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This paper examines how black women who have experienced trauma make meaning of lived experiences. The informants' autobiographies provide data for a team approach to psychological phenomenology, a psychological autopsy. The inner lives are traced from pre trauma to self-actualization. Anger, shame and fear, as well as, love belonging, running and relationships with other women are considered.

EXPLORING THE LIKELIHOOD OF BLACK WOMEN SELF-ACTUALIZING:

THE STRUGGLE TO RECOVER FROM RACIAL TRAUMA

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

An Invitation to Readers

The United States has changed so much that it is common that we all associate with at least one Black woman.[1] Readers here could be any of the 313 million people living in the U.S. (U.S. Census 2010) who work with Black women, teach them, and share memberships in professional organizations with them. For too long the scholarship foci of humanities, social sciences, and behavioral sciences have concentrated on the physiological existence of Black women: strong, hypersexual, or asexual. New generations of academics need a better understanding of the more than 20 million Black women of the U.S. (U.S. Census, 2010). Maslow (1970) hypothesized that people's external lives reflect inner lives. Studying the inner lives of the autobiographers provides an opportunity to expand perspectives through examination of personal motives, needs, and understandings. Doing so, may better enable the next generation of academics to improve the world.

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[1] My personal preference is to use the term Black woman to refer to those African American women whose ancestry includes American slaves. The term African insinuates a destroyed heritage that cannot be repaired. I cannot return to Africa and hope that someone will tell me where in an entire continent I can search for ancestors. I suspect that the use of African slave women for breeding and or the pleasure of slave owners coupled with distorted records tangled family histories beyond recovery. As Black women write, some resist participation in our labeling. I would disrespect myself as well as them by writing *(sic)* if they do not capitalize Black.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore whether and how Black women self-actualize and recover from experiences of trauma. More specifically, this study looks at psychic and racial trauma as described through the words Black women autobiographers provide. In their non-fiction autobiographies, the women describe their survival of violence. I probe their texts for clues to the thoughts that guided them from devastation to self-actualization. This work takes the reader on a journey destined to increase understanding of the inner lives of specific Black women. These specific lives affect all who live in the U.S., whether teaching, collaborating with, or learning from Black women. The words of Black women affect Black men or White men, as well as Black women or White women. The U.S. outlaw of overt oppression makes covert oppression more difficult to locate and manage.

Getting at the psychosocial dimensions of the experiences the women describe, requires moving beyond empirical satisfaction with verifiable and reliable data to relevant data. To stress relevance in this study, the idea of psychological autopsy is used. The *psychological autopsy* refers to a mode of examining the lived experiences. While an autopsy, or postmortem, searches for the cause of death in a corpse, psychological autopsy examines the lived experiences in the case of equivocal death. Relevant professionals collaborate over the interviews of family and acquaintances, documents, and other personal documents. While an autopsy resembles the dissection of a high school biology class, there are no body parts in psychological autopsy. This study is more intrinsic. In this study the data are arranged around the themes of a team of academic

scholars who have studied various dimensions of Black women's experiences as told by Black women.

Self-actualization, one of the highest levels in the Hierarchy of Needs, (Maslow, 1982) is the human motivation to realize one's latent potential, to understand herself, and to establish herself as a whole person. It involves abandoning poses, defenses, and shyness. It means being wholly and fully human (Maslow, 1993). When self-actualized, one listens to her inner voice, takes responsibility and learns who and what she is: she sorts what she needs from what she does not need and what she wants from what she does not want. In this investigation, I search for clues to the women's states of mind as described by the women themselves.

Every encounter leaves a trace. This is called *Locard's Exchange Principle* in forensics (Turvey, 2002). Forensic science is based on the work of Edmund Locard (Saferstein, 1998, pp. 4–5), who promoted reliance on scientific methods, logic, and detailed records keeping, claiming that the microscopic exchange could be used to link individuals to crime scenes. For Locard it means that whenever someone or something enters or leaves a crime scene they both leave and take microscopic evidence, called *trace evidence*.

Retention of a trace is also applicable in psychoanalysis. British psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas (1987) asserts that as an adult, one's ego retains an internalization that as a child could not be processed through mental representations or language. His focus on internalization of relational experiences known but not articulated makes his *unthought known* pertinent in this study of women's inner experiences of trauma. The

study of trauma also subscribes to the idea that minute traces persist. Not everyone recovers from trauma and for those who recover a trace remains (Hess, 2008). In each case what might not be obvious is the extent to which the exchange affects both donor and recipient (Schwab, 2010).

For instance, imagine that a limb falls from a tree into a stream. The limb's location is changed and it is now wet and no longer a part of a tree, maybe even broken. The flow of the stream is rerouted. Even if the limb is removed, it may leave a lasting impression in the bed of the stream and the flow will not likely return to the original flow. At the very least, the water that flowed during that disturbance has moved on.

This idea can also be called *socialization*: learning acceptable behavior from others in small and enduring ways. An example of a *good trace*, the traces worth leaving on each other, can be found in a Hurricane Katrina relief trip to New Orleans. I needed an escape from the grief of my father's death. While there, I was touched by others who went to help, as well as, by people we met there. A Black woman that I met was particularly touching. She explained how she and her husband were deeply touched by our efforts. Her neighbors' houses were gone. She described how she worked to restore her home while her husband struggled to recover from his depression. If she started to feel low, she found others working and pitched in. We met while cleaning a park. She started cooking a meal each day, which she served on her dishes. Each day she would find us and bring her hot and home cooked meal to us, all of us. Her husband explained later during a phone conversation what it meant to him meeting the young men who came

to work and feeling a sense of obligation to get up and work shoulder to shoulder with them.

Good traces, reflecting the value that one sees in people, occur in multiple situations. For instance, in a class that I taught, a middle-aged Black woman returning to school was resistant to the point that she became a disruption. After several outbursts and attempts to get her to maintain focus on the assignments, I insisted on a meeting before her return to class. During the meeting, I addressed how her agitation detracted from the engaged learning environment I wanted to create. She explained some issues and fears she was struggling with. After agreeing that she could *only* return to class if she could listen differently and give the assignments a try, her performance became outstanding. In fact, I heard her explain to the woman with whom she had previously commiserated that her understanding was the result of her listening more and complaining less. The following semester she sent a message that some of her issues led her to take a semester off, but she would return the next semester. Reflecting something positive that I saw in her is an example of leaving a good trace.

Understanding how one leaves traces means it could be harmful for a contemporary Black woman to "abandon all poses, defenses, and shyness" while images of her incite fear, hostility, and aversion. Everyone needs to understand her history. Often traces are not even conscious to the bearers of the traces. A Black woman can little afford to ignore dominant attitudes toward Black womanhood during slavery, reconstruction, the Jim Crow Era, or presently. Every decision a Black woman makes is influenced by dominant perceptions of Black womanhood and perceptions of Black womanhood in the

form of negative images is available to everyone with whom a Black woman comes in contact.

In this work, I study the psychic lives of select Black women as found in the autobiographer's words. When Maslow began his work on self-actualization, he was offering a hypothesis based on his desire to understand what was so great about a few people he admired. His hope was that some "astute professor of philosophy" (1991, p. 103) would empirically test his work. He noted the qualities that the subjects of his study shared. However, Maslow's work earned him recognition as the founder of Humanistic Psychology, psychology that respected the unique and individual nature of human beings. He encouraged "an acceptance of people as they are at their intrinsic core" (1991, p. 104). He used the metaphor of helping a rose be the best rose it could be and not trying to encourage a rose to be a lily.

Sometimes people experience events that are so painful that one's sense of self is fractured. When this happens, one is no longer the same person (shattered since of self) one no longer sees the world the same way (altered world view). This is the very definition of *psychic trauma*. All traumas have a psychic component. While violence is usually thought of as physical, mistreatment of a nature deep enough to cause a shattered sense of self and an altered worldview is psychic trauma and leaves a trace on the psyche of its target. The return of Viet Nam war veterans without bodily wounds led to an expanded definition of trauma to include their mental wounds. Black women are by no means unique in the experience of psychic or racial trauma, but as a Black woman I take the data for inquiry from select autobiographies of Black women. Black women authors

have written how they experience traumatic violence. I choose Black women authors because Black women's experiences are too often buried, interpreted in a way that benefits others and questions, devalues, and diminishes Black women's humanity.

There is recent scholarship about Black women and violence (Jones, 2010; Levenstein, 2009; McGuire, 2010; McNeil, 2008). However, most of this work is not written from the perspective of the women whose life experiences are being described. For instance, McGuire (2010) penned an historical account of the sexual violence experienced by Black American women during the Civil Rights Movement ending in 1975 with the *Free Joan Little* movement. Jones (2010) published the second edition of her book that chronicles Black Women's labor from the time of slavery to the present. Levenstein (2009) investigates the poverty, dependence, and political power of Black American women in Philadelphia. These are only a few books about Black women, but are they *for* Black women if they are not authored *by* Black women?

