data showed that Black children were 3.6 times more likely to be suspended than White children (Gilliam et al., 2016; Turner, 2016). According to Gilliam et al. (2016), the

researcher, concluded that the numbers are so high because teachers spend more time focused on their Black students, expecting bad behavior.

The research also asked the teachers to identify the child they felt most needed attention. Forty-two percent identified the Black boy, 34% identified the White boy, 13% identified the White girl, and 10% identified the Black girl (Gilliam et al., 2016).

The second part of the study involved teachers reading a paragraph vignette describing a child disrupting a class. The vignette described hitting, toy throwing, and scratching. The child was randomly assigned a stereotypical name. Teachers rated the severity of the behavior from one to five. Black students' behavior was rated less severe than the exact behavior of White students. The researcher concluded that these results supported previous research that people may shift standards and expectations of people based on stereotypes and implicit bias. Black teachers, however, consistently rated the behavior of Black students as more severe than White students (Gilliam et al., 2016). The researchers explained these surprising results as Black teachers holding Black children to a higher standard, though the rationale for this is unstated (Gilliam et al., 2016). One could also theorize that Black teachers had become part of the system and shared some of the same views and behavioral expectations as their White counterparts, and internalized oppression was operating.

There was one more twist to this research. Several teachers received information about the children living in dysfunctional environments to see if they would be more empathetic (Gilliam et al., 2016). Teachers who received the information were more empathetic and lowered the severity rating of the behavior if the teacher and the student were of the same race. Interestingly, severity rates skyrocketed when the teacher and

student races differed. The difference may have prompted them to perceive the students negatively. Gilliam et al. (2016) concluded that the disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates that began in preschool for Black boys and young men and continued throughout their school years were accountable for America's school-to-prison pipeline. Gilliam et al. concluded that implicit bias haunts every corner of society.

Cherng (2017) set out to determine if young children show bias towards peers based on identity groups. The study group consisted of 4- and 5-year-olds. They used an implicit bias test typically given to adults. Cherng (2017) found that the children rated the images of the Black boys less favorably than those of White boys and girls, with the Black girl's images falling in the middle; that young children were sharp observers of the social world; and there was a strong pro-White bias by most White and Black children.

Cherng (2017) conducted two experiments to see how young children exhibit gender and racial bias and whether they showed bias towards other children based on gender and race. Four groups. White males, White females, Black males, and Black females. The first group split into two groups. Each group received the same order of the four images. A second group completed the same procedure, but their images had neutral expressions rather than smiles. The children rated how much they liked each face on a six-point scale, one being really do not like, and six being really like. They added an image of a neutral Chinese figure (Cherng, 2017).

Results from the first experiment showed that the children were more positive when the Chinese character followed White rather than Black faces (Cherng, 2017). They responded more positively when it followed female faces than male faces. The Chinese character received the least positive responses when it followed Black boys.

The second experiment yielded similar feelings on race toward the neutral Chinese character (Cherng, 2017). Cherng (2017) found no differences in response based on gender. In both experiments, Black boys were appraised less positively than Black girls, White girls, and White boys.

The study concluded that children begin to show bias early and absorb the stereotypes they observe. According to Cherng (2017), young children become increasingly attuned to social category labels and the biases exhibited by family. Cherng (2017) concluded that young children may treat other children differently based on race, ethnicity, or gender. The researchers at Northwestern believe that an excellent time to intervene to provide learning opportunities for the child is when they display bias (Cherng, 2017).

Children may also experience microaggressions. In 1970, Harvard Psychiatrist Chester M. Pierce coined the term to describe slights and dismissals he frequently witnessed by non-Black Americans inflicting on Black Americans. There are many definitions of microaggressions (Alinor, 2022). Professor Derald Sue defines *microaggressions* as everyday slights, indignities, and insults committed against marginalized groups because of their membership in those groups (Sue et al., 2007). Reportedly, these are considered harmless, unintentional, disrespectful, and demeaning behaviors that communicate negative slights and insults toward people of color (Alinor, 2022). Microaggressions are often worded in the spirit of joviality to mask the appearance of hostility or threats (Alinor, 2022; Sue et al., 2007). According to Sue et al. (2007), recipients respond with suppressed anger and hurt, often not addressing the slight

directly for fear of revealing how angry, shocked, and shamed they felt. Who determined that microaggressions were harmless?

Trauma

Mentioned earlier was the description of schools as sites of trauma for Black and Brown children (Williams, 1987). What is trauma? Trauma is the Greek word for wound. Emotionally disturbing or life-threatening experiences caused by one incident, or a series of experiences have lasting adverse effects on the individual's mental, physical, social-emotional, and spiritual well-being, describes trauma (Center for Health Care Strategies, 2024).

Racial trauma is the cumulative effects of racism on an individual's mental and physical health (Resler, 2019). It is experienced vicariously or directly by people of all ages, including young children. An excellent example of vicariously experienced trauma is the repeated airing of the video showing the beating death of Tyre Nichols over several days on all the news stations. The video of Tyre Nichols caused increased anxiety and feelings of vulnerability and insecurity even though the video was heard and not viewed.

Racial trauma can also be described as “the cumulative traumatizing impact of racism on a racialized individual, which can include individual acts of racial discrimination combined with systemic racism, and typically includes historical, cultural, and community trauma (Helms et al., 2012). Racial trauma caused by overt racism occurs in a person-to-person or group situation where verbal and potentially physical assaults occur. Covert trauma is less obvious and done passively and often concealed in the fabric of society (Resler, 2019). PTSD can result from racial trauma if a person experiences

death threats, serious injuries, or sexual violence (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2024). Racial trauma is also called race-based traumatic stress (Helms et al., 2012).

Psychological stress reactions such as depression, anxiety, aggression, and substance abuse can result from toxic stress (Hemmings & Evans, 2018). Keenan Anderson was terrified of the Police when they stopped him. Mr. Anderson was under extreme stress and severe anxiety. He ran to an open area, hoping it might offer some refuge and protection. Mr. Anderson's worst fears came true.

According to Rogers (2023) and Williams et al. (2019) people affected by racial trauma might take on some of the physical symptoms of stress, such as stomach aches, faster heartbeats, feelings of hypervigilance, chronic stress, avoidance, and re-experiencing distressing events. Other symptoms include difficulty sleeping, fatigue, depression, anxiety, impaired gut health, anger, recurring thoughts of the event, nightmares, sweating, shaking, distrust, self-blame, low self-esteem, headaches, and chest pains (Bhui, 2002; Mental Health America, 2022).

Unfortunately, Black people experience multiple racist and discriminatory behaviors and traumas, such as community violence and victimization, which can lead to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Helms et al., 2012; Hemmings & Evans, 2018).

Symptoms of PTSD may include heightened reactions, nightmares, avoidance of circumstances reminiscent of the trauma, memories of the trauma, anxiety, depression, and an exaggerated startle response (Helms et al., 2012; Hemmings & Evans, 2018).

Toxic Stress

People affected by racial trauma might take on some of the physical symptoms of stress, such as stomach aches, faster heartbeats, feelings of hypervigilance, chronic stress,

avoidance, and re-experiencing distressing events (Williams et al., 2021). Other symptoms include difficulty sleeping, fatigue, depression, anxiety, impaired gut health, anger, recurring thoughts of the event, nightmares, sweating, shaking, distrust, self-blame, low self-esteem, headaches, and chest pains (Mental Health America, 2022; Rogers, 2023).

The body's alert system, known as the fight or flight response, keeps us safe when frightened or threatened. The stress response causes adrenalin and cortisol to enter the bloodstream, which helps us be combat-ready and safe. However, if there is no relief from the stress and the body stays on high alert, releasing adrenalin and cortisol continuously, this is called toxic stress (Shonkoff, 2021).

Toxic stress occurs when an adult or child experiences frequent or prolonged adversity (Williams et al., 2021). This prolonged activation of the stress response system can cause significant wear and tear on developing brains and lifelong effects on learning, physical and mental health, stress-related disease, and cognitive impairment into adulthood (Mental Health America, 2022). Changes in the hypothalamic pituitary and adrenal (APA) hormone, when over-activated, trigger changes in immunity, inflammation, and brain structure. Impaired memory and mood control can be among the consequences of toxic stress.

The literature also indicated that experiences of racism at an early age led to poor academic performance, poor health, and adverse social and emotional outcomes throughout the lifecycle (Shonkoff, 2021). Scientific evidence says that the foundations for lifelong health begin during the prenatal period and early infancy. Supportive relationships, safe environments, and sufficient resources to meet daily needs are

protective factors that promote positive outcomes. The absence of these protective factors contributes to a greater risk of later problems (Shonkoff, 2021).

Young children who experience toxic stress can experience disruptions in their development and development issues with maintaining optimal health (Nemeroff, 2016). Changes to the brain caused by trauma can result in varying degrees of emotional dysregulation and cognitive impairment that can lead to many problems, including difficulty with attention, learning disabilities, low self-esteem, poor social skills, and sleep disturbance (Nemeroff, 2016). Those children who have experienced trauma throughout their developmental years learn how to cope by changing their responses and behaviors (Helms et al., 2012). In different situations for survival, when they feel manipulated or unsafe, children become accommodating, and this changes them developmentally (Helms et al., 2012)

Researchers at Harvard University conducted a study published in the American Journal of Psychiatry, where 7,350 White and 1,786 Black MRIs of children ages 9 and 10 were examined (Gamble, 2023). The study's original intent was to dispel the myth that White and Black people's brains differed. According to the researchers, increased stressors like systemic racism and economic hardship play a significant role for Black children, leading to mental health issues as they age (Gamble, 2023). A byproduct of absorbing toxic stress results in Black children having less gray matter in their brains. The study defined *stressors* as "prolonged exposure to adverse experiences that lead to excessive stress hormones and disrupt the metabolic regulatory and immune systems" (Gamble, 2023). As a result of the data examined, researchers concluded that the

disproportionate life experiences were driving any differences seen in the brains of Black and White children (Gamble, 2023).

The most disturbing conclusions of the study cited by Gamble (2023) were that prolonged exposure of children to toxic stress caused Black children to develop behavioral problems later in life and were susceptible to committing violence, attempting suicide, and abusing alcohol and drugs. Gamble (2023) felt the analysis spotlighted the need for “large-scale structural and systemic change in policy.”

Based on the climate of the country and the continuing issues of race, it is hard to believe that microaggressions are unintentional and not calculated racial digs. Children also experience microaggressions along with spirit assassination attempts. Teaching them about microaggressions and how to respond should be a topic we discuss so they can protect themselves from the emotional damage microaggressions can cause. Teaching them to challenge microaggressions when they occur respectfully is a form of self-care necessary for maintaining emotional well-being while navigating life as a Black person in a racist environment.

Intergenerational trauma or historical trauma is worthy of mention (Gillson & Ross, 2019). We cannot ignore the collective emotional cost of the legacy of slavery, racism, and the White Supremacist governmental infrastructure that perpetuates and maintains racism and discrimination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Four hundred years of social conditioning to protect White comfort left a definite generational imprint on Black descendants (Cooks-Campbell, 2022). White supremacy is the reason that the topic is relevant. Intergenerational trauma is inherited trauma (Cooks-Campbell, 2022).

There is a resurgence of racial ugliness that was a part of the fabric not long ago, threatening the lives of racialized people. Black people are experiencing a heightened sense of stress and trauma on top of existing racial trauma experienced daily (Gillson & Ross, 2019).

There appear to be genetic changes in DNA that alter the gene's function but do not damage it (Ryder, 2022). This DNA change is called epigenetic change.

Epigenetics focuses on how behaviors and the environment influence how genes work and how epigenetics affects gene expression to turn genes off and on (Ryder, 2022). Reportedly, epigenetic changes can affect health: genes can change epigenetics by weakening the immune system, and mutations could increase cancer risk (Ryder, 2022).

According to Costa et al. (2018), when sons of Civil War soldiers who spent time as POWs were studied, they were more likely to die after 45 than sons whose fathers had not been POWs. Costa et al. (2018) concluded that paternal stress could influence future generations through epigenetic channels. Daughters were not affected. They also acknowledged that socioeconomic or psychological factors and culture could influence trauma. Children whose parents experienced trauma were more likely to have an anxious, emotionally distant, and unstable parent, which could contribute to trauma being passed down to another generation (Costa et al., 2018).

In the field of Family therapy exists a similar theory that does not involve gene mutations. It is called transgenerational transmission (Cooks-Campbell, 2022). Transgenerational transmissions of trauma occur when parents' experiences affect their children's development, which affects them emotionally, socially, and biologically (Cooks-Campbell, 2022).

The following is a personal communication amongst friends, that occurred September 23, 2023. Recently, a father involved in a discussion about behaviors, responses, and reactions Black people exhibit in a system based on White supremacy could be residuals of adaptive survival behaviors from slavery, providing an example of how these transgenerational transmissions might occur.

The father spoke of a recent experience with his son at a mall. He explained that a White woman was exiting as they were entering the mall. After she left, his son asked him what that was all about. Upon further inquiry, the father's reaction disturbed the son as the White woman approached them. The father lowered his head and cast his eyes down as the White woman came, avoiding all eye contact. The father was unaware that he had done so. The father was embarrassed. He explained that his grandmother told him to do this as a child because looking at a White woman in any manner might cost him his life. His grandmother told him to look as docile and non-threatening as possible. He was surprised that this was so automatic to him. He struggled with telling his son the story and the reasons for avoiding eye contact with White women as a safety method. How would he feel as a father if he did not tell his son the story about his grandmother's teachings and harm came to his son resulting from a similar scenario?

