Emotional Emancipation: Addressing the Legacy of Historical Trauma Among Persons of African Ancestry

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Goals

▪ Develop expanded definition of trauma
  ▪ Including historical and intergenerational traumatic experiences.
▪ Understand historical referents related to persons of African ancestry that contribute to the lie of Black inferiority.
▪ Review key components of community-based treatment model—Emotional Emancipation Circles—and how to design them to address historical trauma within communities of African ancestry.
Understanding Racism

- Any attitude, action, institutional structure, or social policy that subordinates or makes inferior persons or groups because of their color (Jones, 1997; Ponterotto, Utsey, & Pederson, 2006).
Racial Microaggressions

- Initially coined by Dr. Chester Pierce: “These [racial] assaults to black dignity and black hope are incessant and cumulative ... In fact, the major vehicle for racism in this country is offenses done to blacks by whites in this sort of gratuitous never-ending way. These offenses are microaggressions. These mini-disasters accumulate. It is the sum total of multiple microaggressions by whites to blacks that has pervasive effect to the stability and peace of this world” (Pierce, 1974).
Racial Microaggressions

- Verbal
- Nonverbal
- Environmental

- Are constant and continuous.
- Attack self-esteem and self-image and can cause anger and frustration, deplete psychic energy, lower the sense of well-being and worthiness, produce physical health problems, shorten life expectancy.
Racial Stress

- Race-related stress can cause:
  - Feelings of anger, anxiety, paranoia, helplessness-hopelessness, frustration, resentment, and fear
  - Negative effects to the body including changes in immune, neuroendocrine, and cardiovascular system functioning
  - Decrease in the sense of one’s quality of life
Internalized Racism

- Turning upon ourselves, upon our families, and upon our own people the racial beliefs, attitudes, practices, and oppression inflicted on us by the dominant society.
Defining Trauma

- Traumatic events are *extraordinary*. Not necessarily because they occur infrequently, but because they *overwhelm* the ordinary human adaptations to life.

- Traumatic events, are outside the *normal* range of a person’s experience and constitute, for that person, an *exceptional* mental and physical *stressor*
What makes an event Traumatic?

- There are two main elements:
  - The nature of the event usually involves actual or feared death or serious physical or emotional injury.
  - What the event means to the victim.
- Dysfunctional reactions to traumatic events are often understood through the diagnostic category of PTSD – post-traumatic stress disorder.
PTSD – An Overview

- Those who have experienced or witnessed an event involving actual or threatened death or serious injury and have responded with feelings of fear, helplessness, or horror may develop PTSD symptoms.
PTSD – Symptoms

- Intrusion (e.g., dreams, thoughts that remind one of the event)
- Avoidance
- Negative alterations in cognitions and mood
- Alterations in arousal and reactivity (e.g., difficulty sleeping, irritability)
  - Meet the criteria for PTSD if experienced for at least 1 month (DSM-V, 2013)
PTSD – Symptoms (cont.)

▪ Associated with impairment in a person’s ability to function in typical social or family situations
▪ Feelings of helplessness
▪ Survival guilt, and
▪ Feelings of being under threat
Traditional Approaches to Trauma Treatment

- Exposure-Based Cognitive Therapy
  - Goals:
    - Decrease symptoms
    - Strengthen sense of mastery
    - Decrease avoidance
  - Strategies:
    - Understand PTSD
    - Remember and organize
    - Grieve losses
Need for Community-based Interventions

Entire community is affected

Trauma can have negative affects on:

- Trust
- Connection/Attachment
- Communication
- Boundaries
- Sense of safety
- Parenting
First, current conceptualizations were not developed to address intergenerational or historical trauma.