Cultural nuances have a significant effect on understanding. In the novel, *Property*, Valerie Martin (2003) lays out a plausible relationship between Manon, a slave mistress and Sarah, her slave. Told from the perspective of Manon, it reflects three features that support the need for this study.

First, Manon hates her husband, his slaves, her slave and the children that her husband fathered using her slave. It never seems to occur to her that the people she hates are human beings and may not hold her in high regard. Manon's disappointment that Sarah refused to put her mistress' welfare before her own during a slave uprising is

ludicrous. After Sarah demonstrated the error in that plan, Manon decided to make her

way to the slaves' quarters. She thinks the slaves will protect her.

Second, the novel suggests that as property, Black women slaves suffered sexual

exploitation not only from men but from White women as well. Manon sexually violated

Sarah. This novelist, a White woman from New England imagines and writes that a Black

woman who was property was not only violated for the economic benefit of greater

society but for the personal pleasure of men and women who exercised their power over

her. The possibility of sexual exploitation by women is usually overlooked in accounts of

slavery.

The third and most compelling aspect of this novel is Manon's piercing response

to her husband's note encouraging her return to their home after her mother's death. She

is insulted by both her husband's pretense of caring and that he would think that she is

unaware that it is a pretense. Manon's outrage is based on her knowledge that her

husband has run his own plantation into the ground and is now trying to get his hands on

his wife's inheritance: "Brain suddenly raging, chest tight face hot" as a reaction to the

"condescending tone, the . . . charmless conceit, the element of command . . . offset by an

absurd pretense of warmth" (Martin, 2003, 74). It is comparable to the feeling of being in

the presence of colleagues who feign interest for their own gratification.

However, Black American women exercise agency by writing their own lives,

especially through narratives and autobiographies (Anderson, 2010; Bandele, 1999, 2009;

Baszile, 2008; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Chambers, 2003; Chisholm, 1970; Davis,

1989; Garfield, 2005; Guy, 2004; Harris-Perry, 2011; hooks; 2003; Ladson-Billings,

2009; Muhammad, 2009; O'Neal, 2010; Parks, 2010; Patton, 2007; Ross, 2009; Trotman, 2000; Wilson, 2007). Autobiographies are a genre of literature rich with the life experiences of Black American women. In fact, Anderson (2010) suggests that autobiography can be considered the text of the oppressed: both a way of testifying to oppression and empowering the subject through his/her cultural inscription and recognition, a politicization of the subject. And while it is understandable that traditionally autobiographies are not often used as sources of data by graduate students (Creswell, 1998), the time has come. As a Black woman I know of no safer way to preserve and forefront the life experiences of Black women. Psychological autopsies of Antoinette Davis, Antoinette Frank, Joan Little, and Crystal Mangum might be more revealing. I certainly would like to ask the questions: What were you thinking? Who did you think you were? What did it mean to you that you were a Black woman in the U. S? But this is beyond the scope of this work.

Using autobiographies for data resists *rubricization*. Black women often encounter attempts to categorize them, to see them as only a representative of a person. Rubricizing occurs often as the path of least resistance without thought rather than consciously choosing to meet others as unique individuals. Whether conscious or unconscious rubricizing is an attempt to erase or annihilate the individuality and uniqueness of the target and is therefore violent. Who actually thinks "I will not see this person as a unique human being?" It is a facet of psychic racial trauma. It disrespects the person by ignoring or denying that the person's self, identity, and history has value. Humanist psychologist, Abraham Maslow (1982) holds that we all resist being

rubricized. "Understanding a person is not the same as classifying or rubricizing him" (p. 130). Black women's life experiences must be taken seriously because until we understand their human potential their real, tragic, and unique experiences will happen to millions of others.

It is imperative that the definition of violence avoids our dichotomization of violence as being masculine and victim as feminine (Garfield, 2005; Perillo, et al., 2003; Richie, 1996). For me, the autobiography of Crystal Mangum, of Duke Lacrosse fame, the cases of Antoinette Frank, disgraced New Orleans police officer and Antoinette Davis, who sold her three year old daughter to a man, who murdered her daughter, scream "study me." Each of these lives deserves to be studied, but these lives are beyond the scope of this research. The women selected for this research report specific incidents of violence through autobiographies; describing how the autobiographers see themselves before the trauma, as well as after the trauma.

Black women are assailed by enduring negative images: the strong Black woman, the angry Black women, the castrating and demanding woman, and recently the deraced Black woman. Beaubouef-Lafontant (2009) offers a plausible interpretation of Black women's ongoing exposure to the image of strength. As a group Black women are positioned in such a manner that encourages the embrace of social lies as their own reality. Black women's vulnerability to covert oppression is not only a material reality, but a psychologically invasive practice.

Assigning meaning to the experiences of others may overlook some problems and create other problems. For instance, while the traces left behind on the blackboard are a

clever metaphor for traces on the psyches of students, this image assumes that students trust an instructor who would intentionally write a wrong answer on the board (Hinds, 2010). Other possible explanations are overlooked. Have the students experienced reluctance on the part of this teacher to accept correction? Have students learned that their attempts at self-expression are unheard? Have they noticed unintentional errors that caused them to feel disinclined to raise their disagreement with authorities? Whether misunderstood, unheard, or disregarded, Black women must be critics of their lived experiences in their own voices.

Focus of the Study: Focus on the Traces

One concept worthy of consideration here is the phenomenon of mistakes of philanthropy. Unintended harm is harmful to the psyche of the target. Dossa (2010) discusses this violence of misunderstanding. She explains how organizations may not make the efforts necessary to understand the historical and political contexts of conflict as relates to Afghan women who have witnessed trauma. She argues that everyday life might be the context through which we can best understand the social phenomenon and how everyday life easily serves as a site of healing and recovery. It is where the witnesses of trauma are. She queries how to "witness trauma and suffering without victimizing the people who have been subject to violence" (p. 9). The reality for postwar women and children of Afghanistan is poverty without sufficient food ". . . the harsh realities of Afghan life are not represented visually or in the talk on malaria . . ." (p. 10). Her example demonstrates how intentions to provide aid translate to concentration on malaria prevention, inappropriately suggesting the purchase of mosquito nets for mothers who

have multiple purposes for the limited space and no beds and sleep on the floor. If the mothers could afford the nets, where would they use them? The Black women in this study need an interpretation that understands the cultural nuances of the women living through the violence. This is how it relates to the experiences in my study. Understanding the cultural nuances can diminish diversions and facilitate the intended aid.

A way of studying trauma without further traumatizing lives is the use autobiographies for data. The information is provided by the women themselves and focuses on specific incidences of violence as the women perceive them. Dossa (2010) argues that "the foundational baseline of knowledge on the women of Afghanistan must come from the women themselves. Their context-specific understanding of their experiences … must be validated and harms … publicly recognized to generate a different kind of discourse . . ." (p. 14). Both Afghan women and Black American women must be heard beyond their images. Many speak for both groups, and yet the women themselves remain unheard. Looking at and learning to listen to the women's everyday lives as described by the informants will help researchers better understand their suffering.

For Black women the legacy of slavery in the U.S. and the experience of Jim Crow legislation continue to promote negative life experiences. Cross (2003) suggests that the U.S.'s historical connection to slavery is "problematic and dubious and that contemporary systemic causal factors are repeatedly underestimated . . . myths about Black history are another form of violence . . . directed toward Black culture and Black people as a whole" (p. 69). The dehumanization of Black individuals by slavery still

affects the Black community. Cross calls for a first hand study of the historical record to counter the violence being perpetrated on the very people one professes to help.

The meanings of violence in Black women's lives is often buried because Black women tend to be in situations where they are outnumbered, or because their versions do not apply to the writer or the writer's audience, or because the writer is dealing with or through her own defense mechanisms. Garfield's (2005) interviewee describes her experience as indignities that diminish her sense of self. Amanda's own experiences of being violated over years coupled with being a Black woman have:

> crystallized it more and more . . . It is the indignities, physical or otherwise, of being a black woman, and not just a black person or a woman that has been my struggle. . . . Indignities are something that attacks black women's being, and every day it just eats away at you. (Garfield, 2005, pp. 242–243)

In this study, a select group of working class Black women have written about their experiences of psychic trauma. This study is not solely of racial trauma because no evidence indicates that all trauma suffered by Black women is related to race. "Published autobiographies provide a readily available source of data for the discerning qualitative researcher" (Denzin, 1989). Using autobiographies avoids the risk of opening old wounds or the messiness of dealing with repressed memories.