The trauma of chattel slavery and subsequent historical traumas is not acknowledged. Survival behaviors from slavery that are maladaptive in the present continue to dominate our responses and actions. Recently, a discussion regarding White women's repeated rejection of support for Black women who have stood with them and their causes and whether they were still a threat to the Black community occurred during a social gathering.

The Myth of Mental Health Supports

There has been a continual assertion that more mental health services will help in the schools that experience achievement gaps and other issues relating to race encountered within the school environment or the community. However, the same implicit bias teachers hold exists in the mental health field (Alvarez et al., 2021).

Mental health services that are available are often ineffective in resolving the psychic injury incurred by students who have experienced spirit assassination attempts during their academic journey. The psychic imprint from these experiences has long-term and far-reaching effects on racial-cultural identity development, relationships, behavioral responses, and self-esteem. People must understand that psychology and psychiatry are rooted in White supremacy, founded by White males (American Psychological Association, 2021).

Relational dynamics often emerge in the therapy room, replicating the society we live in today. According to Hemmings and Evans (2018), of the counselors participating in their 2018 study, 71% had encountered race-based trauma in their clinical work. However, few had received training in assessing or treating those afflicted.

Despite the history of slavery and the continued discrimination and racism in our daily lives, trauma-informed therapy was recently deemed applicable to Black clients. However, White therapists do not view their Black clients as survivors or historically traumatized despite decades-long acceptance of transgenerational transmissions. Unfortunately, trauma-informed care focuses on Black children by reinforcing the deficit mindset of White supremacists.

De Witte (2020) noted that psychological research has a racism problem. She cited a study by Dr. Steven Roberts that shows research on racism is scarce and that when it does occur, the research is authored and edited mostly entirely by White scholars. During a clinical conference I attended, the failure of clinical programs to address diversity in training was a hot topic. This personal communication occurred on August 30, 2023.

Most clinicians were White. There were three Black female therapists present. Most complained about how the lack of preparation for treating those who were culturally and ethnically different rendered them feeling incompetent and limited in what they could offer clinically. Many shared how they educated themselves and changed their treatment approach to be relevant and respectful to their clients of color. Three other minority therapists expressed frustration about diversity courses being taught entirely by White people or maybe someone of South Asian descent. A couple of White therapists suggested that their colleagues reflect on their clinical practices to determine the extent to which those practices align with White supremacist ideology.

Mental health practitioners are grappling with this issue as we speak. The American Psychological Association (2021) published a statement of apology to people of color, acknowledging that they have been an agent of White supremacist ideology in their practice with minority clients. They are struggling with figuring out how to diagnose racial trauma and its criteria. Their plan to deal with White supremacist ideology involves a class or two and individual introspection, led mainly by White people, with no ongoing reflection or introspection. In other words, mental health practitioners are not prepared to treat Black people trying to survive in our racist society.

In 2019, Rutgers conducted a study with 1,657 people in which they completed an assessment for schizophrenia and a screening for major depression. There were 1,056 White people and 599 Black people. The study found that clinicians tend to overemphasize psychotic symptoms and overlook symptoms of major depression in Black Americans compared to other ethnic or racial groups (Gara et al., 2019). The study suggests that racial bias is a factor in the diagnosis of schizophrenia in Black Americans. Misdiagnosis can result in adverse consequences for the patient. Drugs that treat psychosis have much more severe side effects than medications to treat major depression, such as weight gain, diabetes, and the possibility of developing tardive dyskinesia and involuntary movement disorder that is not curable.

Black men are diagnosed with schizophrenia four times more than White men, while mood disorders and PTSD are underdiagnosed (Perzichilli, 2020). Most mental health providers in the United States are White. 86% of psychologists are White, and less than 2% are Black.

The father of psychiatry, Benjamin Rush, said that “Negroes” suffered from a disorder called “negritude.” This disorder, viewed as a mild form of leprosy, had one cure: to become White (Mensah et al., 2021).

Prominent physician Samuel Cartwright defined a disease unique to Black people called “drapetomania” (Perzichilli, 2020). According to Cartwright, this disease caused enslaved people to run off, and the cure was to cut off both big toes and whippings. Drapetomania was still listed in the medical dictionary in 1914 (Perzichilli, 2020). Psychiatrists claimed that “Negroes” were unfit for freedom (Mensah et al., 2021; Perzichilli, 2020).

In 1968, an article in the Archives of General Psychiatry described schizophrenia as a protest psychosis where Black men developed aggressive and hostile feelings (Perzichilli, 2020). Black people are diagnosed with schizophrenia three to four times higher than White people (Faber et al., 2023).

Misdiagnosis of Black people is not limited to schizophrenia. Black teens are underdiagnosed for depression (Pattani, 2019). Diagnosis disparities are consistent nationwide for Black people but not Latinos (Faber et al., 2023; Pattani, 2019; Perzichilli, 2020).

Based on the history of racial disparities in mental health and misdiagnosis of Black people, it is not wise to put faith in a treatment built on White supremacy whose solution for the schizophrenic misdiagnosis is to screen for major depression first (Pattani, 2019). Cultural competency classes failed to decrease the incidence of misdiagnosis due to bias (McGoldrick & Hardy, 2019). Cultural competency classes were taught predominately by White people or people other than Black (McGoldrick & Hardy, 2019).

The literature strongly suggests that mental health systems remain incapable of treating Black people with equity (Pattani, 2019). Therefore, the mental health system cannot provide the necessary treatment Black people require for healing.

Summary

This chapter explored what a spirit was and described the manifestations of a wounded spirit. Spirit assassination attempts were defined and described as wounds whose accumulation, without positive intervention, could lead to spirit murder. Schools,

including preschools, were viewed as the initial sites for indoctrination into White Supremacist ideology and the beginning of experiencing spirit assassination attempts.

A brief historical look at the controversy over reasons for the Black-White achievement gap revealed an agreement with current studies identifying teacher bias, exclusionary discipline, and policies as the instruments used to maintain racial disparities in education. The school setting appears to be the site of initial indoctrination into White Supremacist ideology for Black and Brown children. However, it is important to note that spirit assassination attempts occur in all settings, and they continue to be experienced throughout life (Masko, 2014).

Despite the vast amount of research over the last 50-plus years citing teacher bias, exclusionary discipline, and policies as the main contributors to the maintenance of the achievement gap, those policies and practices remain. This chapter noted that the recurring recommendations remain recommendations.

Maintaining the racial achievement gap as the cause for maladjustment and negative future functioning serves White supremacist ideology, fueling its negative narrative to maintain the Color of Mind. These conditions remain as they have since Black people were initially allowed to become educated. Interest convergence is lacking, resulting in the lack of change to identifiable causes for racial disparities in educational settings (Darby & Rury, 2018). The system that causes the repeated phenomenon of wide racial achievement gaps is the one that causes ghettos, unemployment, prejudice, and inferior education (Haley, 1972).

Culture conflict is one of the past theories attempting to explain another reason for the sustained racial achievement gap. Cultural conflict is when two conflicting value

systems become simultaneously internalized (Haley, 1972). Each group, especially the one in control, seeks to protect itself by keeping the other in its place. Culture conflict is maintaining social distance; when the subordinate group's advancement threatens the controlling group's position, it responds with fear and apathy (Stonequist, 1937).

As long as one culture designs the curriculum, assessment tests, and textbooks, and most of the teachers are from the dominant culture, they will consistently score higher than other racial/ethnic groups (Haley, 1972).

This chapter presented some of the behavioral, medical, and mental health symptoms known to arise in Black people, resulting from living with toxic stress due to racial discrimination.

Lastly, information on the inadequacies of the mental health system and its role in support of the Color of Mind highlights the frequent misdiagnosis of Black people due to racial biases.

The literature supports the critical race theory that racism permeates every system in America, and The Color of Mind's contention is that racial achievement gaps are socially and institutionally constructed and maintained.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Although nature commences with reason and ends in experience it is necessary for us to do the opposite, that is to commence with experience and from this proceed to investigate the reason.

Leonardo Da Vinci (n.d.)

Introduction

The last few years have allowed time for reflection. One of the most surprising revelations was looking at ways the work that engaged me with the community supported White supremacist ideology. As much as this researcher has fought for equity and against the disparity in services, the methods used supported and reinforced the ideology fought against, which was a sobering realization.

This study focuses on living with repeated occurrences of spirit assassination attempts and whether these experiences impacted my life and my mental, emotional, and physical health. The study also seeks to determine if the impact of experiences of spirit assassination attempts continues throughout life through the lived experiences of the researcher.

In this chapter, there is a description of the research methodology and how data was collected and analyzed.

This study aimed to determine if experiences of spirit assassination attempts can be linked to mental, emotional, and health concerns, if these experiences are traumatic, and if they have impacted the researcher's life.

Background

Being Black in America is exhausting.

As a result, I grew increasingly angry at racial discrimination and how it controlled my life through the years. Resentment regarding how well I mimicked White values and lifestyle determined my suitability for participation in White-controlled spaces; was a constant source of agitation. Not responding to White behavioral expectations and communication codes gave me great joy. I was curious about the unidentified ways my experiences with spirit assassination attempts have influenced my life.

Until recently, the extent to which life's experiences with racism and discrimination had influenced reactions, communications, and responses in interracial interactions had not been a focus of targeted exploration. Although aware of the pervasiveness of racist policies and people encountered daily, it seemed more of a routine annoyance than a fixable situation. Teachings from parents and older extended family informed us about the low expectations White people had of us and how to behave around them to minimize the risk of harm.

This study focuses on living with repeated occurrences of spirit assassination attempts and whether these experiences impacted the researcher's life and her mental, emotional, and physical health.

In this chapter, there is a description of the rationale for the research, the data collection process, and how data was analyzed. A description of the research setting, and my role follows. Why my study is trustworthy and acknowledging potential ethical concerns closes the chapter.

Research Design

This study used ethnography as the research design with autoethnography as the method.

Because this study centered around the phenomenon of spirit assassination attempts and uses the lived experiences of this researcher, the ethnographic research design was a perfect fit (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018). Ethnography involves observing and describing a culture, usually in a group where the researcher spends considerable time with the group in their cultural setting (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018).

Autoethnography grew out of ethnography, allowing the researcher to examine their experiences while addressing a topic of interest (Poulos, 2021).

The research design is qualitative, and the method used is autoethnography (Merriam & Tisdell, 2021). Autoethnography is relational (Poulos, 2021). It uses the researcher's personal stories to illuminate and shed additional light on the continuing maintenance of spirit assassination attempts in our schools and daily lives and their effects throughout the lifecycle (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Poulos, 2021). It allows the opportunity for a different level of engagement where the reader can enter the researcher's world and gain a different perspective and understanding of the social phenomenon under study (Poulos, 2021).

Autoethnography is a qualitative reflexive research method that uses evocative writing about the self in social contexts to critique and describe cultural experiences, beliefs, and practices (Poulos, 2021). Autoethnography was best suited for this study because it is aware of the emotional responses of the author and other people involved in the research world. This method used the researcher's lived experiences around the

phenomenon in question to draw the reader into their world using evocative stories so the reader can think, feel, and make connections (Poulos, 2021). This method allows the researcher to move around in time, which was essential in this study as the researcher covers several periods (Poulos, 2021).

Autoethnography seeks to describe and understand cultural experiences by analyzing personal experiences (Méndez, 2014). It uses writing about the self to reveal the layers of human theoretical, social, emotional, cultural, and political practice (Poulos, 2021). Autoethnography as a method assisted in seeking meaning to my spirit of assassination attempt experiences through recalling and reflecting on those experiences and the contexts in which they occurred (Reed-Danahay, 1997). This method required honest introspection and the remembrance of details, emotions, context, and behaviors surrounding these spirit assassination attempts (Méndez, 2014).

Ellis and Bochner (2006) stated that autoethnography is a back-and-forth movement between examining and experiencing the self as vulnerable and observing and revealing the broader context of the experience (Méndez, 2014). Autoethnography allowed the exploration of your own positionality and to learn about your own life, who you are and how you came to be (Ellis & Bochner, 2006; Méndez, 2014; Poulos, 2021). This aspect of autoethnography was important in the choice of methodology.

Memory is vital to an autoethnographic study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2021). Mining memories (Poulos, 2021) is a daunting but necessary tool in creating evocative, authentic stories to capture the reader's attention and draw them into the experiences that provide meaning and understanding to their struggles with the complexities of life as a Black person.

Reflecting on past wounds required the researcher to reflect on those spirit assassination attempts and their impact at the time of occurrence and in the present (Méndez, 2014; Poulos, 2021).

I anticipated the results of this study and hoped that by doing so, my spirit would dissipate the remnants of pain and despair carried over the years. There was quite a lot to unpack. Personal memories of traumas, conflicts, and disappointments were not easy but were necessary for this study.

Reliving trauma is a concern, and self-care is vital during this process. However, evocative writing released pain and anger, providing new meanings, understandings, and interpretations about past experiences with spirit assassination attempts. The quote at the beginning of this chapter is the outcome desired.

Research Questions

Research Question 1

How can emotional/behavioral/ mental health or medical symptoms be directly linked to my experiences of spirit assassination? There has been a considerable amount of research concerning the impact of racism on health. And mental health (Bhui, 2002; Mensah et al., 2021; Shonkoff, 2021; Williams et al., 2019). Autoethnography helped me analyze my personal experiences to understand my cultural experiences better (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). Narrative analysis of the data determined if there were any connections between spirit assassination attempt experiences and my mental, emotional, and physical health.