- They do not adequately speak to the possibly compounding nature of responses to multiple stressors.
Limitations of Current Conceptualizations of Trauma

- Focus remains on the individual
- Fail to address the familial and social impacts of trauma reactions.
- Exploring these other levels is particularly important in communities of African ancestry, in which members tend to have strong social and family affiliations and the infliction of trauma was trans-individual.
Limitations of Current Conceptualizations of Trauma

- Third, such categories do not explore the ways that historical and contemporary traumas interact, or
- How a present-day trauma might be interpreted within the context of historical events.
Limitations of Current Conceptualizations of Trauma

▪ Lastly, work examining the factors that buffer the impact of traumatic events – both contemporary and historical – is still quite limited.
  ▪ Partly, due to the continuing denial of the validity of African humanity
  ▪ Partly, due to concerns of communities of African ancestry to focus on resilience and strengths
Defining Historical Trauma

- *Historical trauma* is conceptualized as a collective complex trauma inflicted on a group of people who share a specific group identity or affiliation—ethnicity, nationality, and religious affiliation.

- It is the legacy of numerous traumatic events a community experiences over generations and encompasses the psychological and social responses to such events.
Defining Historical Trauma

- Associated historical events tend to be profoundly destructive at a physical and/or emotional level and are generally experienced by many people in a community.

Historical trauma is collective in that many members of a community view the events as acute losses and experience corresponding trauma reactions.
Defining Historical Trauma

- 3 distinguishing characteristics:
  - Generally widespread among communities of African ancestry;
  - The events generate high levels of collective distress and mourning in contemporary communities;
  - The events are usually perpetrated by outsiders with purposeful and often destructive intent.
Historical Context: Applying Construct of Trauma to Persons of African ancestry

- The ideologies of black inferiority and white superiority are rooted in the trade in humans and colonial expansion. Historical stages of oppression are:
  - Pre-enslavement (prior to 1619),
  - During enslavement (1619-1865), and
  - Post-enslavement (after 1865)
Applying Construct of Trauma to Persons of African ancestry

- During the pre-enslavement era:
  - No legal precedence existed that defined black inferiority. Whites suspected that blacks were inferior but they did not have reasons for how or why.

- During the era of enslavement:
  - Legal processes and several court cases defined and enforced the notion/lie of black inferiority. (Russell-Brown, 2006)
Maafa – The Great Disaster

- Refers to the systematic and systemic disintegration, dehumanization and negation of the essence of the African;

Beyond human comprehension and convention; and

Its key feature is the “denial of the validity of African peoples’ humanity” and an ever-present total disregard and disrespect for the African’s right to exist.
Want to take a few minutes to provide a truncated, but powerful review of the some of the examples of collective trauma experienced by African Americans.

Remembering these examples provides clear evidence of the multiple and ongoing assaults against our communities.
1619 – 1st ship with captured Africans arrives in emerging US colonies
Slave or Enslaved?

- A noun or a verb?
- A status or an action?
- An identity or a condition of dehumanization and oppression?

LABELS MATTER!!!!
Slave Codes

If the slaves resist the master, he can kill his slaves, free of punishment.
Three-Fifths Compromise
The Philadelphia Convention of 1787
1793 Fugitive Slave Act

The Slave-hunter is among us!
Be on your guard!
An arrest is planned for to-night.
Cotton Production
Compromise of 1850
Second Fugitive Slave Act

We could not...
- testify on our own behalf
- have trial by jury
3,446 Black Lynchings from 1882-1968
Last Recorded Lynching:
1981 Michael Donald in Alabama
Dred Scott vs Sandford, 1857

- Scott, enslaved in Virginia, sued to gain his freedom after his master took him to a free state.
- In rejecting his plea, the justices ruled Scott was not even a citizen, and therefore could not sue.
- Black people "are beings of an inferior order..."