Autobiography: The Scene of the Crime

Autobiographies are used here as crime scenes, sources for clues leading to primary evidence. Crime scenes are laden with clues about who committed the crime (Douglas & Olshaku, 1995). Research could lead to multiple and conflicting understandings of the autobiographies. Three of Denzin's (1989) four interpretive

approaches regard autobiography as fiction. However, the fourth, the sociological

approach, holds that whether the author's subject is the life experiences of self or the life

experiences of other(s) "have no sense of autobiography as fiction" (Denzin, 1989, p. 38).

I employ the latter sociological approach wherein the author's life-experiences are taken

seriously, assumed to exist in the real world, and merge intellectual history of personal

life with the world of ideas (Lemert, 1986, as cited in Denzin, 1989).

The self is a major component in autobiography. It is important to understand

autobiography as an attempt to contact the constantly evolving self; the only self we can

know changes as we learn more about it (Eakin, 1980) like Penelope's web trying to

create and destroy itself simultaneously. Eakin (1999) describes autobiographical writing:

"even when we are our own subjects, our own informants, there is always a gap or

rupture that divides us from the knowledge that we seek" (pp. 39–40). Autobiography is a

testimony to one's selfhood mediated by cultural models, discourses, and lived

experience, potentially limited by what one knows how to say (Eakin, 1999).

The association of autobiography with fiction creates a problem for this work.

Distancing oneself from the words of the informants may seem reasonable. However, the

distancing may not include bracketing out the pervasive negative images. Additionally,

focus on learning from our mistakes creates new opportunities for observing, critiquing

and understanding (Delind, 2003). Failed attempts and disappointments are better

understood as invitations to self-reflection, to re-examine personal assumptions, the

context of our actions, and not only the observed, but what is missed. By learning to

listen differently and asking questions that disturb commonplace understandings one

moves into new spaces. We destroy this idea of the "all-knowing, expert outsider" who knows best (Delind, 2003, pp. 350–351). New or altered awareness enables a person to see and present oneself clearer, and less incomplete.

Autobiographical reading calls into question understandings of subjectivity. For example, Suetsugu (2010) uses her childhood experiences to conceptualize her subjectivity and consequently her contribution to dividing practices provoked by difference. As Suetsugu sees it "dividing practices prevail because they are adopted not only by those who exclude but also be those who are excluded" (p. 403). In this study, the autobiographers recognize now if not earlier to value independence and self-sufficiency as a result of power inequity that Suetsugu does not acknowledge.

There are reasons why women are silenced. Women may be silenced if the communities the women live in do not want to hear about their pain and suffering. It is painful to listen to someone who is hurting (Jack, 2001). Or perhaps the women are individualized, de-contextualized, and de-politicized to sever any trace of responsibility for oppression on the part of the dominant group (Wagner & Magnusson, 2005). The women are left with few options: fragmenting or numbing to survive. Employing individualistic strategies to address collective and political problems leads to symptoms like dissociation, flashbacks, hyper-vigilance, low self-esteem and a pervasive sense of shame which negatively influence the ability to learn (Horsman 1999, as cited in Wagner & Magnusson, 2005). Treating the aftermath of trauma as private and personal matters, defines difference and sickness and pressures victims to remain silent. Work in classrooms grounded in everyday realities may trigger emotional reactions.

There are sound reasons why Black women might be reasonably moved to anger (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Parks, 2010). Poverty, ignorance, experiences of disrespect in welfare centers, living in tenements, living with rats and roaches, inadequate schools, malevolent or inept teachers, dealing with pimps, drug addiction, opportunistic preachers and community leaders, corrupt lawyers, and insensitive and illogical court system and men of two races who treat them like sexual chattel and a beast of burden are all conditions for which anger is a reasonable response. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009) also lists the devaluation evident in the lack of outrage over Black women's mistreatment and their continued misrepresentation as other than sympathetic and multidimensional.

Self-sufficiency and independence are necessary traits for Black women. Black women must be consistently in control of their lives (Parks, 2010). Parks sees the negative images as changing. She recognizes that many children are reared depending on their mother's anger as a place of safety. For instance, when a child is attacked verbally in school, she relies on her mother's anger for safety. The assumption here is that a child's mother's anger is a place of safety. I have difficulty accepting Black women's resilience, resourcefulness, and strategic thinking as sufficient to hold off the harm of racial trauma victimized Black children are likely to encounter.

Black women are still injured by their social environment. It is important to remember the two-way nature of people's relationships with society: "Our subjectivity both conforms to as well as challenges the parameters set by our social settings" (Beaubouef-Lafontant, 2009, p. 8). Individual attempts to make meaning of individual lives often fail to meet the conceptions of others. Black women's subjectivity contains

multiply shifting and contradictory stances which should be reflected in the images of Black women.

Important to the idea of subjectivity is a strategy of the oppressed, called dissemblance (Clark Hines, 1989). Dissemblance focuses on the agency of individual Black women who produce their own invisibility to protect aspirations and feelings that could easily be shattered by members of White society, and by Black men. For example, the behavior of early twentieth century migrants "suggests the subjectivity of Black women is not reducible to and cannot be directly inferred from the outwardly conforming behavior" (Beaubouef-Lafontant, 2009, p. 39). Dissemblance is a response to exploitive situations.

The fact that the selected authors write about the violence in their lives indicates a failure of Maslow's lowest level of needs satisfaction—for safety. For some, the violence also indicates the failure to belong and achieve the acceptance of others. I use a psychological autopsy approach to probe the circumstances the authors describe. In lieu of an interview protocol I use the levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory as a lens to code the data. There is a succinct description of self-actualization in Chapter II.

Trauma is derived from the Greek *trauma* meaning wound (Hess, 2008; Schwab, 2010). Once taken to refer to bodily injury; it has evolved to include injury to the mind, body, and spirit. Three important points about trauma underlie this study: first, trauma is a kind of psychological wound (Freedman, 2006, p. 106), second, "not all traumatized people recover, and third, those who do recover retain a trace" (Hess, 2008). If trauma can occur from simply listening to others tell of their trauma, there exists significant

unrecognized trauma. Hess calls this trauma, *indirect trauma*, which refers to the sense of

despair and despondence that can become instilled in those who learn about others'

traumatic experiences. Trauma is described in more detail in Chapter II.

Researcher's Personal Autobiographical Perspective

As a nontraditional student I have taken most of my courses while I worked full

time. Sometimes the job required that I work rotating shifts. Formerly employed as a

criminal investigator I learned to make the most of the ability to mirror what people said

in a way that respected their value. This mirroring is a form of listening. This was an

interesting position from which to study myself and others. Over the decades, from

multiple sources some maxims formed. The first principle combines two ideas.

Encounters are consequential; changing the world depends on personal change. The

second principle is that everyone has knowledge. I believe the only attitude or behavior I

can change is my own. I strive to carry myself in such a way that others sometimes

imitate. The imitation may be unconscious. Second, I approach others believing that

everyone with whom I come in contact knows something that I do not know. Through

careful, respectful and critical listening (and reading) I can learn something from

everyone, while never expecting to know everything.

One of the most impressive compliments I ever received was written in a letter of

recommendation on my behalf. It still touches me to think how the administrator actually

reflected a quality that he saw in me. He wrote that he was impressed with the way that I

endeavor to insure that institutions are truly responsive to the people they profess to

serve. I am a Black woman, but I am human first. It would be pointless to try to hide that

I am a Black or female. The pernicious images of *Sapphire*, *Jezebel,*, and *Mammy* threaten to humiliate me. Critical reading and critical listening have bolstered my confidence so that I do not so readily internalize the unrelenting blows to my sense of self. I recognize that the elements of multiple marginalizations cannot be ranked and are experienced simultaneously.

Though exposed to the negative stereotypical images of Black women, I can endure blows gracefully. If in places in this dissertation I sound angry, it may be because I am. Even though "the angry Black woman" is a racist-sexist stereotype there are reasonable conditions for anger. For example, questions framed in such a way that the answer only affirms or denies the interrogator's perspective offend me. Such questions do not engender mutual respect and mutual respect is essential to dialogue. In my experience such questions tend to be posed by women who are White. Perhaps a reason that some men do not pose such questions is because they are comfortable in their superiority. A colleague once commented that he would not worry that feminists would take any power from him until they agreed on something other than wanting men to be more like women

In some positions, like law enforcement, the power that males have allows them to say things (within range of my hearing): that at just under six feet tall and 130 pounds, that he would rather have no back up than to partner with me. In the case of men, however, there is latitude to prove oneself. In one case, I earned respect by being attentive as the officer's voice started to reveal impending trouble. When he called for help other officers could not confirm his physical location. He was grateful that I responded and intervened on his behalf. For another, respect accrued merely because I

did not share at roll call that he locked me in a garage when he responded to back me on a call. He worried that a woman would betray his confidence.