Research Question 2

How have experiences of spirit assassination attempts continually impacted my life? This question aimed to determine if my experiences have been transformative (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). Through reflective and evocative writing rich in description, highlighting emotions, behaviors, and outcomes, the extent to which these experiences were transformational was determined (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018).

Research Question 3

In what ways has trauma played a role in my experiences of spirit assassination attempts? There have been some intense spirit assassination attempt experiences. Often, I wondered if they altered me in any way, modified my approach to work problems, or affected my racial-cultural identity development and, if so, to what extent.

Autoethnography provided the opportunity through evocative writing to reflect on those intensely emotional times and gain new insight and interpretation (Poulos, 2021). My perceptions of those experiences changed once data was analyzed (Ellis & Bochner, 2006).

Participants

This researcher is the lone participant in this study (Poulos, 2021). As such, I wrote about experiences with spirit assassination attempts within the social-political context as a participant and observer.

This study of self has intriguing possibilities that caused repressed memories to surface, which were emotionally challenging to confront but necessary to remember for the trustworthiness of this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2021; Poulos, 2021).

This study aimed to study whether spirit assassination attempts influenced throughout life, connected to mental, emotional, and physical health concerns and whether those experiences were traumatizing. Focusing on the self requires deep reflection on the memories and, through evocative writing, finding meaning in my struggles (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018).

Setting

Since I am retired, home was the setting for my data collection. I purchased a notebook specifically for recording my spirit assassination attempts recollections. A smaller notebook also fits in my purse to deter me from writing on the backs of envelopes, paper bags, napkins or whatever I could find as memories emerged. It is imperative to record these memories as they appear to ensure the richness of the data (Poulos, 2021). Writing a daily reflection is a goal.

Researchers Role

The researcher's role is that of participant, researcher, and author.

The researcher ensured that the writings were evocative and had thick descriptions. It is the role of the researcher to produce writing that shows self-exposure so the reader can enter the researcher's world and make judgments about the viewpoint (Poulos, 2021).

The researcher has a responsibility for ensuring that the stories' writing causes no harm and will use pseudonyms if necessary to protect identities (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018). One of the most critical roles of the researcher is that interpretations be driven by the data and not by preconceptions and biases of the researcher (Ellis & Bochner, 2006; Poulos, 2021).

Data Collection

Data collection came from emotional exploration, examination of personal trauma, and systemic self-exploration in the form of narratives using the researcher's lived experiences with spirit assassination attempts (Poulos, 2021). Stories offered a social critique of experiencing spirit assassination attempts throughout life (Méndez, 2014).

The data reflects my emotions, struggles, triumphs, and lessons learned, designed to bring the reader into the actions, thoughts, and emotions of my experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2006).

First-person was used to provide the reader with an intimate eyewitness account. The narratives, reviewed, rewritten, and reviewed, ensured the data had thick description which was helpful in data analysis (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018). Facets of the researcher's lived experience should make the researcher's experiences culturally familiar to the reader (Merriam & Tisdell, 2021).

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using the tenets of critical race theory and *The Color of Mind* to analyze the data (Darby & Rury, 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The counternarratives reviewed uncovered the structures, themes, beliefs and values, emotions, context, and discourses embedded within them. From this review determined which of my stories aligned with the overall goal and if these stories answered the research questions. By examining these elements, researchers gain deeper insights into the cultural, social, and psychological dimensions of human experience (Ellis & Bochner, 2006)

An interpretative approach helped to understand the experience of spirit assassination attempts and the meanings conveyed through my counternarratives (Poulos, 2021).

Narratives were sorted into three-time frames: 1954-1972, 1973-1998, and 1999-2019. These time frames represent significant periods of revelation, trials, and growth. 1954-1972 was the period of awakening. 1973-1998 represents entering the world of work, and 1998-2019 represents a redefinition of purpose, a lengthy period of disillusionment, and entering retirement.

Recurring themes, and patterns were critiqued to ensure that findings align with the theoretical framework, research questions and the goal of the research.

This researcher looked for underlying meanings, critically reflecting on assumptions and any identifiable or emerging biases that may fashion the analysis (Ellis & Bochner, 2006; Poulos, 2021).

Trustworthiness

Reflexivity and transparency were essential to address concerns about subjectivity in autoethnography. Reflexivity refers to the researcher's critical self-reflection and constant self-awareness of their role in the research process and acknowledging biases and subjectivity (Poulos, 2021).

Transparency involved clearly stating the researcher's positionality, values, and potential conflicts of interest. Incorporating transparency and reflexivity enhances the trustworthiness of autoethnographic research (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018; Poulos, 2021).

Ethical Issues

Privacy and confidentiality are always ethical concerns (Méndez, 2014). Because many stories involved the participation of others, communities, or places, steps were taken so those people and places are not harmed by the revelations in the narratives or results of this study (Poulos, 2021). This researcher employed pseudonyms as needed so no harm comes to anyone involved in these narratives or the researcher from sharing sensitive personal information (Poulos, 2021).

Adherence to ethical guidelines, transparency, and reflexivity enhanced the integrity and credibility of this research (Poulos, 2021).

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

“Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars.”

Kahlil Gibran (2022)

Introduction

This chapter covers a snippet of my spirit of assassination attempt experiences from ages 6 to 70. Pseudonyms were used to protect identities in this chapter.

Spirit assassination attempts are intentional words, non-verbal looks, body language, and other actions intended to remind Black people of their powerlessness and worthlessness in this society, destroy hope, joy, and self-esteem, and take away dignity and respect. Spirit assassination attempts occur interpersonally and structurally and are experienced repeatedly throughout life (Douglas, 2023).

White Supremacist Indoctrination 1954-1966

Introduction

Childhood is a time for exploration, discovery, and learning about yourself, the world, and societal norms and expectations. Childhood is also a time for *proper* behavior, following parental and societal rules, and completing tasks. In books, childhood is depicted as idyllic and free from the complexities of life, a happy time, is not the reality for many children.

Childhood is not the same for every child. Race, gender, socioeconomic status, and family dynamics contribute to the quality, diversity, and variations of childhood experiences and differences in opportunities.

In childhood, we learn societal norms and expectations that shape our perceptions of who we are and where we fit.

The Beginning

As mentioned in Chapter 1, I was the first Black child in a religious elementary school system for 2.5 years. My parents did not advise me of the move, nor did they prepare me for the disdain and disrespect endured during my time at this school. The experience of being in a Black preschool and attending K-1h in a Black neighborhood elementary school, in addition to my parents, poured the foundation for my ability to survive and resist some of the pressures of forced compliance for Black people as defined by White Supremacist ideology throughout life.

Chapter 1 is a description of my first couple of days. When the girl stabbed me in the leg with a pencil, I did not react. I felt paralyzed in disbelief and held my leg out with the pencil protruding (Rogers, 2023). As I recall, the teacher was very casual about it. I had to walk to the principal's office with the pencil in my leg. The principal notified my parents and removed the pencil from my left shin in the principal's office. I walked home after the principal cleaned and bandaged the wound.

I walked home in a daze, oblivious to my injury, wondering why that girl would do such a thing to me! Once my parents arrived home and examined my leg, they called our pediatrician, who came to our home, recleaned and bandaged the wound, and gave me a tetanus shot. The school had informed them the injury was not that bad. My parents acknowledged my bewilderment and offered that the girl was motivated by her hatred of people who look like us. Confused, I inquired why. My mother offered her favorite reason, "They are just ignorant; ignore them." My father emphatically declared the attack occurred because I was a Negro. White people did not use Black and African American

to describe us then. I had no idea what my father meant. Why would being a Negro cause that girl to harm me? I was not comprehending.

The fact that I was 6 years old made it difficult for my parents to explain racial dynamics in a way I could understand. He said White people used to own Negro people. My father went on to explain that White people felt they were better than Black people and that they were in control of our lives. He further stated that White people thought we were stupid and incapable of success. He told me some brief information about George Washington Carver, Ralph Bunch, and W.E. B. Dubois. My father told me never to forget that “you are no better than anyone else, and no one is better than you.” He added, never bow your head or downcast your eyes in the presence of White people; look them straight in the eye and always believe and act like you have a right to be wherever you want and to express your views as well.

None of my father’s advice made sense to me at the time. However, I was a compliant child and remembered all the survival tips he gave me. My parents explained that the school I was in enjoyed a lofty reputation and that my job was to take advantage of the opportunity and learn what the “White people learn.”

I hoped my parents would rescue me and return me to my neighborhood school, where I was happy, had many friends, and enjoyed social interactions. The next day, I was back at the religious school. I felt alienated, despised, and unprotected. I was conflicted and confused (Bhui, 2002). None of the students reached out to play with me. Students shunned me as if I carried a contagious disease. When I reached out, I was quickly rejected and soon stopped all attempts to connect (Weir, 2012).

The girl who stabbed me with the pencil was no longer seated near my desk and attended class the next day. When I entered the classroom, all eyes turned to me as I went to my desk. The atmosphere lacked a welcoming and accepting spirit. To add insult to injury, I skipped two grades because of my reading ability. So now the best reader, who is Negro, is also the youngest student in the third grade amongst a group of White children who disliked Negro people. To say that my time at this school was challenging emotionally and physically is an understatement.

Having been quite outgoing and socially interactive at the neighborhood school, the isolation and social rejection were devastating—neither student nor teacher relationships developed during my years at this school. I felt abandoned, thrown out, trapped, unsafe, uncared for, and on my own (Nergaard, 2018). The origins of my growing anger and disappointment with my parents for placing me in this environment and leaving me there are rooted in these experiences. Why would you leave your child in a place like this, I thought?

Below are a few of the many spirit assassination attempts I experienced at this school:

1. The teachers often called upon me to read out loud to the class, for which I received positive affirmations when asked to do so. However, on several occasions, the teacher made similar statements: “Karen, thank you for reading that chapter for us.” “You did a beautiful job.” “Now, class, Karen is a Negro and is reading better than all of you.” “She should not be reading better than you because Negroes either don’t know how to read or don’t read.” “You all should be ashamed that a Negro is reading better than you.” Those statements seared my

soul and evoked intense emotions I did not know how to deal with. I felt a mixture of shame and hurt. Those statements immediately stripped me of any sense of accomplishment felt before the teacher's comments (Love, 2016).

2. When the teacher called upon me, the teacher would often deem whatever answer I provided incorrect, although I knew my answer was correct. The teacher would then openly commend a White student for giving the same answer I had given, which she said was wrong. The teacher shushed or waved me off whenever I tried to raise this point. Frustrated, I turned to my father for guidance. My father said the teacher hoped I'd feel bad about myself and doubt my abilities. He noted that Negro people had to be ten times better than White people just to be noticed. He added that this is why they put me in this school: to learn what they learned so I would be competitive later in life. My father told me always to believe in myself, that I did not have to be the star, and that I should be among the stars. He reminded me that White people did not expect this little Brown girl to be intelligent and innovative. My father's guidance helped, but it did not relieve the impact of being shunned, ridiculed, and mocked daily without on-site support, compassion, or empathy. Nor did my father's counsel explain the animosity White people had for Negro people. I was perplexed. To this day, I am triggered and reactionary to others being unjustly criticized, mocked, taunted, and shamed, and to those who attempt to do the same to me, and I will confront the perpetrators.
3. I raised my hand repeatedly during class, was looked over, and never called. Being overlooked was very hurtful as the teacher did not acknowledge my

enthusiasm and interest (Darby & Rury, 2018). However, when I did not raise my hand, the teacher would call on me, and I did not know the answer, so I did not raise my hand. Ignoring me felt like I was invisible and did not matter. The teacher intentionally shamed me because she knew I likely would not know the answer if I did not raise my hand. What was the point of embarrassing me? Daddy came to the rescue again. My father confirmed my thought that the teacher was doing this intentionally, so he devised a plan. When I knew the answer, I would not raise my hand; when I did not, I would. Sure enough, I followed my father's instructions, and it worked. The teacher called on me twice when I did not raise my hand, and I answered correctly. The teacher's face turned red. Accepting that the teacher wanted me to fail and look bad in front of the class was hard.

4. When I was in line to receive anything, the person handing out whatever it was would often look over me to accommodate a White person behind me. My father taught me to shout that I was next, which I did, which was effective. My heart would pound when faced with this situation, and I would have to allow myself to become agitated to pump myself up, be assertive, to speak up. All my father's interventions worked. The same physical reactions occur today if I feel compelled to speak up and speak out on controversial matters (Cherng, 2017). Others may view me as angry when I'm not.
5. Student slurs were a daily occurrence that I just took in stride, and I often had creative comebacks to their insults, such as: If called the N-word, I would say, "I'm not an N-word I'm a Negro! When I become an N-word, I'll let you know."

From the daily harassment, isolation, and social rejection, I learned to function independently, not to trust or expect help, to complete tasks independently to ensure success and minimize sabotage, and always to be hypervigilant. I also became comfortable spending time alone with myself.

From the teachers, I learned that because I was a Negro, the aura of suspicion for any wrongdoing and low expectations was always upon me (Dhaliwal et al., 2020). The fact that a White person can accuse you of anything, their word is gospel, and you are assumed to be guilty remains a pet peeve.

At age nine, I developed a rash that covered my entire body from head to toe, resulting in hyperpigmentation wherever the rash had been. I was diagnosed with lichen planus, for which I received injections and numerous ultra-ray treatments. The cause was unknown, and there was no cure. Migraine headaches presented as well; these headaches were so debilitating that I often was in the ER, missing days of school. Testing with electrodes on my head yielded no cause again. Stomach aches were another ailment I frequently complained about as a reason not to attend school (Cherng, 2017). My mother caught on about the stomach aches. She told me she was taking me to the doctor for a shot. Miraculously, I felt better and went to school. My anger towards my parents grew as I withdrew into books to escape and lost interest in other activities, falling into depression. We know now that the stomachaches resulted from anxiety.