US Supreme Court ruled:
- Blacks are so inferior that “they have no rights which the white man is bound to respect.”
Ten years later: 1867

- Dred Scott passes away and is buried in Calvary Cemetery on West Florissant Avenue, in St. Louis, Missouri, near Ferguson
1865 – 13th Amendment
Emancipation – Without A Plan to Restore
Humanity, Dignity, and Agency to Black Life
1865 – 1877 – Reconstruction Era
1865--Enter
The Klu Klux Klan
1865 – 1936 – Convict Leasing

Enslavement
By
Another Name
The Black Codes
1896 – Plessy v. Ferguson
Establishes Separate but Equal
1921 – Tulsa Race Riots
1932 – 1972
Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment
1954 – Brown v. Board of Education

**SEGREGATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS ENDED BY COURT**

Ruled Unconstitutional By Supreme Court; Date To End Practice Not Set

Associated Press

Leased Wires

FOR ALL DEPARTMENT CALL 4500

Late News

Alexandria, Va. (AP) - A suit by John Lee Green to force his recognition as a Democratic candidate for Congress went to trial before a three-judge federal court here today. Green, a Republican who held office as an Altavista County sheriff, brought the suit against Virginia's 12th District Democratic County Committee after it refused to accept him as a party candidate for the forthcoming congressional election.

Funds Requested

WASHINGTON (AP) - Pres. Eisenhower asked Congress today for an extra $1,000,000 to help areas arsoned by federal workers at work, or federal workers with school construction.

The request, in a letter to Speaker of the House Mathias, is for funds for the next fiscal year beginning July 1. The extra money is in addition to $6 million dollars already in the budget for the same purpose for the fiscal year ending June 30.

Considering Violations

WASHINGTON (AP) - Justice O. W. Brown of the D.C. Circuit Court served a notice of his intention to hear the case of the several students who have been denied admission to the public schools in the District of Columbia.

The court set a date of July 11 for the hearing.

**Danville School Board Will Meet At Once To Study Court Decision**

**Firm Entered, Haul Is Made; Boy Wounded**

**Man Accidentally Shot In The Hand**

A breaking and entering and assault with a shotgun and attempted larceny and unauthorized use of a firearm were charged against John Smith, age 21, of 123 Maple St.

**Paroled Slayer Captured After Bizarre Deaths**

**Held For Four Brutal Killings**

**McCarthy-Army Hearings' Future Thrown In Doubt**

Presidential Order Shutting Off Inquiry Denounced By Sen. McCarthy

**WASHINGTON (AP) - The Supreme Court ruled unanimously today that segregation of Negroes and whites in public schools is unconstitutional. But it did not set a date for the end of the practice.**

Robert P. McCannell, chairman of the School Board, was being held in the Danville jail on charges of violating state law by not obeying the court's order to desegregate the schools.
1955 – The Murder of Emmett Till
1963 – Birmingham Church Bombing
1965 – Bloody Sunday
1965 – Malcolm X Assassinated
1965 – Watts Riots
1968 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Killed
1982 – Enter ...The War on Drugs
Or A War on Us?

BLACK AMERICANS
13% OF THE US POPULATION
14% OF DRUG USERS
56% OF THOSE INCARCERATED FOR DRUG RELATED CRIMES

Or the Next Version of Enslavement?
1997 – Prison Industrial Complex

DON'T KEEP CALM
MORE BLACK MEN ARE IN PRISON TODAY, THAN THERE WERE ENSLAVED IN 1850.

WHILE BLACK WOMEN ARE THE FASTEST GROWING SECTOR OF THE PRISON POPULATION.

CITED: MICHELLE ALEXANDER, THE NEW JIM CROW: MASS INCARCERATION IN THE AGE OF COLORECLINDNESS
1999
The Murder of Amadou Bailo Diallo
2001 Investigation

406 cases of theft = 24k acres of Black-owned land antebellum period to present
The New Millennium
The School-to-Prison Pipeline
2000’s Disproportionality and Disparities

- Special education
- School suspensions
- School drop outs/push out
- Foster care
- Juvenile justice system
- Health status
- Unemployment
- Poor access to healthy food and recreation
2008

- The United States House of Representatives issues an apology for slavery.
- Yet the lie of Black inferiority still prevails.
24 CASES: Killed by Police/Died in Custody Under Questionable Circumstances

MIKE BROWN
2014, Age 18
Pending.