At other times I may strike you as cold or aloof, a strong Black woman. No apology: Strength is often a reasonable condition for survival. My trust is earned. The words "trust me" trigger a wave of fear that washes over me that is no less frightening than looking down the barrel of a gun. Experience has taught me that the only reason to ask someone to trust you is when trust is not earned. When conditions feel right I can be vulnerable.

A frustrating manifestation of racism is recognizing discrimination but lacking the evidence to prove it. That frustration can be equated with my account of the "jezebel" image. I am sure that my moral character has at times and places been called into question (a jezebel) but if you cannot prove it, you will never know. The mythical images of Black womanhood are distortions of truths. Self-knowledge and understanding the myths strip them of the power to control.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, I look at research that authenticates the theme of psychic and racial trauma in the lives of Black women. It demands an understanding of psychic trauma that extends the evolution of trauma beyond the physiological (Freedman, 2006). Racial trauma narrows the literature on psychic trauma specifically to the complexity of the unique human life in preparation for application to the selected autobiographies. Self-actualization is described as I propose using it here. Critical race testimony and autobiography each represent an explanation of the author's perspective. Autobiography is the appropriate genre to serve as key informant.

The Psychic Nature of Trauma

Benefits accrue from the medical model of trauma. Psychiatrist, Judith Herman's (1992) medical model of trauma (1992) is helpful in diagnoses. Diagnoses are required for insurance benefits, financial help with seeking therapy. Working class and poor women may not realize this benefit. Herman also describes trauma as extraordinary not because of rare occurrence but because traumas "overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life" (p. 33). It does not exclude Herman's work from this paper but it does require careful critical reading of her work.

Expanding on Herman's (1992) work, Hess (2008) contributes several points on the nature of trauma that are worthwhile for the purposes of this work. Not all people

who are traumatized recover and of those who do recover, recovery is not complete; trauma leaves a trace. This trace can be imagined as the writing that is left on a blackboard after it is erased (Hinds, 2010). It is visible and can be interpreted, as everything is, through the lived experiences of the reader. Hess also points out the possibility of collective trauma in which whole communies or countries are harmed. Admitting that Black women constitute a collective group makes it easier to imagine that they are vulnerable to collective traumatic harm that if recovered leaves a trace.

Also useful is Hess's (2008) treatment of terms and theories. She points out two kinds of violence that can be internalized through social formation: systemic violence and traumatic violence. Systemic violence occurs as part of people's daily lives and may be internalized by victim, oppressor, or both. Traumatic violence (the violence that leads to psychic wounding) is severely harmful and can produce psychological, physical, and spiritual symptoms that break down the self. But while Hess works toward exploring the Christian responsibility to the traumatized, this study turns to the effects of Black women's experiences of trauma as told in first person accounts.

As previously indicated in the discussion of traces on the African American psyche, trauma has significant effects beyond physical damage. Schwab (2010) suggests two notions that are helpful to this project: soul murder and trans-generational trauma. Torture and rape are the two most prominent forms of soul murder (Schwab, 2010) because unlike other wounds the victim's suffering resists the normal healing of time. Healing is further hindered when the victims are not allowed to mourn (Butler, 2006).

Soul murder refers to killing the most essential part of a person leaving only her body alive. Significant damage occurs for perpetrators, victims, and witnesses.

It is important to consider two things when thinking of trauma to understand the psychic trauma experienced by Black women descended from slavery and Jim Crow. First, one does not completely recover from trauma. Second, trauma can be transmitted through generations (Schwab, 2010). Working from a new perspective, not of the tortured but of the torturer (and the heir of the torturer), Schwab claims that trauma is transmitted trans-generationally. This idea of the transmission of trauma through generations is significant for the descendants of slavery and Jim Crow. "Trauma as a mode of being violently halts the flow of time, fractures the self, and punctuates memory and language" (p. 42). It is also important to understand that to diminish trauma it is as important to identify and treat the trauma of those who perpetrated the violence as those who suffered it. Treating the victim does not heal the perpetrator.

A helpful feminist criticism of clinical trauma theory is related to the focus on the victim rather than the offender, on the individual rather than the society that created the context. The definition of trauma is thereby expanded. First, insidious traumas describe those behaviors that "do violence to a person's soul or spirit" (Root, 1992). Second, indirect or secondary traumas are suffered by witnesses rather than the victim (Root, 1992).

The idea of the traces left when teachers erase what they have written on blackboards is a very apt metaphor for the traces left on students' minds. Hinds's (2010) article illustrates an important notion for this work. Critical race theory can be used in the

classroom. However, Hinds too quickly assumes that his intentional error is accepted as a truth to his students. It could have been accepted not as truth but as necessary to survival. After all, what does it benefit a student to know that an educator has made an error if pointing out that error results in a lowered grade, a more troubled relationship, and a more difficult existence for the student? A part of the African American psyche that Hinds describes includes the knowledge that survival in our society is often made more difficult by pointing out the errors of those in authority to those in authority.

The literature on trauma holds an interesting dilemma for Black women. While Black women's life experiences are often the data, it is presented in a way that ensures that an individual Black woman does not engender sympathy or support and cannot be an innocent victim (Ladson-Billings, 2009). While recent writing interprets history for the good of greater (White) society, what does it say about the Black women subjects?

A perspective that concentrates on the greater good does not acknowledge the importance of Little's self-conscious decision to turn herself in while she was offered opportunities to leave, not only North Carolina but the country to evade prosecution (Davis, 1998; McNeil, 2008). Through her testimony, she "framed self-defense in ways that contested stereotypical understandings of the black self, and foregrounded both personal responsibility and integrity" (McNeil, 2008, p. 237). Little took responsibility for her body and would not consider it separate from her dignity.

It is important to understand the Little case in its sociohistorical context (Davis, 1998). Little was charged with first degree murder in a town where everyone knew each other. A member of the Grand Jury that indicted her was a relative of the man she was

charges with murdering. Evidence suggested that she was the only woman, prisoner or guard in the jail. She was kept under lock and key and the decedent had the key. The weapon was an ice pick that the decedent kept in his desk. The decedent was naked from the waist down and his pants were not located for three weeks. There was a camera in her cell and she was not even allowed privacy to shower. There is sufficient evidence to suspect that the deep brown color of her skin and the texture of her hair caused her to appear at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

Davis's (1998) article focuses on the rape of Black women but not without an empathetic concern for Little. Davis's article is from a plea for attention to Little's position, as well as, for an understanding of the precarious position of Black girls and women in Eastern North Carolina in the 1970's.

McNeil's (2008) article about Joan Little's trial provides a more humane and comprehensive examination of the defendant in the trial as well as those who supported her. For example, McNeil captures something as small as an issue with the pronunciation of Little's name that has significant racial import. Spelling her name *Joan* though her name is pronounced Joann might be the direct results of having a White clerk misspell her name on her birth certificate. McGuire's (2010) historical account carefully outlines how organizations participated or refrained as resources to Black women who were victims of sexualized racism. Whether because she did not see the significance, Little's humanity, or missed the point altogether, McGuire's book does not mention this dilemma.

Racial Trauma

Myths allow two possibilities for Black women: the "good" (read strong, maternal, hardworking, devoted to family, and quiet) and "bad" (read ugly, lascivious, lazy, negligent, emasculating, and loud). Too often what people think is common knowledge about Black women is rooted in these two sides of myth. Psychology literature rarely examines the difficulties that Black women live unless "their losses somehow affect the greater segments of society. . . . For psychologists, Black women represent an understudied, overlooked, and distorted topic" (Jackson & Greene, 2000, p. xiii).

Jackson and Greene (2000) suggest three reasons for the dearth of knowledge about the experiences of Black women. First there exists a bifurcation of the dual status of Black women that seems to demand that a Black woman is sometimes Black and sometimes a woman. Second unwillingness to acknowledge differences within the Black community persists. Third there is still failure to significantly acknowledge the similarities of Black women with other groups.

The nature of racial trauma has evolved. It is no longer legal or popular to overtly display racism. Consequently, racial trauma is often covert. Racial trauma, the physiological, psychological and emotional damage that results from harassment and/or discrimination (Carter, 2007) continues to adversely shape the psyches of Black women. Not everyone internalizes negative life events as traumatic, but the more one experiences such events and the more one is confronted with hostility the more likely one is to be traumatized. For Black women, negative images continue to harm the collective.

Since a single trait is not studied in isolation we cannot study one's state of mind without consideration of the person who possesses or sufficiently understands the experience. Understanding complicated lives of complicated people requires analyses that consider them within the context of families, communities, and societies (Garfield, 2005). It is not as though Black women are immune to the influences of U.S. society and control the key elements of their behavior, personality, and experiences. A study must include the influences of others, and their views of themselves across and within a variety of domains. Without such we only have part of a picture.