I became increasingly annoyed about attempts to force me into specific thoughts, behaviors, and actions deemed acceptable based on White supremacist ideology. I was uncomfortable. Feelings of helplessness and powerlessness overwhelmed me. Who could help me? My parent's answer to racial issues was some version of "You have to learn

how to deal with it; that is how the world is. I felt they were useless. Suppressing my feelings and emotions and being compliant became normal to get along. How well you mimicked White values and language appeared to increase your odds for upward mobility. I began to oversleep in a deep sleep, grind my teeth, and talk in my sleep (Mental Health America, 2022). The continued onslaught of statements and behaviors whose message was that Negro people were inferior dirty, and stupid kept me in defense mode.

Now, my anger is growing because of the hate I felt based on my skin color from my White peers and teachers for some pre-assigned characteristics they felt I inherently possessed, keeping me feeling I was always on alert. My family consisted of relatives all along the spectrum from very dark to White presenting and White passing, and hatred about skin color never arose. My parents warned me not to make myself a target, leaving me to wonder why White people exerted control over Negro people? It was clear that I was responsible for finding a way to survive amidst this sea of Negro negativity. My father said I had to be my advocate and stand up for myself because he and my mother were not always around. He said I was strong and intelligent and would figure it out.

Because of my experiences at the religious school, I cannot recall the names or images of the teachers or students with whom I shared space for 2.5 years (Sanchez-Hucles, 1999).

Finally, the religious school closed due to White flight because the neighborhood was becoming majority Black. I finally returned to my neighborhood school in the 2nd half of fifth grade. I was delighted but not the same girl who had left. This girl returned more cautious, distrustful, and somewhat introverted but remained compliant. However,

the warmth, caring, support, encouragement, and Black history lessons contributed to a sense of belonging and self-worth.

There were stark differences between the religious school and my neighborhood school. The religious school had all new books and desks unmarred by graffiti. The neighborhood school provided the support, encouragement, interest, caring, and supportive relationships the religious school lacked. All my teachers were White at the religious school and Negro at my neighborhood school. It felt good to be back.

Graduation from grade school was in 1962. We were all super excited about what the future held. Two months before graduation was a very emotional time. We all had to take the track test, which would determine the curriculum we could take in high school that would influence our life's courses (Darby & Rury, 2018).

The track test had five possibilities. Track 1A and A were the highest, meaning you would take college preparatory courses. Track 2 was considered your average track. You could attend college; however, the curriculum for Track 2 was not as challenging as Track 1. Track 3 was below average, and these students went to vocational schools. The last track was called TE, which stood for terminal education. Students in terminal education could only attend school for 2 years. Tracks 3 and TE were undesirable. The worst part of this process was that the teacher read scores out loud in front of the entire class. Once the teacher announced your score, you joined your Track Group. Tracking was an extremely stressful process. Your heart pounded when the teacher called out the names in anticipation of your own and from the reactions of those who made the Track 3 and lower. I prayed to make Track 1.

My friends and I made Track 1A. Five of us are still close and travel with each other out of the country every 5 years. On to high school we go. We were relieved!

Back in the Saddle: Indoctrination Continues

High School! Wow! I was so excited! Enter the parents who, again, without discussing their intentions with me, enrolled me into another PWI, a religious high school.

This time, I would not be the only Black person in the school. The first-year class had five Black students: four females and one male. Three of us attended the same church. There were six Black students in the junior class: three females and three males, and two in the senior class, one male and one female. Because of distribution and class assignments, Black students rarely had a class with another Black student unless it was gym class, choir, or a sports activity.

I was anxious, unhappy, hypervigilant, uncomfortable, and hypersensitive to racial attacks. However, being accustomed to racial attacks and quite comfortable that I could handle myself, I was not overly concerned because I was familiar with the terrain. I knew I would challenge any harassment that came my way. I committed myself to handling them in a way that the offender would think twice about attacking me again. I used what I called, 'acts of repulsion.' For example, "If you call me that again, I will become your most stereotypical nightmare."

There was not one staff member who was not White, which signaled red flags everywhere. We spent the first 2 years at the school located in the city until the contractors completed the new high school. After one week, my experiences at the religious school came flooding back, and I am back on alert to combat the racial slurs,

mocking behavior, and insinuations of racial inferiority that certainly would come (Sue et al., 2007). Being on alert means protecting against physical and mental attacks. I was ready.

Our high school had a sister school on the South side. We held joint homecomings our first 2 years. Our sister school did not have any Black or minority students or staff. One of the activities of homecoming was the talent show. Each school had performances. Our sister school presented a demeaning and degrading performance in the second year. The performance was two White guys dressed in blackface. One wore a long-sleeved maxi dress with combat boots, an overstuffed rear end, and overflowing breasts. The other guy was in blackface as a Black man with bucked eyes and dazzling teeth. The crowd roared with laughter at their antics and mocking of Black people and their language. There were maybe four Black students in attendance. I was fuming.

When the school opened that Monday morning, I was in the principal's office complaining about the sister school's homecoming talent show, expressing my displeasure that such a performance was allowable. The principal told me I was overreacting, and it was all in fun. The principal made it clear that no action or complaint would be forthcoming. Determined to call attention to the discomfort the performance caused Black students due to the negative imagery used, I set out to organize the now 20 Black students to protest the homecoming performance of our sister school. Not all the Black students participated, as several were afraid of repercussions. Fifteen of the twenty participated. In addition, I sent a scathing letter of complaint to the head of the Religious organization. Our protest and letter made the Religious Newsletter. As a result, the head of the religious group issued a public apology and banned any future racist performances.

The principal was surprised and not pleased with my actions. I did not care; I accomplished the mission. That was the last year for joint homecomings. I felt accomplished.

There were plenty of racist teachers at the religious school, and they did not try to hide their beliefs. Most children love to sing. Choir was a class we all looked forward to.

Mr. Ketchoff was our choirmaster. He was silly and fun and racist. Choir members gathered to take the annual yearbook picture. As we were assembling, he shouted, "Now, don't any of you colored kids stand together because if you do, there will be just a black spot there," he laughed profusely. Mr. Ketchoff repeatedly referred to us as "you people." he talked about how colored people loved to dance and would ask us to dance. I never honored any dance-on-demand requests for him or White students' amusement, but several Negro students would. Negro students were often the brunt of Mr. Ketchoff's jokes.

Ms. Perkins, from Arkansas, was the typing and note-hand teacher. She was country-looking with greasy, curly, thin, black, neck-length hair. She wore cat eyeglasses, an old lady printed dresses, and had a pot belly. Ms. Perkins was funny and had a great sense of humor, making it difficult to hate her. However, Ms. Perkins made her views about race unapologetically known. She was not mean. There was one other Black student in the class, Nelda Tolbert. In front of the entire class, Ms. Perkins announced her class expectations. She then told the class where she was from. Ms. Perkins added that colored people in her class would not earn higher than a C because Black people could not earn higher grades because "colored" people were intellectually inferior to White people. We were appalled (Darby & Rury, 2018).

Ms. Perkins's racial views were not something she rubbed in our faces after that announcement. Because of Ms. Perkins's cheerful attitude and demeanor, we forgot about her beliefs about "colored" people. Nelda and I were the most competent students in the typing class, and everyone knew it. When grades came out, we were surprised to see that Ms. Perkins had, in fact, given us a C for a grade. It was devastating that Ms. Perkins based our grades on our skin tone.

One of the scariest things that happened in class occurred because of an assignment. Mr. Grice was the history teacher. He asked each student to present their favorite magazine to the class. Presentations happened over the next two weeks because of the number of students in the class. Two Black females with different skin tones, heights, and weights were in the class, yet Mr. Grice could never distinguish between us. It was very annoying.

My presentation was during the first week. *Ebony* was the magazine that I brought and presented. The following week, a White male student stood beside my desk with his fists balled up and clenched tight, his face red, and his whole-body trembling. His name was Edward Cooper. Edward said his father said that *Ebony Magazine* was a lie and that there were no Black doctors, Black lawyers, or other Black college-educated professionals. He stated his father told him Black people were incapable of achieving those kinds of jobs. I was genuinely concerned that he was about to attack me. Mr. Grice had another White male student escort Edward to the office. This incident shook my sense of security.

Why *Ebony Magazine* triggered a violent reaction from Edward was puzzling. The intensity of his anger was frightening, and he intended to harm me. I pondered why the thought of successful Black professionals upset Edward to that extent.

During grade school and high school, my mother taught me etiquette, had my brother and me answer the phone according to a script, and taught me the proper way to sit, eat, and respect my elders. At that time, I was not aware all the approved White ways of behaving in public were taught to me by my mother.

Southwestern Bell contacted my mother and wanted me to come to their offices to receive an award for how I answered the telephone. I was excited. When we arrived for the award, the Southwestern Bell staff were shocked that I was a Black child. The lady who greeted us said, "I did not know you were Negro." You could see the surprise on her face. They hustled us in, gave me a certificate, and rushed us out.

In high school, I won a journalism contest sponsored by *The Globe-Democrat*. The review of my writing included an opportunity to intern briefly as an introduction to journalistic work. When my parents and I arrived for the award, the man who greeted us said, "We did not know Karen was a Negro." After hearing this for the second time, it became apparent that my race would impact my life forever and not just in school. But why was my skin color such a threat?

All these messages from White people that I was not okay and incapable of success, I knew were invalid. There was a clear message not to confront White people regardless of their behavior towards you because it can affect your life forever. It upset me that to confront maltreatment from a White person could result in worse outcomes. It was beginning to become clear the power White people held over Negro people, and I felt

it was unfair and could not comprehend why this was tolerated and accepted. I decided that I would never allow White people to define me or make me feel ashamed of who I was and believe I was inferior.

After being denied a spot on the majorette team my sophomore year, I practiced incessantly in my backyard to prepare for next year's tryouts. When the High School held majorette tryouts the following year, I was ready, and this time, I made the team, becoming the first Black majorette at the high school. After my first performance, we were walking off the field, and I heard a woman say, "That wasn't so bad," regarding my debut performance.

When it was time to apply for college, our school counselor, Mr. Dolba, told the Black students that he was not going to sign our college application paperwork because Black people did not go to college. He recommended vocational training. Mr. Dolba seemed unaware that our parents were college graduates, and several were medical doctors and lawyers. Our parents obtained a lawyer to force Mr. Dolba to sign and submit the required paperwork and documents for our college applications. When I received my Master's, Mr. Dolba was the first person I visited when I came home, diploma in hand. He was cordial and congratulatory.

I informed my parents that I refused to attend a predominately White college or University and would only apply to historically Black colleges and universities. I was accepted to join the Freshman Class of 1966 at Fisk University. My determination to challenge any attempt by a White person to demean, degrade, or cast me as inferior without sacrificing my dignity and moral code became solidified the day, I stepped on the campus of Fisk University.

White People in Black Spaces

White Supremacy at an HBCU

The fall of 1966 was an exciting time. Arriving at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, was a sobering experience. Many historical Negro Americans graduated from this historic University; W.E.B. Dubois, Nikki Giovanni, John Hope Franklin, and John Lewis. Dr. Kenneth Clark, whose experiment with dolls influenced the Brown vs. Board of Education decision, was in residence when I arrived in 1966 (Legal Defense Fund, 2023). He autographed a book for me. John Hope Franklin was also in residence, where I met him and had several conversations with him at Fisk.

Fisk was a hub of Negro history, and minds of the time often visited our campus. Eldridge, Kathleen Cleaver, Stokely Carmichael, Julian Bond, Jesse Jackson, and Richard Pryor were among the famous Negro people who frequently visited Fisk University. I learned more about the history and struggle of Negro people, which put earlier experiences in perspective.

Fisk School began in 1865, 6 months after the Emancipation Proclamation. Fisk became incorporated as a university in 1867. Across the street is Meharry Medical College, the only medical college Negroes could attend.

Everyone was warm and welcoming. Immediately, the feeling of acceptance and belonging came through, so different from the environment I had recently graduated from. I felt relaxed, relieved, revived, and was not on alert. Other freshmen teased me about how I spoke relentlessly but jokingly. I worked on correcting that, and when I came home for Christmas, my mother noticed and said, "Your diction is deplorable." At the time, it was vital for me to shed the remnants of my time in predominately White

institutions and spaces that strove to convince me that I was less than and incapable of success in life. I rejected the White supremacist message that I should be more like them to be successful.

It was a tumultuous time in the country, especially in Nashville, Tennessee. The Voting Rights Act passed in August 1965, and the backlash from southern states still reverberated in the fall of 1966 when my university life began.

White Nashvillians would ride through our campus, calling us the N-word and throwing bottles, cans, and rocks at students. It became so prevalent that the University sealed the campus from traffic, and the Police could only come to our campus if the University requested their presence. I was frightened by the intensity of hatred displayed by Southern White people.

The Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) were active on our campus. SCLC promoted Christian ethics and non-violent protest, and SNCC was radical and promoted action strategies. I was fascinated with the movement and engaged with SNCC. My past experiences in White dominated spaces motivated my brief participation in these two groups.

The President of the SNCC chapter on campus was a tall Black student who always wore fatigues and had a huge afro. He was a very fiery orator capable of working the crowd into a frenzy against White people and their oppressive systems. Sit-ins and assemblies were the norm.