AMADOU Diallo
1999, Age 23
Cops indicted, acquitted.

OSCAR GRANT
2009, Age 23
Cops indicted, convicted. Served 31 months.

JON FERRELL
2013, Age 26
Cops indicted, pending.

ALAN BLUEFORD
2012, Age 18
Cops not indicted.

CHAVIS CARTER
2012, Age 21
Cops not indicted.

ERIC GARNER
2014, Age 43
Pending.

SEAN BELL
2006, Age 23
Cops indicted, acquitted.

TIM STANSBURY
2004, Age 19
Cops not indicted.

EZELL FORD
2014, Age 25
Pending.

RAMARLEY GRAHAM
2012, Age 18
Cops indicted, indictment tossed on technicality.

DANE SCOTT
2012, Age 18
Cops indicted, sentenced to four years.

PHILLIP PANNELL
1996, Age 16
Cops indicted, acquitted.

PATRICK DORISMOND
2000, Age 26
Cops not indicted.

WENDELL ALLEN
2012, Age 20
Cops not indicted.

VICTOR STEEN
2009, Age 18
Cops not indicted.

KENDREC MCCADE
2012, Age 19
Cops not indicted.

KIMANE GRAY
2013, Age 16
Pending.

ARMAND BENNETT

DERRICK WILLIAMS
2011, Age 22
Cops not indicted.

OUSMANE ZONGO
2003, Age 43
Cops indicted, sentenced to probation.

JOHN CRAWFORD
2014, Age 22
Pending.

JONNY GAMAGE
1995, Age 21
Cops indicted, acquitted.

GUS HUGLEY
2006, Age 21
Cops not indicted.
Michael Brown 2014
Psychological Impact of the Lie

- Perceptions of a stressful situation that taxes or exceeds one’s ability to cope may result in feelings of anger, anxiety, paranoia, helplessness-hopelessness, frustration, resentment, and fear
- Physiological responses to psychological stress occur as a result of unsuccessful coping responses
- The primary physiological stress response involves immune, neuroendocrine, and cardiovascular system functioning (Utsey et al., 2002, p. 368).
- Discrimination is a major threat to African American mental health (Keith et al., 2010).
Towards Emotional Emancipation™

The Association of Black Psychologists
Community Healing Network, Inc.

“Emotional Emancipation Circles is a service mark of Community Healing Network that is the product of the collaboration between Community Healing Network and the Association of Black Psychologists and part of the larger movement being spearheaded by Community Healing Network to overcome and overturn the lie of Black inferiority: the root cause of the devaluing of Black lives.”
“Where do we go from here?”

“First, we must massively assert our dignity and worth. We must stand up amid a system that still oppresses us and develop an unassailable and majestic sense of values. We must no longer be ashamed of being Black. The job of arousing manhood within a people that have been taught for so many centuries that they are nobody... is not easy” — Dr. King (1967)
“A people with power look for the source of problems within themselves”
“...Why, after all this time, when calculating the achievement of the ‘American Dream,’ are [Black people] still ranked at the bottom of almost every ‘good’ list, and at the top of the ‘bad’ lists?”

Good Lists

- Wealth/income
- Marriage rates
- BA and graduate degrees
- Higher household income
- Home ownership
- Life expectancy
Bad Lists

- Substance use
- Incarceration rates
- Unemployment
- Foreclosure
- Poverty rates
- HIV/AIDS
- Stroke, Diabetes, Hypertension
History and the Politics/Consciousness
The African Maafa in Real Time

Years In
246 years
1619-1865

Years Out
146 years
1865-1964 = 99 years no civil rights

1964 - present

Really Out
49 years
1619-1865
“We need a mass-based movement for mental health patterned after AA, where there are meetings people can attend and have education for critical consciousness...We need to start where we are, in the places where people live...” —bell hooks
...”Any movement for the Negro’s freedom that overlooks this necessity is only waiting to be buried. As long as the mind is enslaved, the body can never be free. **Psychological freedom**, a firm sense of self-esteem, is the most powerful weapon against the long night of physical slavery”.