Economic trauma refers to the interference with one's ability to meet one's housing and or employment needs. Formerly, as a criminal investigator collaborating with other criminal investigators, social workers and mental health professionals trying to help each other with "the hard cases," it became clear that a few families (and those few intermarried or cohabitated) in the community were familiar and often "the hard cases" for these professionals. The same family names popped up in files from every service institution in town. But it stands to reason because they lived at the periphery of society. It seemed that each family had several members who were mental health clients. Each family had members who were or had been clients or subjects of investigations in the Department of Social Services. These families were usually on the extremely low end of the socioeconomic continuum and had several family members whose criminal records ruled out their living in federally assisted housing. These families of "hard cases" moved into usually substandard housing in the neighborhoods when such housing was available. Sometimes this housing had just reached the level of substandard and time combined

with tenants who are unable to harmoniously co-exist with neighbors led to condemnation.

Consider the results of these "hard cases" moving into a working class neighborhood where years of care and compassion hold the neighborhood together. Their habits may seem irrational and/or irritating to working class families who have for years lived there in harmony. Remember the "hard cases" are frequenting several community agencies. There is always the problem of school failure, whether failure is caused by poor attendance (frequent moves), little regard for the value of an education, or because of poor schools.

Unable to withstand the ravages of so many unmet needs, most of the neighborhoods are overrun with drug and criminal activity. Many of the working class people in the neighborhoods have invested decades in their homes and families and cannot afford to escape neighborhood blight by moving. They are now on the periphery of society. They have needs that the community does not address. Moreover, living at the periphery of society means not really mattering: confusing the underserved with the undeserving, a manifestation of violence that needs to be addressed because it affects so many areas of women's lives. In this case, this could be called economic trauma (Daniel, 2000).

Educational trauma refers to the extent to which the opportunity for meaningful education may be hampered. As a doctoral student studying deviance, there was an apparent diversity in the approximately twenty students: the professor and the majority were White women of different ages and grade levels (advanced undergraduate students

and master's level students). There were approximately 6 women of color (5 of African descent and 1 of Asian descent). There was one White male, master's level student. Class discussions seemed to constantly return to comments that men should be more like women. Returning after missing a weekly class for a family medical emergency about the third week, the composition of the class was drastically different. The only diversity to this classroom of White women (who still expressed the hope that men would just be more like women) was the lone White man, the woman undergraduate of Asian descent, and me, the Black woman doctoral student. The problem here is that it did not seem to be worthy of notice that these four young Black women had decided the third or fourth week of class to no longer attend. Realizing that dropping a class at this point in the class was financially costly, it raised questions for me. My cultural sensitivity drove me to realize several reasons why someone should be interested in knowing what happened. First, as a mother, I wonder if these students had anyone with whom to discuss the circumstances of their decision. Did they talk among themselves? Did they have a connection to professionals on campus? Was there anyone to hear their concerns? Second, as a nontraditional student, I recognize the high financial cost of their untimely departure. And third, as an academic advisor, retention through graduation of underrepresented students is a priority. If university administrators heard what these students had to say, the administrators would be in position to better understand why so many students do not persist until after the semester break.

I need to hear firsthand what Black women say about their experiences. O'Neal (2010) stabbed a teacher with a pencil. She explains that she was expelled from school

and how it inconvenienced her. Yet, she does not remember the teacher's name or tell what effect it had on him. What could we learn from what Antoinette Frank says from reading her words? Frank is on death row in Angola Prison convicted of murder. She was convicted of murdering her New Orleans police officer partner and her off duty employers while she robbed their business.

My previous employment as a police officer taught me expect to be called by some other squad to search some nasty drunk woman that male officers preferred not to touch, or being chosen to stay late because of a project that required a female officer when that project was dangerous or undesirable. Understand that there was no reciprocal courtesy that I would not have to search the men I arrested, no matter how nasty or what size (officers who knew me did, however, offer me this respect and more). What matters here is that this was not expected of White women officers.

It creates a specific ethical issue for a woman, if when she turns to the authorities for help after death threats from her estranged husband and the abduction of her children, she meets with slow inefficient response (in the failure to file appropriate reports to federal authorities). Eventually, a law enforcement agent suggested that she act as a decoy to sit in a parking lot to attract her estranged husband, who was plotting to kill her (Muhammad, 2009).

I use a conceptual framework that stretches the idea of a psychological autopsy to explore autobiographies for evidence of the maximal development of human potential. The psychological autopsy was developed in California in response to suicides. As the victim/perpetrator of suicide is not available for interview, investigators attempt to

reconstruct the victim/perpetrator's frame of mind at and around the time of death. It is reasonable to try to expand the use of the procedure.

The autobiographies used are authored by Black American women. I find clues to the degree of self-actualization in the authors' words. Properly organized these are the thoughts that underlie the first chapters of my dissertation. The autobiographies were selected based on the various authors' experiences of violence and because the authors are not known as firsts**.** Black women who are known as "firsts" seem to be publicized as a model or pattern and are not recognized for their own worth. For instance, a reference to Condoleezza Rice's (2010) autobiography upset the Black women in a developmental reading class, because the women (who were the majority) resented any comparison. The selected authors have published memoirs, legacies of violence, as guides for others. Each tells her unique experience of violence: the experiences of Asha Bandele, Mildred Muhammad, Arlether Wilson, and Stacey Patton seem to span the range of experiences of Black women but could never be generalized to represent all Black women. In *Rewriting the Script* (2007), Arlether Wilson uses her life story to counter the media tendency to sensationalize incidences of domestic and sexual abuse. Wilson proposes that it would be better to focus on educating the public over pity. Wilson details her childhood of abuse where her mother is a major contributor to her psychological violation. Her mother's disappearance (explained to Wilson as death) result in Wilson being turned over to Mother Brown, a foster mother whose interest seems to be financial. Two of Wilson's childhood friends die young: the first, eleven year old Wilson's first experience of death

involves Wilson's discovery of the body terminated early by leukemia and she witnessed her second little friend's death in a fire set by a man in her friend's mother's life.

Wilson admits, "There are millions of women who have gone through similar and even worse circumstances throughout their lives . . ." (p. 6). However, we make choices based on our experiences and have final say over the outcome of our lives. Wilson's mother allowed boyfriends to babysit her children. When a boyfriend molested Wilson, the mother was negligent in her response. Later, when Wilson became pregnant, the mother accused Wilson for "luring" him.

In *That Mean Old Yesterday* (2007), Patton parallels her abusive adoptive mother with slavery. In so doing, she opens the window for African American families to reconsider the effects of corporal punishment on their children. She explains how physical violence left scars that she could touch, but the violence to her psyche left an intangible internal hole. She understood her world as "wanting to keep [her] soul frozen in time" (p. 79).

Patton's adoption fed her feelings of abandonment and isolation. If, she thought, her birth parents had not abandoned her, she could never have been adopted. Her adoptive mother kept her from playing with children outside her adoptive family insuring Patton would not disclose the truth of her scars and wounds. When the family gathered, as for holidays, her adoptive mother spoke for her. "No one ever heard my voice. I always respected and never crossed boundaries. I spoke when spoken to and came when called" (p. 81). She felt even more isolated because she shared no common history with

her adoptive family. For instance, when families laugh at some incident they experienced, she knew nothing of it and they knew nothing of her past.

In fact, Patton struggled daily to make meaning of her life—to define her strength, tenacity and identity as a black girl. "I felt a deep, deep gash in my soul that I couldn't touch or adequately describe . . . Having no clue who I was or where I had come from made me feel my life was meaningless" (p. 78).

In judicial trauma institutions like the police, courts, and the department of social services that should help fail. Some of the authors' links to violence were not the direct result of their mother's actions; they married violence. For instance Mildred Muhammad is often only known through her ex-husband, John, the alias "DC Sniper." In *Scared Silent* (2008), Muhammad clarifies how she was a victim of domestic abuse whose pleas for help were denied because she had no physical scars. Ironically, the same authorities who failed her would later try to use her as bait to capture the "DC Sniper." While physical abuse can cause trauma, emotional and psychological abuse cause trauma.

Though not physically scarred, Muhammad was wounded psychologically to the extent she experienced a mind/body split similar to that experienced by those subjected to long time physical abuse. At the same time, she searched for her children in order to provide for them.

In *The Prisoner's Wife*, Asha Bandele (1999) offers a love story of her marriage to a Black man incarcerated for a violent felony. However, in *Something Like Beautiful* (2008), Bandele explains the negative effects of her marriage for her daughter as well as herself. She passes on some wisdom that came to her through her experiences. Bandele

originally failed to see the similarities between her situation and that of the stereotypical single Black mothers who she held at a distance mentally.

Bandele did not realize that when she walked down the street, no one knew her as any different from any other Black woman who walked down the street alone. She failed to see herself sitting in the doctor's waiting room as alone as every other Black woman who went to the obstetrician's office alone. Eventually, she came to understand that she was being judged based on the visible. Consequently, she longed to be known as different, not someone used and abandoned, she wanted what she thought would be stability.