One evening, we were summoned to the Chapel to confront the Board of Directors about student body concerns. Students forced themselves into the Chapel to

engage the members of the Board. Much to our surprise, all the Board members were White. Imagine our shock that our Negro University was governed by a White Board of Directors. As we entered, the Board members tried to flee because they assumed we were there to harm them, which was not the case. The Board members hopped over pews, trying to escape an imagined attack.

The President of SNCC was able to get the Board Members to settle down and listen to the concerns of the student body presented by the SNCC President. They did so under duress. The aftermath of that event was the beginning of financial decline for Fisk University as White benefactors withdrew their funding.

In addition, there was a race riot in 1967. White people rode past our campus and the campus of Tennessee State University, shouting, throwing items, and just terrorizing the Black neighborhood. The National Guard arrived. During the day, they stood at attention with their weapons. We ensured we were in the dorm before dusk; curfew was at 6 pm. At night, the National Guard pointed their guns at the windows of our dormitories. We had to sleep on the floor in the hallways, frightened and hearing bullets ricocheting along the walls. We were afraid and concerned for our lives. Tanks rode up and down Jefferson Street.

Both Tennessee State and Fisk University are located on Jefferson Street. Many people and students were killed, maimed, disabled, or injured as the conflict between Black and White communities battled each other at night. We were terrified.

Stokely Carmichael was a frequent visitor to the campus and was scheduled to speak in our student union one afternoon. We assembled in the Student Union; the Dean of Students pulled the fire alarm, so students cleared out of the Student Union, and

Stokely Carmichael's address to students was disrupted. Students assembled at the small beer joint on the northwest corner of Jefferson across from Fisk University. The Beer joint was just a one-room establishment, much too small for the crowd assembling, so they spilled out into the street.

While we waited to find out where we would hear Stokely Carmichael, the riot patrol assembled before the beer joint, dressed in royal blue and black with silver helmets and Plexiglas shields trimmed in silver. They were about twenty rows deep, with approximately fifteen patrolmen in each row. They were reticent and standing at attention. As we watched and wondered why they were there, someone threw a rock, and the patrolmen moved on the crowd. They were hitting people with bully clubs, and a Patrolman hit me on the right shoulder with his club.

The crowd ran onto the Fisk University campus for safety. Everyone was in a panic! Dorm mothers would not let us into the dorms initially because of the community people seeking safety within the University. Firefighters doused us with water from water hoses whose force knocked us down and rolled us along the grass. The dorm mother finally let us in. We were horrified! Later, we learned that the Dean of Students pulled the alarm at the direction of the White Board of Directors as they viewed Stokely Carmichael as a bad influence on the Negro students.

It appeared that there was no escape from the power and oppression of White people in the lives of Negro people, not even in predominately Black institutions (Bell, 1992).

The following year, in April 1968, riots at Fisk occurred yet again in response to the killing of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Two friends and I went to the neighborhood movie theater for their triple feature. It cost \$.35. We arrived at 11 am and did not leave until 4 pm. Jefferson Street was utterly devoid of cars and people on the street when we left. Jefferson Street was a bustling street in the Black community, so we knew something was wrong. As we walked back to campus, a man leaned out the window of his house and told us we needed to get off the street because someone killed Martin Luther King Jr.

We raced to the campus. I immediately called my parents to come home to escape the chaos that was sure to come. There was no desire to relieve the rioting experienced the year before. Unfortunately, Nashville was on lockdown. You could not leave or enter the city. My classmates and I had lived through the assassination of influential Negro Leaders, JFK and Robert Kennedy, church bombings, the killings of Fred Hampton, and more; bombings killed four young girls, Emmett Till was killed, the tumultuous civil rights demonstrations and protests, and the vilification of the Black Panthers. We were not interested in becoming a statistic. Terror took hold, remembering our interactions with the National Guard.

Meharry Medical College, the only medical school to admit Black doctors, also provided Fisk University students with health care. One of the popular OBGYNs, who was White, was arrested and found guilty of sterilizing Black female students from Tennessee State and Fisk University by snipping their fallopian tubes during routine vaginal exams.

There was a heightened sense of pride and solidarity among Negro students and the Negro community at large. James Brown released "I'm Black and I'm Proud," which became the anthem of Black students. Black activism was at its height.

During our senior year, the campus leadership decided that anyone who participated in or supported the Black Panthers would be put out of school and would not graduate. It was sobering to realize the far-reaching arm of White supremacy. It appeared that there existed no safe place for Black people from the power and oppression of White supremacy, not even in predominately Black institutions.

In 1970, I graduated with an B.A. in Psychology. Eager to enter the world of work. That desire disappeared when I applied for jobs, and refusal to get rid of my Afro meant continued unemployment. In response, I applied to graduate school at Fisk University's new master's in Clinical Psychology program, which collaborated with Meharry Medical College, Fisk University, and Vanderbilt University, and graduated in 1972.

During my time at Fisk, my migraines continued. However, they were less frequent and intense and never required an emergency room visit or hospitalization. My skin completely cleared. with no visible signs of hyperpigmentation.

Here again, White supremacy attempted to dictate how and what Black people should think and behave with the expectation of uncontested compliance. I resented the continuing intrusion and judgment of White people in the lives of Black people and wondered if their dominance would ever end.

1973-2001 Entering the Work World

I was a Tool of White Supremacy

My first job out of graduate school was at a community health agency in a predominately Black city in the Midwest. Our department worked with the families of preschoolers who were classified as severely and profoundly developmentally disabled.

We also sought out those developmentally disabled people in the community who, hidden by their families, and had never received any services. That job ended when Reagan shut down residential mental health facilities and cut funding for community mental health programs.

A position in the Diagnostic and Treatment Center of the city Juvenile Court was available. All the diagnosticians were White, and they made it clear that they did not want a Black diagnostician despite lobbying by several people and the person who advocated for me. During the 12 years spent at the Juvenile Court, there was never a Black psychological provider in that department. Approximately 98% of the children served were Black.

I subsequently took a position in the detention center until a Deputy Juvenile Officer position opened. Nine of those years, I spent as part of a four-member Child abuse task force that investigated the worst child physical/sexual abuse and neglect cases in the city. There were two women and two men; I was the lone Black member.

My job was to investigate assigned cases of child abuse and neglect and prepare a Social Investigation Report with recommendations and a treatment plan. Social investigation reports submitted were thorough, and in the 9 years I was on the task force, I never had a recommendation denied or altered. Defense lawyers dreaded my testimony—commendations for my work from lawyers, other staff, parents, and other community providers filled my personnel file. I was proud of my work protecting children from further harm.

While working with a parent on a reunification plan, the fact that I was a participant in their oppression became clear. The court had a cookie cooker treatment

plan that included weekly visitation, parenting classes, and counseling. The mother worked two jobs, relied on public transportation, and had three younger children to care for as a single parent. The parenting classes and counseling sessions were in the county. Failure to comply could result in the eventual termination of parental rights. This reality moved me to investigate the recommended parent and counseling programs to see if they would be helpful given the facts and circumstances of the case and, most importantly if the plan was feasible for parent participation. How could I have failed to recognize how the cookie-cutter plan acted as a barrier for low-income families for reunification, me the pied piper for racial equity? From that time forward, I ensured that all treatment plans were tailor-made for each family and checked in to see how they were progressing and if any obstacles stood in their way.

The reality that I was an agent of the oppressive system I despised loomed large in my thoughts. Because the decisions we recommended affected the trajectory of children's lives, in addition to family disruption, I always approached my job responsibilities seriously. The thoroughness of my Social Investigation Reports gave validity to my approach regarding the information needed to make recommendations about what should happen with a child or children.

The realization of my role in the oppression and suppression of Black people resulted in the rejection of the cookie-cutter treatment plan and efforts to outline a plan of remediation and reunification that was realistic and achievable. Parents or legal guardians participated in the treatment planning process to ensure achievability. The evidence against them was explained and discussed education about the possible legal outcomes, what the court would require for reunification, and why, I provided it to the parents and

guardians. By the time the court day was approaching, the parents and guardians agreed to my recommendations, much to the defense attorney's chagrin. I believed I was making a positive impact, but was I?

My migraines stopped in 1984 and have never returned. However, I experienced my first episode of vertigo in 1990. Like the migraines, tests performed could not pinpoint the cause of vertigo. My skin condition erupted again, and treatment with ultra-violet light, Accutane, and steroids was ineffective. Physicians were unable to identify a reason for the outbreak. Depressive episodes occurred frequently i.e., fatigue, low mood, and loss of interest.

When desegregation programs began, The Child Abuse Task Force became inundated with educational neglect cases. My service area was Police Districts 1, 2 and 3, all on the city's predominately White south side. The other female, Sarah Haddish, was assigned to the predominantly Black north side. Some parents all over the city resisted their children being transported to other school districts to create diversity and opportunity for marginalized children.

The task force also served the summonses and subpoenas on our cases. I experienced a plethora of racial slurs, summonses, and subpoenas thrown back at me, torn up in my presence, threats, chased, and spat at. Sarah experienced similar experiences on the North side. The Chief Juvenile officer denied our request to switch location assignments until the public was quiet about bussing.

During the last 2 years of my employment at the Juvenile Court, I worked in the Foster Care Department. Many children in foster care at the time had not seen a caseworker in over 2 years. Permanency planning became a policy to eliminate the lack

of monitoring and contact with a foster care worker. Children's status and plans now required a yearly hearing.

While waiting for a case to be heard, I observed the adoption case ahead of me. The matter involved the adoption of a 10-year-old Black boy who had been in the same foster home since birth. The foster mother wanted to adopt the child. She had had him since birth, and they shared a close bond. The child wanted to stay with the only mother he had known. However, the foster mother was an obese, older Black female in her early 50s. She had been a foster mother for over 15 years. Also, desiring to adopt the boy was a White couple in their mid-30s.

The judge, a balding older White man in his early 60s, denied the foster mother's adoption request and granted adoption to the White couple. The judge responded to the foster mother's inquiring about the reason for the denial of her adoption request; the judge replied, "You're too fat!" You could hear the gasps resounding in the courtroom. We were all powerless to challenge the judge's decision. To do so assured you a hasty termination. No one was surprised by the judge's ruling as he was curt, dismissive, and abrasive to the foster mother throughout the hearing, displaying his disinterest to everyone present. I was appalled at this blatant show of racial discrimination in the Juvenile court.

As the sheriffs moved to place the child in the physical custody of his new adoptive parents, the child began to scream, cry beg, and reach for his foster mother. The child struggled to get to the foster mother. The child broke free and ran to the foster mother, who was also crying. The sheriffs had to peel the child from his grasp of the foster mother. The judge was unmoved and retreated to his chambers. Observing this was

emotionally draining. Having worked 10 years at that point, I had never witnessed blatant racial bias in the courtroom. An overwhelming sense of helplessness and powerlessness consumed me. It was difficult to accept that there is no doubt that, in some ways, I was an agent and tool of White supremacy.

This ruling was my first experience observing obvious racial bias at the juvenile court, but it would not be my last.

During my time at the court, I established a celebration for those children on official court supervision who excelled in school and had complied with the rules. The intent was to empower and inspire them to believe in themselves. I also assisted with the development of a yearly Christmas party for families and detainees by securing storytellers and other performers for the event. Again, believing I made a positive impact, or was I atoning because I realized I was a tool of White supremacy?

In reflection, the motivation may have come from my need to distance my connection to blatant and subtle displays of racial discrimination and legal injustice in the court system. This knowledge conflicted with everything I believed and continued to fight for. I am a dedicated community servant devoted to providing honest, caring, respectful, informative, and transparent services to the families assigned to me. I had become an expert in the field of child abuse and neglect, especially in child sexual abuse and trauma. I trained the city juvenile officers and spent two years training Division of Family Services workers and the staff at a popular family treatment program.

How do I reconcile the fact that I work in a system that demonstrates racial bias toward Black people? My parents convinced me that racism was everywhere and that my

continued service at the Juvenile court would at least positively impact those I touched, so I stayed a little longer.

A young Black youth, age 14, was arrested for robbery and was scheduled for a hearing. I received a subpoena to appear as a background witness. Tony was assigned to me for Official Court Supervision. Tony was very tall for his age. He stood 6 feet 2 inches at the age of 14. He was handsome.

Two White women claimed that Tony and two of his friends had robbed them on the corner of Page and Goodfellow at 12:30 am. They claim they were sitting in their car and summoned the youth to ask them a question. Reportedly, they had the young men join them in the car, and the robbery occurred at 12:30 am.

Neither of the women could describe the assailants. One woman remembered that one of them had a nice smile. The judge asked Tony to smile, which he did. Tony was convicted of robbery and sent to Booneville, MO, for 2 years because of his smile. I was shocked and sat there in disbelief. The sheriffs held Tony in handcuffs, and the judge retired to his chambers.

A child I had removed when he was 5 years of age for neglect was on my caseload for a permanency planning review. He was now 13, and I did not immediately recognize him. The young man remembered me and reminded me of his case. I recalled the case and was curious why this child was still in the foster care system. He told me he had traveled and participated in wilderness camps in Utah and Oregon during his placement. When he returned home, he and his family felt that he no longer fit in their family dynamic, and his family returned him to foster care. It struck me that although we had removed this child from a dangerous situation and placed him for his safety, no

interventions or family treatment occurred to remediate the conditions that brought him into care in the first place.