**MLK Proud to Be Maladjusted**
Rationale for Our Work: Overcoming the Lie

The **LIE** of Black inferiority –

- Used to justify the enslavement and subjugation of African people for centuries –
- The source of our collective historical trauma – is still very much with us
“If you make a man feel that he is inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept an inferior status, for he will seek it himself.” — Dr. Carter G. Woodson
The Lie of Black Inferiority

“[There is] a peculiar kind of communal self-hatred, an especially virulent form of anger, self-loathing, and lost hope, that leads to a devaluation of the lives of fellow Blacks, and to...a devaluation of the self.”

—Dr. Alvin Poussaint and Amy Alexander
"The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed."
Stephen Biko, speech in Cape Town, 1971
That **LIE** tells us that Black people are not as beautiful, lovable, intelligent, capable, and worthy as other people ...
- It undermines Black people’s sense of worth,
- The well-being of Black families, and
- Black children’s sense of positive possibilities
Defy the Lie

▪ To reverse these negative trends, Black people must engage in the struggle for what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called “psychological freedom,” –

▪ We call it:

  “*Emotional Emancipation*™”
“No Lincolonian Proclamation, no Johnsonian civil rights bill ... the Negro will only be free, when he reaches down to the inner depths of his own being and signs with the pen and ink of assertive manhood (womanhood) his (her) own Emancipation Proclamation.”

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
"It becomes more necessary to see the truth as it is, if you realize that the only vehicle for change are these people who have lost their personality. The first step therefore is to make the black man come to himself; to pump back life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity, to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth." ~ Steve Biko. (1978).
Why Emotional Emancipation℠?

*Emotional Emancipation* requires admitting that we are all victims of “the greatest propaganda campaign of all time” (Burrell, 2010)
What is Emotional Emancipation℠?

- *Identity* and “a firm sense of self-esteem” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

- *Freedom* from any and all toxic ideas about the inferiority of Black culture

- Freedom to see ourselves *beyond* the negative stereotypes that have burdened and limited us for centuries
Countering the Lie...

- Emotional Emancipation$^{SM}$ as psychological intervention
- Establishing the emotional foundations for each of us to become stronger, healthier, safer, more caring persons
- Creating a stronger, healthier, safer, more caring Black community in the United States and around the world!
How do we counter the Lie?

- Emotional emancipation\textsuperscript{SM} requires a reclamation of our African cultural heritage
- Learning the lessons from our collective history
- Never apologizing for Africa
- Never allowing others to dismiss Africa
Emotional Emancipation\textsuperscript{SM} is about healing....

- The historical trauma of 250 years of enslavement
- The ongoing assaults to our humanity and our civil rights from Jim Crow, industrial slavery, chain gangs, and through legalized and customary segregation
Emotional Emancipation℠ is WORK!

- Working together to overcome the LIE of Black inferiority and the emotional legacies of slavery and racism that continue to keep us captive.
- Developing ongoing ways to promote Community Healing for our children, families, and communities
EECs

- EEC spaces *intentionally* counter the lie by emphasizing the core strengths and virtues we hold as individuals, families, and communities
- Create the conditions for healing conversations that lead to individual and collective recovery and wellness
EEC’s Can Reaffirm Sense of Community

▪ A readily available, mutually supportive network of relationships on which one could depend (Sarason).

▪ The strength of the bonds between people; a feeling that members have of belongingness; a feeling that members matter to one another and the to the group; a shared sense of faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment together (McMillan & Chavis).
Thank You!

- For additional information:
  - [www.ABPSI.org](http://www.ABPSI.org)
  - [www.CommunityHealingNet.org](http://www.CommunityHealingNet.org)
  - [http://www.defythelie.org/](http://www.defythelie.org/)