She also felt the strain of conjugal visits controlled by the authorities who kept her husband confined. She and anything that she brought to the prison was searched. Her most intimate plans with her husband could be taken away at will. The result of the events surrounding her marriage and the birth of her daughter were sufficient to lead to a mind/body split.

From my generation another cohort of authors shares understandings of violence. Debra Dickerson chose the military as a way to meet basic and psychological needs. Patrice Gaines reveals her understanding of who she was and who she was becoming. Janet McDonald describes her reality growing up in the projects.

The autobiographies have been read and reread and coded based on Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs. The phenomenological data to be mined within the autobiographies consist of characteristics of self-actualized people. Self-actualizing people listen to their own voices, take responsibility, are honest, work hard, and find out

who and what they are both regarding her mission in life and what she likes or dislikes. The obstacles that keep some young Black women from realizing their human potential must be identified before they can be diminished.

I believe that one of the factors in my "between positions" status is my identity as Black woman. It is easy for me to be taken as one of the women of whom I write. I say *taken* because sometimes and in some ways I am or was one of the women of whom I write. My life's desire, personal, professional, and academic is to weaken the obstacles that keep some young Black women from realizing their human potential. Weakening these obstacles, first, benefits these young women, second, benefits society by increasing the number of productive contributing members in the community, and third, hopefully, these new contributing citizens help others to maximize their human potential.

Daniel (2000) further considered image distortion as trauma. The distortion of physical images to look grotesque successfully sparked self-hatred for Black Americans and a sense of superiority for White Americans. For some Blacks the image distortion results in psychological trauma. The images of Black women reflect their relative value in a racist American society. The images of "Mammy," "Jezebel, and "Sapphire" have been updated. The updated images include the mentally unstable Black woman who justifies being dismissed or ignored, the affirmative action person who is the recipient of unmerited compensation (Welfare Queen), the Black woman who is responsible for taking Black men's jobs and harms the Black family, and the deraced woman, seen as just a woman. The de-raced woman is the only image which allows the Black woman to be seen as a victim.

An in depth consideration of the racial trauma Black women may suffer is essential to a study of how specific Black women negotiate the trauma in their lives. Daniel asserts that while many of Black women's life experiences and life memories are directly linked to race and racism, psychological literature "fails to take racism into account as a locus of traumatic experiences for African American women" (p. 126). Daniel's (2000) offering of examples of traumatic racial memories help to clarify the differences in life experiences of trauma for some Black women. Her examples include sexual trauma, actual and threatened violence and trauma, law enforcement and judicial trauma, medical trauma, trauma in educational settings, economic trauma, and trauma associated with social activism. Current versions of White men who abuse power may be intensified by childhood trauma involving White men's predatory sexual behavior toward Black women. Black parents justifiably warned their children of the dangers of expecting that those law enforcement officers who have taken an oath to protect and serve will in fact do so. This example takes into consideration the disrespect toward Blacks and demeaning lectures by judges and the consequences of anger, anxiety, and avoidance. Medical trauma may have resulted from memories of loss of loved ones who were turned away from medical care or forced to drive unnecessary distances as a result of segregation. Additional medical trauma transpired from premature hospital discharges, inappropriate medication, poor care, neglect, no information, conflicting information, and the rude treatment of care providers. Trauma in educational settings was produced in segregated schools. "The overwhelming majority of African Americans have not received the same quality of education as Whites (inferior structures, outdated and inadequate

teaching materials)" (p. 139). Also references to "cultural deprivation" can be experienced as psychologically harmful. It conveys the message of inferiority. It is "a particularly distressing and demeaning label." Some teachers treated children as they were labeled or at least disadvantaged. Internalized racism is an unspoken part of the curriculum. Integration of schools redistributed structures and teaching materials but there are additional determinants of the quality of education.

Economic trauma refers to the overwhelming stress engendered in employment and housing. Some Black women consider themselves successful in White America. However, at what cost? Chambers (2003) interviewed Black women who she considers successful and who consider themselves successful. Some successful Black women expressed the difficulties they experience in thriving in neighborhoods where they are the "only" Black. A limitation of Chambers' book is that she deals exclusively with upper middle class women who can financially afford to leave the neighborhoods of their youth leaving so many Black women behind. Is leaving an escape? Those who leave interpret it as the result of their hard work, buying into the capitalist idea of merit. How else are Black women describing themselves? Are those who leave listening to their inner voices?

Black women authors have written in response to the negative images that persist. Parks (2010), professor of American Studies and award-winning teacher and public speaker explains that when it comes to Black women combining anger and strength has both positive and negative connotations. Protection of others is a positive use for anger. However, anger becomes negative when it is perceived as permanent and suggests a danger of acting out against White people. When one perceives Black women as

perpetually angry they rob individual Black women of their emotional nuance and intelligence: "The image of the out-of-control anger is dangerous to Black women" (p. 120). For example, a school administrator may see no need to question a White student who fought with a Black student even after the Black student asks why?

The image of the angry Black woman is often that of out of control, unjustified anger. Parks (2010) holds that some Black women use their anger instrumentally, as men have, to bring social change into existence. I concur with Parks's assertion that no one is angry all the time. Additionally, anger is "a reasonable response to some conditions" (p. 117). The conditions that Parks refers to are all economic. Anyone would be angry if they were stuck in a slum building in an unsafe neighborhood. Would it not make anyone angry to have to drag her baby's father to court monthly to try to garner support for her child? Working all month but not making enough to pay bills can lead to anger. Or being asked or told to "skin and grin" to assure others that you are happy is likely to trigger an angry response: "Sometimes Black women do not perform the self-disarming signals that other women do" (p. 118). Anger is a multifaceted human condition.

Despite Jackson and Greene's (2000) contention that we need to understand how Black women are like other groups, we need to clearly delineate how they are different in this society from their White counterparts. Trotman (2000) asserts that the more existential, humanistic and feminist approaches to psychotherapy are "less potentially harmful to Black women clients seeing White therapists." She offers four categories that contribute to the uniqueness experiences of Black women that differ from the experiences of White women. First, physical characteristics, such as skin color, lips, and hair textures,

may be the basis of adverse treatment by one's own family or the Black community and are often based on stereotypes. Second, historical, social, and cultural dynamics, like the African origins of oral traditions, polyrhythmic musical influences, Black English, and extended family has major impact on cultural understanding. This impact is found in a woman's patterns of behavior and responses toward people and objects that affect fulfillment of self. Emotional and intellectual characteristics like the image of "Black superwoman" (p. 255) are influenced by differences in incidences of female-headed households, poverty, extended family traditions and the experience of the strong female role models taken to the extent of ignoring one's own needs. Third, gender roles and intimate relationships differ: more Black women have worked outside the home than White women and many Black women were not reared to expect that a man will take care of them. Black women who are professionals tend to balance home and work life well. Black women may experience racism as the major factor in inequality rather than sexism. Fourth, simultaneously experiencing both racism and sexism, "[Black women] were subjected to oppression no White woman was forced to endure" (p. 257). Trotman (2000) insists that the development issues of Black women cannot be accurately defined in White middle-class terms.

Accepting that Black women may experience a variety of traumas, how would Black women find competent therapy? As a psychotherapist, Daniel (2000) proposes racial trauma as a possible deterrent to successful therapy based on three considerations. First, while Blacks' very survival has been dependent on understanding Whites, legal and de facto segregation made the inverse unnecessary. Second, therapists' knowledge of the

complexity of the intersection of trauma, race, and gender is limited. And third, therapists who consciously or unconsciously collude with their patients in avoiding disclosure of life experiences with racial content or who deny the existence of racism impede the healing process. Daniel further provides several examples of racial trauma as experienced by Black women: economic trauma, medical trauma, law enforcement/judicial trauma, sexual trauma, image distortion, educational trauma, and the trauma involved in social activism. These examples easily cross the boundaries that separate them. They are often multiply experienced.

Self-actualization

Self-actualization refers to the ability of an individual to reach an assumed innate potential. It requires acceptance of an individual's humanity, as well as the individual's unique human potential. It also incorporates in its explanation that individuals are never disconnected from other humans (Goldstein, 1940; Jung, 1953; Maslow, 1993; Rogers, 1961).

Individuation refers to distinguishing between what one is and how one appears to himself and others (Jung, 1953). Individuation, only fits an understanding of self-actualization as an example of the problem. In service of individuation, Jung (1964) holds, one must listen attentively, shutting out what one thinks is right or wrong to determine what one's self really wants to do in a particular situation. This practice of shutting out what one thinks does not fit into the self-maintenance of marginalized people. Jung's emphasis on symbols, dreams, and the spiritual seems to preclude an

individual's ability to actualize their potential.[2] Goldstein (1940) already explained the inextricable link between actualization of the self only with respect to their surroundings in some degree, especially people. In fact, Goldstein held that one "must develop adjustment to others and limit himself according to the social actuality of others" (p. 201).