Learning New Skills and Making a Change

Training at the court was always first come, first served. I applied for every training available. The Division of Youth Services offered a 2-year, 150-hour training in family therapy. I was one of the 11 people accepted for the program. The juvenile court allowed us 4 hours a week to participate. However, we had to use our time to see families after work hours. I had a 2 year-old son who accompanied me to those after-hour sessions. We worked behind a 2-way window. This process was called live supervision.

At the end of the 2 years, our trainers suggested that we apply for a 2-year, COA-accredited postgraduate program in family therapy offered by an agency known for providing counseling.

I applied to the Family Therapy Institute and later interviewed with the director of the Family Therapy Institute; a Jewish woman named Susan Symes. Susan was a petite, short-haired feisty brunette who spoke her mind and did not bite her tongue. I was elated when I received the acceptance letter from the Family Therapy Institute.

The Family Therapy Institute was the only postgraduate program in Missouri at that time. The program was highly competitive as people across Missouri and neighboring states applied. The Family Therapy Institute conducted performance reviews every six weeks. Only 10 spaces were available. Although I was not the first Black female to enter the Family Therapy Institute, I was the only the second in the State to do so.

The fact that I would be the only Black student in the program did not phase me, as it was an environment, I was familiar with and not intimidated by. I was ready for the racial barbs that I was sure to experience.

At the first gathering of the new group accepted into the Family Therapy Institute, the other students could not disguise their shock when they saw this Black female enter the room. After dealing with White stares, looks of disgust, and whisperings about who I was and why I was there most of my life, I ignored them and acted as if I belonged, because I did. Their issue with Black people belonged to them and not me.

One of the women, Judith, had the gall to ask me, "What type of clients are you going to see?" I looked at her perplexed and responded, the same clients you will be seeing." Judith replied, "I would never see a minority client!" I responded, "And well, you shouldn't. Minorities have suffered enough from people like you, so I agree, no minority clients should see you for therapy." She turned away in a huff. I chuckled because I loved being challenged by racists. It gives me pleasure to disrupt the negative narrative about Black people promoted by White Supremacist Ideology, causing them to rethink teachings about White superiority and the inferiority of Black people.

As time passed, I made up names to deal with the distasteful actions and behaviors I had to endure. There was a participant from Wisconsin, Martha, who would jump in whenever someone had a question or concern about how therapy was progressing or not with Black clients. She explained that she had worked with some Black people, and they were this way, or that felt this way or that and behaved in predictable ways. Martha considered herself the resident expert on the life and times of Black people. It was useless to challenge her, so I didn't. I did, though, have a name title for her.

Martha is what I call a *Negrologist* (Douglas, 2023).

I have experienced many in my lifetime. What is a Negrologist you ask? A Negrologist is a White person who feels and expresses that he knows everything there is to know about Black people. They view Black people as a monolith and base their opinions on the limited contact they've experienced with the few Black people they've met. A Negrologist will dominate a conversation about Black people even if there are Black people present. Negrologist act as a clarifier for their White peers about the inner workings and habits of Black people. Their White peers look to them for guidance on Black people and seek out the Negrologist with questions about Black people. A Negrologist will interrupt a Black person talking about their culture, questioning the information provided by the Black person. A Negrologist loves to share his unsolicited knowledge about Black people. A Negrologist is a unique category of racist (Douglas, 2023). They grind my soul.

During my time in the family therapy program, I excelled, especially with clients of all demographics. I had the lowest cancellation rate and the highest client satisfaction rate. No one was close. My low cancellation rate created an atmosphere of resentment among my White peers. I noticed my peer's attitudes and ignored them because I was working to complete the program, learning all I could. I had learned to tune them out as a young child and to proceed with my learning.

One time, a snowstorm began, and clients called to cancel their appointments except mine. My clients called to advise that they were running late but would be there for their session. Because we worked using live supervision, my peers had to stay because they were behind the mirror. They openly wondered why clients, White and

Black, kept their appointments with me. Remember that they observed my sessions through the two-way window.

When Black clients failed their sessions with my White peers, they chalked it up to the Black client's inability to understand them, that they did not possess the resources to participate intellectually, or that they were not ready. It was amusing that my White peers viewed the color of my skin and my successes as a family therapist as flukes rather than skills they did not possess. I gloried in my accomplishments.

At the end of our 2-year program, the director announced that I would join the Family Therapy Institute as its first Black faculty member. You could have heard a pin drop. The director also offered me a position at the agency as a part-time intake worker and part-time therapist until a full-time position opened. Hesitant because of my seniority at the juvenile court, I was reluctant to make a switch. A week later, I accepted the position.

Work at the agency was great. My clinical supervisor was an older Jewish gentleman with a wealth of knowledge. He was welcoming and supportive. I decorated my office with African and Jamaican artifacts and pictures.

Word spread about my arrival and that I was also on the Faculty of the Family Therapy Institute. As I arranged my office, I had two visitors. Dr. Paul Yoblanski was the agency's psychologist. He came to my office and introduced himself. He stated that he had wanted to meet me because he had tried for 3 years to get on the faculty and had yet to be selected. Dr. Yoblanski wished to meet the person who had successfully joined the faculty.

My next visitor, a Jewish woman with blonde hair named Trina Don, had been in the agency for several years. Her demeanor showed me that she just wanted to see this Black female everyone was talking about. Trina walked around my office voicing like for my office decor. For years, this woman tried to undermine me somehow but never successfully.

My supervisor, Robert Friedman, called me into his office a month after I joined the North County Center. He asked me if I would remove the Rastafarian sculpture from Jamaica and other Black images from my office. The request was strange as Mr. Friedman had admired my office three weeks prior, so I inquired about the reasons for the removal request. According to him, Trina had complained about the artwork in my office to the administrative office. Bear in mind that all therapists had pictures and artwork in their offices depicting White people. The only difference was that the subjects in my office depicted Black people. I informed Mr. Friedman that I would take my artwork down if other therapists also removed their artwork. Otherwise, I refused. He told me they wanted offices to be neutral,

A week later, Mr. Friedman asked me again, and I refused. He told me, "We all know you're Black, so you don't need pictures of your family looking down on you." This time, keeping a lid on my emotions was difficult, but I did it. Forced compliance is a trigger for me. Again, I refused and informed him that White staff had pictures of White people on their walls and that this therapist would not be hanging pictures of White people on her walls. That was the end of that attempt at power and control.

Even clients I worked with were comfortable making spirit assassination attempts when frustrated about some other situation or occurrence. The secretary advised me one

day, upon my arrival, that she had a voicemail for me I should hear. I requested she tell me what the voicemail said, but she insisted I listen. It was from Matthew, a man I had worked with for 6 months for depression and relationship issues.

The secretary played the recording for me which said, "That's alright [N-word], forget it." Matthew was due for his appointment in 30 minutes giving me time to plan how I would address his message.

Matthew arrived on time for his appointment. I greeted him as usual, and we went to my office. One there, I informed Matthew that I had something I wanted him to hear. I then played his message for him three times. Matthew was silent.

I reminded Matthew that I had never disrespected him, and I would not tolerate disrespect from him, that if he could not abide by that rule, today would be his last session and I would facilitate his transfer to another therapist. Matthew told me that he was very upset because he found out that his daughter was dating a Black boy and he needed to talk to me, and I was unavailable. He apologized and stated he did not want to change therapist. He continued another 6 months until he achieved his goals, and his case was closed.

For 2 months I had been treating an elderly White woman for depression and anxiety. She was from the south and had a deep southern drawl. One day she came to session and said, "You know my most favorite doll when I grew up was a picaninny doll." I was shocked and inquired what made her tell me that. I let her know that I found her statement offensive and would not tolerate disrespect. The elderly lady explained that when she informed her family that her therapist was a Black woman, they chided and mocked her. She viewed me as the cause of her family's ridicule and was getting back at

me for who I was. Although I understood, I was not about to be the target for her choices and told her so. We discussed whether she wanted me to transfer her to a White therapist and she declined. There was never another occurrence of racial disrespect with this client and treatment successfully concluded 4 months later.

A director position for the West County office was posted 6 months after I became employed at the agency. The current director was retiring, and the agency wanted that office to expand. I applied for the position. A Black staff member told me I would not get the position and urged me to withdraw. Trina came to my office to inform me she had also applied and would become my “boss.”

Interviews for the West County director position were conducted with the director of the Clayton Center, Sarah Barnes, and I got the job. I was so excited! I would inherit a secretary and two therapists, all White.

One of my Family Therapy Institute students, David Bland, informed me that there was a lot of controversy about my selection as the new director of the West County Center, which I was unaware of. I asked David why there was controversy. David said, “You know.” I replied that I did not know. I responded again that I did not and asked him to explain. David said it was because I was Black, and no one felt that a Black person could be successful in West County. I promptly informed him that I had lived in the West for many years and did not see my Blackness as an obstacle. David did not know I was used to White peoples doubt and was unfazed by his and other staff’s gloomy predictions.

It got so bad that Sarah came out to see me because of the pressure she received by selecting me for the position. I asked her if she had doubts about my capabilities, and

she said she did not and was just overwhelmed by the amount of negativity surrounding my selection. Sarah remained supportive until we both left the agency in 1998.

When I took over the position, I inherited the secretary and two White therapists. The secretary was from Alabama. We had to have a come-to-Jesus meeting about how she was to treat me, address me, and who was in charge after she said to me, "Turn that N-word music down."

The agency had four Black people: three females and one male. There were eight centers, and we all worked separately. The previous director called every day for 2 months, worried about the office being administered by a Black person. The two therapists left within a month, and I hired my staff and, eventually, my secretary, all White.

One of the therapists hired, Fatima, was a student in my supervision class who desperately needed to leave her present job. The secretary I hired was from a small racist community. She worked for me for 5 years before telling her parents her supervisor was a Black woman. Staff became protective of me after receiving calls from people asking them what it was like working for a Black woman.

A new COO became my supervisor, and in my first evaluation from her, I noted that my staff outperformed therapists in other centers and led in independent medical documentation audits consistently. She said my staff was very successful but loyal to me rather than the agency. My staff told me about the repeated attempts they received to provide information about the goings on at the center.

We expanded the center and added another therapist, an Intensive outpatient program, and a medical director. In addition to teaching at the Institute, I planned and

implemented an agency-wide program to address racial bias within ourselves and the agency for 1 year. I ran a 3-month workshop for White therapists working with Black clients entitled “Working with Black Clients More Effectively.”

99.8% of our clients were White. Upon arrival, they addressed my secretary as if she were the director, avoiding eye contact. I would introduce myself and ask them to accompany me to my office. My secretary described the look on the faces of first-time clients as lambs going to the slaughter. These same clients left relaxed and smiling when they departed. She joked about wondering what I was doing to the clients to change their mood from apprehensive to positive.

It was ironic given my history, that I would direct a center and conduct therapy with predominately White clients. The location was the reason for the lack of diversity.

My reputation as a clinician and administrator, success at program development and problem-solving resulted in the agency using me as a troubleshooter for the agency and outside companies experiencing programmatic or staff issues.

My experiences in elementary school prepared me to survive and thrive within White spaces with my dignity and ethics undisturbed despite numerous attempts to undermine my work and my self-confidence. I became proficient at succeeding at work and deterring attempts to sabotage me. Functioning this way was tiring but necessary. I stayed on alert.

Our largest center was in the city. The City Center was experiencing problems. The CEO and the CEO called me to their offices to offer me the center director position for a \$2,000 pay increase. My response to that offer was to thank them for considering me for the position. However, \$2,000 was less than 35 dollars on my check, and there

were things at the West County Center I still wanted to achieve. I politely declined their offer. The CEO snatched the contract from the table and replied, "We'll just offer it to someone else." I left.

Three months later, they contacted me and offered the position to me again. I asked for 10 thousand dollars when I accepted the position and, if successful, \$5,000 more in 6 months. That they agreed to those terms and at my request put them in writing. That they did so without resistance was suspicious. After the announcement that I would take the City Center director position, other center directors revealed why executive management returned to me.

During these experiences, I suffered from fatigue, insomnia, and dysthymia. Dysthymia is a longer form of depression that is always under the surface. Dysthymia can include bouts of major depression and is also called persistent depressive disorder (Lewslly & Slater, 2023).

Reportedly, after I declined, they offered the position to the director of the Bellville, Illinois Center; somehow, she learned that I had been their first choice and had turned the City Center director position down. Because of this, she rejected the offer. David informed me that she was insulted that the administration had offered the position to a Black woman before her. The CEO and COO presented the position to the other five center directors, who also turned the position down for the same reasons.

Once more, the office of the CEO requested my presence at her office. The CEO interviewed one of the institute faculty members, Marie, who sat beside her. My female therapist was in the Institute, and Marie was one of her favorite instructors. They both described issues with the way that Fatima dressed. They both felt her clothing was either

too short or too revealing. Fatima was from a small rural community. I informed them this matter was part of supervision.

The CEO and Marie wanted to fire Fatima. They wanted me to fire her because Marie wished to preserve her relationship with Fatima. I told them both that I had no reason to fire Fatima. Fatima was an excellent therapist who was improving her skills through the Institute and taking direction about her choices for her work wardrobe. If I did not fire Fatima, the CEO informed me that termination was in my immediate future. I replied, "I will fire Fatima and tell her both of you told me to do it." This response placed me in a position to receive some put-you-in-your-place maneuvers. These maneuvers are punishments for your defiance and refusal to comply. An example might be a denial of requested leave time or withholding needed resources or support, Put-you-in-your-place maneuvers are spirit assassination attempts designed to discourage any future instances of non-compliance or defiance.