Frankl (1960) equates both the satisfaction of needs and reduction of tension with maintaining homoestasis, equilibrium. But it does not follow that trying to maintain equilibrium shuts out the world. Frankl does contend that self-actualization ignores one's ties to the world, like inner peace or happiness cannot be attained by seeking is an effect; and once one is actualized one is always actualized.

Cultural sensitivity demands a more humanistic psychological view of the self. Founders of humanistic psychology, Maslow, Rogers, May, Bugenthal, and Allport reestablished the study of self within the field of psychology to better understand human life and their clients (Polkinghorne, 2001). Limitations of self-actualization include acknowledging that our true selves are distorted and segments of our true selves hidden by our need of the acceptance of others and the press to conform socially. Further limiting is understanding that we know other humans based on what we perceive in others moving toward and know ourselves only as we "protect our *potential* in action" (May, 1958, as cited in Polkinghorne, 2001, p. 85). It is helpful to remember self-

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[2]Additionally, Jung's description of America as infected by the Negro is an insult to a Black woman's sense of self. Although, his body of work was popular and remains popularly accepted, such a claim illustrates a perspective I must hear but not embrace.

actualization not as an absolute state, but as "a process in which a person grows toward the ideal" (p. 84).

Rogers (1961), who introduced unconditional love and person-centered therapy, paints a picture of self-actualization in comparison to a flower. Like a flower growing to its full potential if the conditions are right, people flourish and reach their full potential when their environment is sufficient, achieving the highest level of "human beingness" that particular individual can. Maslow would later expound on the metaphor of a flower by explaining that when it comes to the education of children our goal should be to make a child the best that child is capable of being. For example, one teaches a lily to be the best lily she can be, not how to be a rose.

To some extent, one might consider the interviewees in Chambers's (2003) book self-actualized. After all, they have "transcended the values of their culture" (Maslow, 1971, p. 177). Self-actualization here is taken to mean one of the highest levels of needs, recognizing that Maslow, indeed, seemed to suggest in his posthumously published work that self-transcendence was the highest level of need. Whether calling it self-actualization or self-transcendence he refers to one attaining her maximum human potential. People who are self-actualizing listen to their own voices, take responsibility, are honest, work hard, and find out who and what they are both regarding his or her mission in life and what they like or dislike (Maslow, 1993).

Every introductory psychology textbook makes reference to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow proposed his theory of self-actualization with the hope that some philosophers would test it using scientific methods. However, limited studies of

Maslow's theory surfaced. Worthy of note is a study of Maslow's later work in which

Maslow contemplated self-transcendence (Koltko-Rivera, 2006).

Maslow (1993) specified 8 qualities of the self-actualizing moment:

1. "experiencing fully, vividly, selfishly, with full concentration and total absorption" (p. 44);

2. making the progression choice in a given number rather than the regression choice, the growth choice instead of the fear choice:

3. Letting the self emerge by listening to one's own voice, the "impulse voices" instead of "Mommy's introjected voice or Daddy's voice or to the voice of the Establishment, of the Elders, of authority, or of tradition" (p. 44);

4. Being honest rather than not, taking responsibility for one's beliefs and perspectives;

5. Being courageous, not afraid, daring to be different, unpopular, nonconformist;

6. Using one's intelligence to go through an arduous and demanding period of preparation in order to realize one's possibilities;

7. Setting up the conditions so that peak experiences are more likely by, for example, breaking up an illusion, getting rid of a false notion, learning what one is not good at, learning what one's potentialities are not;

8. Opening oneself up to one's own psychopathology' identifying defenses and finding the courage to fire them up.

Black Feminist Theory

Trying to piece together enough relevant data to quilt a self that sustains me and supports me in making a positive contribution to my world has been and continues to be excruciatingly painful, but no more painful than reading some authors. For instance reading the renowned philosopher, Carl Jung (1953), I notice that he believed that America is *contaminated* by the Negro. Reading Arendt (1970) I notice that she believed that Civil Rights leaders sought to lower the standards of colleges and universities. What I wonder is whether professors who use these celebrated scholars notice or if it matters.

Contemporary Americans, especially Black women can learn from considering the states of minds of the leaders of the Equal Rights Association: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a White well-educated feminist, and Frederick Douglas, a Black abolitionist, "the foremost male proponent of women's emancipation of the entire nineteenth century" (Davis, 2001, p. 85). My aim in this work is to focus on Stanton's "opportunistic and racist line of reasoning" (p. 71). She convinced Douglas to support her in her claim that women were entitled to the same rights as men. In her *Declaration of Sentiments* delivered at Seneca Falls Stanton argued "the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness" for "all men and women" (n. p.). However she betrayed the Black people who promoted equal rights for women because she believed that middle-class White women's suffrage was more important than abolition (*Wikipedia,* 2010). Davis describes the impact: "The Declaration all but ignored the predicament of white *(sic)* working-class women, as it ignored the condition of Black women in the South and North alike" (pp. 53–54). At the 1848 Seneca Falls Conference, which was based on abolitionist

foundations, well known abolitionist, Frederick Douglas was the only Black person

(Davis, 2001). Having encouraged her feminist friends to strongly support anti-slavery

efforts, at the end of the war, the Republican Party's praise for her "patriotic activism" (p.

73) was insufficient. Stanton thought that her support of anti-slavery earned the right to

vote for women not emancipated Blacks.

Stanton did not understand the relationship between the Republican Party and the

newly emancipated slaves. She thought the emancipation of slaves made Black men

equal to middle-class White women. When asked whether she would support suffrage at

the expense of Black men, she answered no:

> I would not trust him [the colored man] with my rights; degraded, oppressed
> himself, he would be more despotic with the governing power than ever our
> Saxon rulers are. If women are still to be represented by men, I say let only the
> highest type of manhood stand to the helm of State. (Stanton et al., as cited in
> Davis, 2001)

Stanton seems not consider the logic of raising the idea that those who are

degraded and oppressed are likely to become despotic at the realization of power of

government while struggling to free women from the oppression and degradation of her

male counterpart.

Stanton misunderstood her relationship with the Republican Party. Participating in

the struggle against slavery was a means to an end. It did not mean that she supported the

liberation of Black men or women as human beings. The Republican Party's struggle was

to ensure political control through votes.

In 1869, at the last annual meeting of the Equal Rights Association, Frederick Douglass, "the nineteenth-century's most brilliant proponent of Black liberation" (Davis, 2001, p. 86), disputed the idea of abandoning Southern Blacks in their struggle for the vote. Douglas argued that the riots in Memphis, New Orleans, and New York illustrated the urgent need of Blacks for physical safety. In 1866, in Memphis and New Orleans, "mobs burned schools, churches and Black dwellings . . . Raped singly and in groups, the Black women whose paths they crossed" (p. 79) killed and wounded mostly people who were Black and some people who were White. In New York slavery and anti-draft sentiments led to loss of lives of a thousand people (Foster, as cited in Davis, 2001). The middle-class White women represented by Stanton and Anthony could not claim that their lives were in physical danger. The end of war did not mean the end of violence for southern Blacks.

From androgyny (Bem, 1994) to new racism (Collins, 2005) my study of feminism has not satisfied my intellectual curiosity. While Bem did not held to the values of middle class White women, Collins characterized new racism through the globalization diluting the power of governments; transnationalism hiding the fact clumping of Black women and men at the bottom of the social hierarchy; and growth of mass media's manipulation' obscuring the racism that does exist. My experiences related to feminism most closely align with bell hook's (2005) interpretation:

> When I participated in feminist groups, I found that white *(sic)* women adopted a condescending attitude toward me and other non-white *(sic)* participants. The condescension they directed at black women was one of the means they employed to remind us that the women's movement was "theirs"—that we were able to

participate because they allowed it, even encouraged it: after all, we were needed to legitimate the process. (pp. 65–66)

This condescension made certain that women who were not White would not find a safe place or feel included. Susan B. Anthony's interaction with Ida B. Wells (Davis, 2001) illuminates this point. Anthony dismissed a stenographer who "refuse[d] to take dictation from a Negro woman" (p. 110) but kept her personal conviction private. For example, Anthony excluded Douglass from addressing Southern White women so they would not feel offended. In so doing she perpetuated White supremacy.

Traditional feminists did not see non-White women as equals. And though they expected Black women to provide firsthand accounts of Black experience, they felt it their right to decide if these experiences were authentic (Davis, 2001). This offense was not corrected by the multitude of feminisms that exist. The crafters of feminism in effect allow non-White and non-middle class women to describe and read their own feminisms. But these various feminisms are based on insufficient foundations. By insinuating that the traditional feminisms permit the adjunct feminisms to define themselves distorts the adjunct feminists' needs to define themselves.