Managed care was the rage in the behavioral health community During the late 80s through the 2000s. For 15 months, I worked in managed behavioral health care, managing mental health benefits for a specific contract. I ranked first or second for all stats used to evaluate performance. I was the only Black person on this contracts team. Initially, we had a female supervisor. Once our supervisor transferred to a different department, we gained a new White male supervisor,

Weekly staff meetings provided updates and any changes in performance standards and where we fell about team expectations. After announcements, the floor was open for questions and discussion. The new supervisor was about 5 feet 6 inches tall, regular build, and brunette. He displayed an authoritarian demeanor and speech in my

presence, often cutting me off and ignoring me completely. That day, he threw up his hands to silence me and waved me away like a fly. I had been tolerant and patient, but he had taken it too far. I became incensed and informed him in front of everyone that his behavior towards me was unacceptable, and that behavior would cease now. I told him that if he tried to treat me that way again, we would be in the Human Resources Department working on a settlement for racial discrimination. All my area mates told me afterward that he deserved what I said and how scared he was afterward. That man never treated me with disrespect to my face again. He interacted with me only when he had to, which was agreeable.

A new managed care company called BHAT opened in Clayton. Many people applied. BHAT offered me the clinical supervisor position for the call center, authorizing and monitoring treatment plans and managing utilization rates.

There were approximately 15 case managers. My reception was chilly. When I arrived on Day 2, only three case managers were working. The others reportedly resigned because they did not want to work for a Black woman. The four of us reached all benchmarks as I worked to hire people to build our team.

Our team shattered expectations. After outperforming them at every level, we successfully gained the rest of the lives of our nearest competitor. Lives had been divided between us to see who achieved the best outcomes.

I quit this job on 9/11 after repeated instances of racially motivated behaviors by the newly hired director. This man called my male staff member and asked him what working for a Black woman was like. He brought in people and placed them on my team. This man attempted to sabotage me at every turn. The harassment was not worth it.

2008–2019 Trying a Different Approach*White Supremacy in Black Spaces*

In 2008, I became the Director of Mental Health at a Head Start operated by a Black neighborhood non-profit organization. Adults were to set in their beliefs and behaviors to consider a different approach to improving racial understanding. Perhaps children could learn skills that combat the intrusion of generational patterns passed on from unresolved trauma from previous generations we have yet to address.

I mentioned that this agency was a Black neighborhood center. White people held all the key positions: the CEO, the COO, the director of development, the director of education, and the director of compliance. The agency also serviced the city's poorest and most crime-ridden zip code.

My supervisor was a White woman by the name of Ruth Spinster, who was the director of education. I had one staff person and a part-time therapist, both White, for 750 predominately Black children. When it became apparent that one person could not handle the number of children requiring attention, I joined my staff person in providing services.

My staff member Pat was White and had never had a Black supervisor. She would not talk to me but talked frequently with Ruth, the director of education. When Pat would interact with me, it was to tell me how things worked before I came to the agency and to express her dissatisfaction with the changes I was making.

One day, Ruth approached me about facilitating a counseling session with Pat and me. Ruth had a Master's in Professional Counseling but never practiced. On the other hand, I possess licensure by the State, hold the highest credential from the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists, and possess the designation of an

approved supervisor. Because of my extensive training, the state allows me to provide clinical supervision for those seeking marriage and family therapy licensure. I advised Ruth that what I needed from her was support. If Pat came to her with an issue, she should inquire whether Pat had discussed the issue with me, and if she had not, Ruth should direct her to do so. I stated that her current actions amounted to subversion of my authority, making it impossible for me to run this department effectively. The counseling session did not happen.

One day, Ruth appeared at my office armed with her copy of *Head Start Standards*, which I had studied some time ago and was thoroughly knowledgeable of its content. Ruth, the director of education, told me that as the director of mental health, I was not required to assist my staff in their work. I also have over 25 years of experience as a therapist and as a trainer of therapists. She added that I was doing too much and gave me her copy of *Head Start Standards*. I immediately reminded her that I owned a copy and gave hers back. I also pointed out that the standards set minimal standards and that our children needed more.

Ruth never showed interest in my work, provided no supervision, never commented on my monthly reports, or attended any of the training sessions conducted for the agency. Ruth spent all her time in her office, never visiting our five centers. She had no interest in providing instructional excellence to the children in Head Start.

Ruth approached me once with a big smile, verging on laughter, asking me, "Why do Black people serve macaroni and cheese every holiday." I responded, probably for the same reason White people serve green bean casserole." My response wiped the smile off her face.

Although Ruth never confronted me directly, she set about a plan to sabotage my work relationships unbeknownst to me. A relatively new Black staff member told me Ruth told her when she hired her to avoid me. She added that I did not fit her description and wondered why she would do such a thing. Ruth's actions reported by another Black administrative employee echoed the same information. I did not probe the details of what Ruth said to the employees or how long Ruth had engaged in this behavior. The only concern I had was Ruth's actions.

The information from these two employees explained why White people were distant and unwelcoming at community organizations when I joined committees, Ruth was also a member of. It was time to confront this behavior. I contacted Ruth and met for a consultation, so I asked her about the information concerning her actions towards me. Ruth denied all of it. You could tell by her body language that she was anxious. I told Ruth to stop talking about me to other Black people because I would find out about it and that if she had issues with me, she should speak to me about them, not to other staff. Ruth continued to deny it. I told Ruth that if I found out this racist behavior continued, I would file charges.

I reminded her of the time she called me after a night of drinking with the young White girl working as the interim financial officer regarding Jessica, a White female staff member submitting a monthly mileage report for 1,100 dollars, which I refused to sign, how she called me yelling and demanding why I had not signed the mileage and asking if I would like the same done to me. Ruth had been out drinking with the interim financial officer. Reportedly, Jessica had gone to the interim financial officer complaining that I would not sign her mileage. The interim financial officer informed Ruth while they were

together drinking. I was thrown off balance and shocked by how Ruth spoke to me. After working for her for over 5 years, I noted that she should have asked why I had not signed and submitted the mileage request before making assumptions and attacking me. When I told her the details, she apologized. First of all, 1,100 dollars for 1 month was excessive. Ruth later discovered that Jessica's van was being repaired at a dealership, costing 1,100 dollars.

Jessica was part of another program Ruth had asked me to take over in addition to my primary responsibilities because the contract was on the verge of being pulled because of poor performance. That program had two White females providing services. The program thrived under my leadership, and the agency with whom we had the contract cited the program as a model program. I am still waiting to receive acknowledgment from my agency.

It took 3 days before I felt calm enough to discuss what happened with Ruth. I went to her office and told her she could not ever talk to me the way she did again, ever! She looked at me under the eye as if I was nothing, and I told her not to look at me that way ever again as well. Ruth told me how she would have handled the situation and how I should have responded. My control was weakening, but I was able to stay emotionally calm. I wanted Ruth to hear and understand me. I let her know that how she would handle the situation was irrelevant, that she did not define me, my actions, or my feelings, and that she could never treat me that way again. I told her I felt she was racist, given this and past actions.

I received a call from Sandy, my sorority sister, who also headed a department at the agency. Sandy informed me that Ruth had called her and told her that I called her a

racist. Ruth wanted to know if Sandy thought she was racist as well. Sandy said she told her no, and we chuckled about the situation. The next day, I went to Ruth's office. I reiterated that she should not be talking to other Black people about me disparagingly because they would tell me what she said. Ruth said that Sandy told her she did not think Ruth was racist. I responded that most Black people tell a White person that; however, I was not like most Black people and was not afraid to tell her the truth.

The agency reorganized, and my department, along with health and nutrition, was placed under the supervision of the compliance director, a middle-aged White man named Jody, from a small Illinois community. Jody's cubicle and mine were next to each other.

The agency was notorious for getting the children the cheapest food they could find. The food was horrid, so complaints rushed in. The CEO directed Jody to find a healthier vendor to provide food for the Head Start Program. I overheard Jody saying he was thinking about ordering large industrial cans of food and having the nutrition staff prepare it. Canned goods are notorious for containing excessive sodium. Jody told the person that the only thing he found concerning was that staff in another agency had dropped one of the cans on her foot and lost a toe. Once Jody completed his call, I let him know that I heard him and that I would oppose him tooth and nail if he tried to implement his unhealthy ideas for the children in Head Start. Jody's plan never materialized. Several of the White staff informed me that Ruth and Jody together were telling other White staff that I hated White people. I chuckled, thinking at least they knew I was a vocal and demonstrative advocate for fair and equitable treatment of Black preschool children and their families and to proceed cautiously.

The 2 years before my retirement were fraught with stress as the agency was failing, and they hoped to merge with another social service agency to save the agency. Morale was low, support was minimal, and the current administration attempted to convince staff that they were committed to staff and the community and were trying to solve issues of concern.

The interim CEO was a White woman previously occupying the director of development position. Staff considered the interim CEO racist. She often sought retribution against Black staff when Black staff pushed back protesting loudly when her all White staff exhibited authoritarian and superior attitudes in their interactions.

Once the interim CEO, Barbara, assumed this position, she suddenly voiced her support for equal treatment. We were amused, insulted, and opposed to her efforts to convince staff that she was now the bastion of equality. Her behavior was annoying. In the company of Black staff, she would quote Bible scriptures, and she was Jewish, talk about her favorite "soul" food. Barbara's attempts to speak like Black people were insulting.

To show her devotion to bridge the racial divide within the agency, she hired a White man from an agency in Georgia to speak to the predominately Black staff about racism. This man from Georgia told us that racism was a figment of our imagination and did not exist. He stated that racism was all in our minds and that if we changed how we thought, we would see and understand that racism was not real. I sat there in shock about the docility displayed by the Black people in attendance who silently listened to his presentation. When I could no longer stand his rhetoric, I said what he said was the most ridiculous thing I had ever heard. The silence continued, and people were shocked that I

had spoken out despite the history of the organization disciplining Black employees on the accusations of White staff without credible evidence.

Afterward, Black staff expressed anger about the man's presentation from Georgia, and that White administration thought that this presentation was a good idea. Yet, they were silent and afraid of White staff retaliation should they speak.

My career came to a close after agency staff sabotaged the success of trauma training by violating the agreement, they signed with the company providing the training. All staff were to participate, but the executive staff sporadically attended and then not at all.

The final straw came when they claimed not to have money to set up a self-care room for staff but purchased kid furniture for show for visitors from the state, furniture the children could not use.

During my career, I felt as though I was always fighting, always on the defense as I advocated for resources, empathy, and concern for those we were servicing, only to have barriers and obstacles placed before me. I had mastered using whatever was available and making it work despite adversarial challenges. I was tired and less hopeful but not defeated. I'd find another way to advocate change!

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

The first step toward change is acceptance. The second step is acceptance.

Nathaniel Branden (n.d.)

What I Surmised

I began this journey because I believe that not enough emphasis is placed on the psychological damage caused by a history of slavery and living with continued racism and discrimination. It is my belief that Black people are subjected to numerous spirit assassination attempts throughout life that result in wounds to self-esteem and continual struggles to maintain a sense of purpose and direction and prevent good physical and mental health.

Spirit assassination attempts are the primary tool of White supremacist indoctrination. The literature shows that indoctrination into White supremacist ideology begins in preschool (Armstrong, 2019; Gilliam et al., 2016). That is approximately 15 years of indoctrination within our educational system.

Spirit assassination attempts are intentional words, non-verbal looks, body language, and other actions intended to remind Black people of their powerlessness and worthlessness in this society, destroy hope, joy, and self-esteem, and take away dignity and respect. Spirit assassination attempts occur interpersonally and structurally and are experienced repeatedly throughout life (Douglas, 2023).

Autoethnography offered the opportunity to use stories of my lived experiences with repeated spirit assassination attempts to illuminate individual impact and struggles to transcend effects on life's course and outcomes. Autoethnography is counter storytelling that challenges the dominant narrative and gives voice to the marginalized voices of Black Americans (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

This autoethnography illuminated the enormous number of spirit assassination attempts experienced during my life validating the enmeshment of White supremacist ideology in every aspect of American society (Bell, 1992)

Spirit assassination attempts experienced as a child left me confused, angry, frustrated, and distrustful of White people. Those experiences have influenced my educational and career direction and for a while, a belief that I could make a difference by facilitating a space where mutual understanding could occur between White and Black people and flourish. The continual onslaught of negative messages that Blackness is to be feared and that Black people are less than human contributed to the relinquishment of hope that racism and the experiences of spirit assassination attempts would diminish with understanding.

I believe that to break the chains of mental slavery; Black people must recognize and acknowledge the damage of the past and then identify the ways that pain manifests itself behaviorally and emotionally.

The research questions were:

1. How can emotional/behavioral/ mental health or medical symptoms be directly linked to my experiences of spirit assassination?

My stories show the emergence of physical and emotional symptoms closely associated with repeated stressful occurrences of spirit assassination attempts. That the doctors found no medical basis for the manifestation of symptoms I experienced leads to the possibility that racial trauma and toxic stress could contribute to the development of the headaches, stomach aches, skin eruptions, anxiety, and depression experienced as a

child and throughout life (Chen & Mallory, 2021; Mensah et al., 2021; Shonkoff, 2021; Williams et al., 2019).

Achieving personal and professional success was exhausting. Having to prove yourself worthy daily, while experiencing spirit assassination attempts Spirit assassination attempts are stressful and exhausting.

2. Have experiences of spirit assassination attempts continually impacted my life?

The counter stories presented detail a continual struggle with restrictions, barriers, and perceptions of Black inferiority throughout the researcher's life. Spirit assassination attempts continue to influence my attitudes, and actions. I am immediately reactionary to any displays of overt discrimination, false accusations, or attempts to undermine my identity and sense of self. I am intolerant and confrontational about attempts to exert power to intimidate me because of a person's position. I will intervene when observing public displays of injustice, bullying, berating, or any other form of maltreatment. I will call out and confront overt actions of injustice and racism. I enjoy challenges and discourse about injustice and racism. I enjoy debates with racist White people. I tend to overwork, and I am an achiever when employed. I am intolerant of put-downs and attempts to tell me who I should be. I do not need validation by White people to feel worthy. I am hypervigilant about attacks, on my dignity and self-respect. I remain angry, frustrated and hypervigilant, anticipating my next unpredictable spirit assassination attempt experience. My anxiety goes sky high when falsely accused for I fear truth will not prevail due to presumed guilt,

3. In what ways have my experiences of spirit assassination attempts been traumatizing?

Mining memories from my religious elementary school proved challenging. Many times, I had to step away and return to trying to remember details, names, and faces.

Intense feelings of sadness, detachment, and alienation precipitated breaks from attempts to remember. I knew the spirit assassination attempts affected me but had no idea of the depth and extent of the trauma. It was impossible to recall the names of any teacher or student, or physically describe them after spending 2.5 years at the school.

These early experiences taught me to become comfortable with being alone, taught me not to depend on others for help, to expect negativity about who I was from White people, and that I could succeed despite the expectation I would fail. Anger, frustration, and mistrust of White people as a collective, remain to this day.

This autoethnographic study provided plausible explanations to the reasons for certain behaviors I exhibit in specific circumstances. When I was employed, it was important for me not to deviate from written guidelines and to submit all reports and request prior to the deadline. I realize now that it was because I had learned that when I as a Black woman made a mistake, it was magnified and dwelled on, and minimized if a White counterpart made the same mistake. My inflexibility with guidelines and expectations is rooted in the fact that I did not want to be called out and made an example. Avoiding feelings of embarrassment and shame was paramount, not that my work was beyond reproach.

The almost paralyzing anxiety I feel is when falsely accused and assumed guilty from spirit assassination attempts where truth did not matter and did not always prevail against lies and innuendo.

It is clear now why I possess a compelling need to confront any situation that makes me feel I am treated unfairly, disrespected, unjustifiably admonished demeaned, or racially discriminated. Dealing with these spirit assassination attempts immediately, either confirms or invalidates my perceptions, and always reduces my anxiety.

As I wrote this autoethnography and read what I had written, I noticed there was a numbing of emotions; that it was difficult to describe the emotional impact as if to keep the emotions from affecting me. I learned early that my emotions did not matter. Numbing of emotional impact of spirit assassination attempts probably is a survival adaptation that kept my hope and motivation from destruction.

This autoethnography caused me to question how much of Black culture remains within me. How much of White cultural absorption has diluted Black values and beliefs along the way as Black people strived to be participants in the American dream? In what ways have I internalized, perpetuated, and maintained White supremacist beliefs and values?

Throughout this research, I have leaned on Darby and Rury (2018) concept of dignitary injustice and the tenets of critical race theory to frame my investigation, illuminating the often-invisible scars left by the insidious nature of racism. Dignitary injustice, the systemic denial of acknowledgment and respect based on racial prejudice, has emerged as a pervasive theme in the narratives explored, one that has profound implications for the mental health of Black individuals (Darby & Rury, 2018).

The following tenets of critical race theory completed the analysis of my stories: intersectionality, interest convergence, counternarrative storytelling, critique of liberal legislation, and the permanence of racism.

Intersectionality

The intersection of race with other identities compounds the impact of spirit assassination attempts, revealing the complexity of Black identities and the need to address the multiplicity of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989).

As a Black female, I faced unique intersections of race and gender as reflected in my stories. On two occasions, when my new all White staff saw their new supervisor was a Black female, they resigned in mass. They had only met me the day before, so their resignations occurred because I was a Black female. Devastating as it was, their resignations allowed me to build my staff.

These intersecting identities compounded experiences of spirit assassination attempts and shaped the unique challenges I faced.

Interest Convergence

Racial progress often occurs when it serves the interests of those in power (Bell, 1980). My repeated encounters with discrimination, reflect the reluctance of dominant groups to relinquish their privilege and power and that motivations for my promotions were advantageous for the agencies and companies that employed me.

Counternarratives

Autoethnography is counter-storytelling that voices Black Americans' marginalized experiences (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

The counternarratives in this research challenge dominant discourses that downplay the persistence of racism in society, the consistency, and variations of spirit assassination attempts.

Racism as Permanent

Racism is not an aberration but a default condition of society (Bell, 1992).

Despite advancements in civil rights, systemic barriers and prejudices continue to shape my experiences and limit opportunities.

My autoethnography spans 69 years, which includes the passage of the Civil Rights Act, the Fair Housing Act, and the Voting Rights Act, to name a few. The narratives in this research show that racism and discrimination found ways to redefine and manifest themselves and the persistence of spirit assassination attempts despite legal advancements in civil rights, systemic barriers, and prejudices persist.

Derrick Bell's (1992) *Faces at the Bottom at the Well* has profoundly impacted me. Bell's book asks, "If racism is permanent, what is the point of the struggle?" Bell felt that racism is a permanent fixture of American society and that despite our best efforts, racism will persist, and the battle against racism cannot be won.

Reading this book was sobering, and I wanted to disagree, but based on history and the current racial divide in our country, it compels me to understand the reality of Bell's beliefs.

Reviewing the literature regarding the research on the reasons for the persistence of the racial achievement gap illuminates Bell's concept of interest convergence. Bell stated that there will never be a change in the progress of Black people without the sanction of White people.

In the late sixties and early 70s, assessment tests played a role in creating and maintaining the racial achievement gap (Haley, 1972). They also noted teacher bias and exclusionary discipline practices were significant in the maintenance of the racial

achievement gap. Subsequently, since that period, there have been numerous studies that confirm the need to include diverse persons in the formation of intellectual assessments, provide teacher preparation, ongoing training, monitoring and coaching on racism in the classroom, and the elimination of exclusionary discipline for non-violent offenses yet never been nationally implemented (Brazil, 2022; Breese et al., 2023; Cherng, 2017; Davison et al., 2021; Dhaliwal et al., 2020; Gilliam et al., 2016). Instead, another medical racist theory called stereotype threat has emerged as a probable cause for the racial achievement gap (Pennington et al., 2016). Stereotype threat believes that stigmatized groups underperform on tests of ability because of concerns about confirming a negative stereotype as a self-characteristic (Pennington et al., 2016).

Given the lack of implementation of recommendations to reduce the racial achievement gap, and based on Bell's theory (1980), it is apparent that there is no authentic desire for the powers that be to take steps to reduce the racial achievement gap. It is more critical to the power structure to maintain the racial achievement gap as it supports and maintains White supremacist ideology about the inherent inferiority of Black people (Darby & Rury, 2018; Johnson, 2020).

Black progress is a threat to our White supremacist society (Bell, 1992).

Conducting this research helped me to feel empowered and to acknowledge my accomplishments, which were diminished because of the repeated experiences of spirit assassination attempts.

After reading and analyzing my stories, I realized that I am a phenomenal woman, having been a single parent and an accomplished professional while surviving the onslaught of repeated spirit assassination attempts. The amount of spirit assassination

attempts experienced over 69 years was overwhelming. Themes of commitment, resistance, survival, self-respect, and resilience made me proud.

As a mental health professional, it is important to highlight the similarities among spirit assassination attempts, social rejection, and emotional abuse. Spirit assassination attempts, emotional abuse and social rejection are intentional acts.

Spirit assassination attempts are intentional words, non-verbal looks, body language, and other actions intended to remind Black people of their powerlessness and worthlessness in this society, destroy hope, joy, and self-esteem, and take away dignity and respect (Douglas, 2023).

Social rejection is the experience of being excluded, ostracized, or marginalized within social settings or interpersonal relationships (Weir, 2012). Social rejection can manifest in several ways including being ignored, excluded from group activities, subjected to ridicule and humiliation (Nergaard, 2018). Social rejection undermines a sense of belonging, emotional distress, feelings of loneliness and self-acceptance. (Weir, 2012)

Emotional abuse consists of behaviors with the intent to control, manipulate or belittle a person within a relationship. Emotional abuse targets a person's self-worth, emotions, and sense of autonomy. It leaves lasting psychological scars undermining self-confidence, emotional wellbeing, and the ability to trust others. Emotional abuse can leave profound and lasting effects on interpersonal relationships, mental health, and quality of life (Sanchez-Hucles, 1999). Spirit assassination attempts are a form of emotional abuse (Douglas, 2023). Emotional abuse targets the victim's sense of autonomy, self-worth, and emotions.

These three forms of adversity involve power imbalances between the victim and the perpetrator, social exclusion, and abusive relationships. This power dynamic reinforces existing inequalities and the perpetuation of harm. Survivors carry the emotional scars of these experiences impacting social functioning and mental health (Sanchez-Hucles, 1999).

As I draw the threads of my autoethnography to a close, I sit with the weight of countless stories, my own and those whose voices echo through the corridors of a society that has too often turned a deaf ear to our pain. There is no immunity from the reach of spirit assassination attempts. Some wounds don't heal!

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research on Black people who have experienced repeated spirit assassination attempts can validate the experiences of others who have experienced spirit assassination attempts and the challenges those experiences pose.

Future research can support the reality of the enduring impact of experiences of spirit assassination attempts, challenging the dominant narrative that the effects of slavery and discrimination no longer exist.

Additional narratives can potentially mobilize communities and inspire collective efforts to address racism and promote equity and justice. Individuals may feel empowered, and the stories may promote healing, and they can find strength and resilience in the face of adversity.

Future research on spirit assassination attempt experiences can show the diversity of perspectives, reactions, and coping styles on the impact of repeated spirit assassination attempts in mental health and emotional lives of Black people.

Future research on the enduring impact of repeated spirit assassination attempts on individuals can put a humanistic face to the struggles of the marginalized, which may foster an increased understanding of the impact of spirit assassination attempts and their impact on individuals and communities, This may ultimately contribute to efforts to dismantle systemic inequalities and promote social justice.

Future research can also focus on the similarities, dynamics and outcomes of spirits assassination attempts, emotional abuse, and social rejection their roles in the perpetuation of White supremacy and impact on the life outcomes of Black people.

Spirit assassination attempts are the primary tools of White supremacy. Spirit assassination attempts inflict wounds whose cumulative effects last a lifetime. Some wounds don't heal!

Conclusion

Honestly, I don't believe that additional research will aid in the reduction of spirit assassination attempt experiences. I specifically chose the racial achievement gap as the focus of my literature review covering research from 1968-present to magnify Americas' reluctance to implement the recommendations of numerous studies (Haley, 1972). The intention was to illustrate the vital role schools play in indoctrinating Black children about White supremacist beliefs, values, and their perceived role in a White supremacist society.

The literature reviews highlight the nations continued hesitancy to take transformative actions to reduce the racial achievement gap as evidenced by the lack of action to promote a national initiative to transform our educational system to reduce teacher bias, exclusionary discipline, and teachers' preparation courses for teachers, who

are majority White females, to acknowledge and work on the biases they bring to the classrooms.

In conclusion, his researcher believes that the lyrics to “They Don’t Care About Us”, by Michael addresses the reason why America continues not to engage in national transformative action strategies, based on research, to address and reduce spirit assassination attempts in educational. Until that changes, what will more studies accomplish?

They Don’t Care About Us (Michael Jackson, 1995).

All I want to say is that they don’t really care about us
 Don’t worry what people say, we know the truth
 All I want to say is that they don’t really care about us
 Enough is enough of this garbage
 All I want to say is that they don’t really care about us

Beat me, hate me
 You can never break me
 Will me, thrill me
 You can never kill me
 Sue me, sue me
 Everybody, do me
 Kick me, kick me
 Don’t you Black or White me

Tell me what has become of my life
 I have a wife and two children who love me
 I’m a victim of police brutality, now (Mhmm)
 I’m tired of bein’ the victim of hate
 Your rapin’ me of my pride
 Oh, for God’s sake
 I look to heaven to fulfill its prophecy
 Set me free

Tell me what has become of my rights
 Am I invisible cause you ignore me?
 Your proclamation promised me free liberty, now
 I’m tired of bein’ the victim of shame
 They’re throwin’ me in a class with a bad name
 I can’t believe this is the land from which I came
 You know I really do hate to say it

The government don't wanna see
But it Roosevelt was livin', he wouldn't let this be, no, no

Some things in life they just don't wanna see (Ah)
But if Martin Luther was livin'
He wouldn't let this be, no, no

Skinhead, deadhead (Yeah, yeah)
Everybody's gone bad
Situation, segregation (Woo-hoo)
Everybody, allegation
In the suite on the news
Everybody dog food (Woo-ho)
Kick me, kick me
Don't you wrong or right me

All I wanna say is that they don't really care about us
All I wanna say is that they don't really care about us
All I wanna say is that they don't really care about us
All I wanna say is that they don't really care about us
All I wanna say is that they don't really care about us
All I wanna say is that they don't really care about us (Jackson, 1995)¹

Closing

Meditation

*I seek healing to mend the wounds of my past, the wounds that continue to be felt
and noticed. Take away the pain, the memories that hurt, and the shadows that
linger in my heart. Replace my anger, anguish, sorrow, and brokenness with
peace. Please show me the path to healing so that I might find renewal,
rejuvenation, and restore my spirit.*

(Douglas, 2023)

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