Recent U.S. tragedies like Hurricane Katrina and the Duke Lacrosse case have spurred scholars to write about their understandings of the oppressions of Black women. Writing about the women called the Duke 88, Taylor and Johnson (2007) confront Duke Professors Holloway and Lubiano:

Faculty trained in the race-class-gender approach generally consider American society deeply flawed, with the majority and the powerful oppressing women, minorities, and the poor. For these faculty members, the lacrosse case was too

tempting not to exploit. And they did not hesitate to vent their class hatred against their own students. (p. 112)

Rather than the Black women as individuals, it is those who are trained in race, class, and gender who are attacked. Taylor and Johnson (2007) brilliantly take on the hiring practices of the institution; they criticize the criminal justice system and they are suspicious of the credentials of minority faculty. As they do this the Women faculty members who are Black lead the lists of offenders. They accused the faculty of exploitation but at the prestigious private school, the women actually worked to present an open dialogue about the students' thoughts concerning recent local issues of race and gender and class.

Recent feminist options serve to impress boundaries on choices. As a woman who is Black two components of that identity leave little real choice in the matter. As Holloway (2011) wrote, "My private identities are always and already public" (pp. 16–17). These components of a person's identity (i.e. not White and not male) warrant differential treatment before anything is known of the person's character. Appropriate recognition is crucial to a healthy sense of self.

The ability to negotiate boundaries between private and public spaces is a component of recognition. Harris (2011) explained "Narrative scripts attached to women and blacks become public narratives that very nearly dismiss the private" (Harris, 2011, p. 18). Experiencing a lack of private space inhibits the ability to listen to one's inner voice. Holloway's (2011) feminist observations are significant because the complex project of development of a sense of self depends on the extent to which one can

negotiate one's private choices and personalities in public. Holloway describes this negotiation:

> Privacy is a privilege that legal and medical interest in identity obscures. The very occasions that we would want to claim as insular, inviolate, and ultimately private are actually—because of the social histories of law and the practice of medicine and research—the most vulnerable, exposed, and critically public. Although a private identity seems a fundamental privilege of personhood, for some it is a fractured privilege. (p. 20)

White male heterosexuality is the norm against which different bodies are publicly visible (Holloway, 2011). For example, take Sonia Sotomayor's, a Hispanic woman, hearings to qualify her for the Supreme Court. For some, it was difficult to separate her from her ethnicity. It becomes vital that there exist a separation between public and private personhood.

Harris's (2011) history of the Combahee River Collection (CRC) provides clues to an understanding of politics surrounding Black women in feminist movements in the U.S. The CRC began in Boston, splintering in 1975 from the National Organization of Black Feminists to focus more exclusively on issues of sexuality and economic development. Realizing that the dominant political narrative did not include them because of race and gender, the founders of the organization knew that someone must contest the image of Black welfare queen. For six years, the group of highly educated Black lesbian feminists persisted. Their major accomplishments included the media exposure of the murders of 12 Black women in Boston, understandings of multiple expressions, and the assertion "that if Black women were free, then everyone would be free, because all the systems of oppression that affect Black women and women of color affect everyone else

also" (pp. 6–8). The class of these educated women might exclude them from understanding the experiences of the women who still live in the places the Combahee members left.

Notably, Harris (2011) analyzes the Black feminist political status during President Obama's tenure. Her analysis centers on the reference to current administration as *post-racial*. For President Obama's election Black women experienced the highest voter turnout rate among all racial, gender and ethnic groups. For a country that is exhausted from dealing with a racist history, a Black man in the White House could easily be seen as signaling the end of racism. Some Black women may have reason to object.

President Obama's administration is a source of frustration for some Black women because of the administration's treatment of former press secretary Desiree Rogers, failure to support former director of Georgia's USDA, and the fact that the administration did support Elena Kagan one of two Obama appointees to the Supreme Court. Highly qualified Harvard graduate Rogers was responsible for the first state dinner crashed by Tareq and Michaele Salahi. The White House would not allow Rogers to defend herself during the Secret Service investigation (Harris, 2011). Rumors indicate that her flashy dress and jewelry during an economic recession may have contributed to her departure and replacement on the same day. It concerns me that she was not allowed to defend herself, especially without sufficient evidence to determine. Every citizen should have the right to defense.

The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Georgia Director of

Rural Development Shirley Sherrod was asked for her resignation after a two and half

minute clip of a video showed that the NCAAP was a racist organization (Harris, 2011).

Within the hour, the video was on Fox News, posted online, and Sherrod received three

phone calls from the deputy undersecretary at the USDA (I hope that the video has been

taken down). Donna Brazile (CNN) watched the entire video and reported that the clip

was from 24 years prior and the less than three minute clip was taken out of context. Had

there been more Black women in Washington, perhaps someone could have helped

before Sherrod was forced to resign. *Essence* magazine published a list of 20 powerful

Black women, but only two were in cabinet or cabinet-level positions: Lisa P. Jackson,

administrator in charge of a staff of 18,000 in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

and Susan Rice, Ambassador, U.S. permanent representative to the United Nations. Both

occupy *cabinet-rank* positions (*Cabinet*, 2012). Regina Benjamin was offered the

position of Surgeon General only after Sonjay Gupta declined the offer. Harris points out

that:

> So while we see a diverse staff, there is still a telling lack of black women at the
> head of administration and in positions of true power . . . despite the numbers of
> highly qualified black women available to serve. (pp. 159–160)

When Sherrod was offered an apology and another job, she gracefully accepted

the apology and declined the job—the job left a sour taste (Harris, 2011). In reference to

the president, Sherrod explained that she knows that the president lacks experience of

grass-roots level people who live in the rural South "Let me help him a little bit with how

we think, how we live, and the things that are happening" (p. 171). The problem here is that it appears that the Obama administration either cannot or will not entertain a race-centered conversation.

Yet, Elena Kagan, whose law school hiring record lacks diversity and who took no action when Harvard law students offered a parody that portrayed minorities as stereotypes: an articulate Black woman as a Shanaynay character, a Cuban American women with balloons for large breasts, which are popped in the presentation; a Dominican American who barely speaks a word of English, and another Black women who is promiscuous with both professors and classmates (Harris, 2011):

> Kagan's disregard for legitimate concerns about racism in her school clearly demonstrates a lack of sensitivity and awareness to the experience of minority women, and her inability to find an African American professor for tenure (but 25 White men) during her time at Harvard further suggest her indifference to the creation of real diversity in the faculty or the experience of Harvard Law School. (p. 163)

In addition to Kagan's inattentiveness or awareness of issues of minority women, there seems to be a relaxation in what it means to be feminist. California attorney Rice (2012) insists on her feminism. Rice's feminism never seems to express the racial conscious component to make it Black feminism. She is affirming a commitment to feminism. Lani Guinier introduced Rice for her first law clerk position as "a livewire and a feminist" (pp. 82–83). Guinier was comfortable referring to her as feminist. The judge who grew fond of her introduced her as "his feminist law clerk" (p. 84). Though Rice's description of her feminism may is not preceded by any descriptors, I believe it is a part of naming herself to call herself feminist. Rice described her feminism: "Despite my inner feminist,

[occasional postcards depicting warring Amazons or spike-heeled dominatrixes] cracked me up and usually ended up on my refrigerator" (p. 86). These declarations of feminism were not supported by impressive evidence. It could be that what makes her refer to herself as feminist is not important for her to share. In college, Rice (2012) said "I hit the feminist road with copies of *The Feminist Mystique, Our Bodies Our Selves, and For Colored Girls who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf* and I have never looked back" (p. 48). Rice also "indulged in a brief flight of fancy over feminist studies but settled for lectures on women's roles in patriarchal society, the colonization of women's bodies, and the sociological dynamics of the Salem witch trials" (p. 48). Does traditional feminism finally accept someone's declaration of feminism as enough?

If Black feminism has meaning, that meaning should be evident in the way the qualified Black women who supported a Black man for president occupy positions of power. Instead, the Obama administration maintains a race-neutral position indicative of a post-racial America.

Critical Race Theory in Post-racial America

The U.S. is in a new era of American politics called *post-racialism*. The idea that America is post-racial gives the impression that America has resolved its racial problem and further attention is no longer required. In the 1970s and 1980s minority legal scholars who could see how social inequity persisted, gathered to investigate the significant harm of race in the lives of many Americans (Crenshaw, 2011). More specifically, critical race theorists believe that laws and judicial policies make changes that prohibit visible racism but in doing so strengthen attitudes of injustice because the powerful dominate the critical

discourse. Critical race theorists maintain several points. First, the racial progress that occurs through laws and court decisions outlaw the most visible signs of racism while patterns of racial inequality strengthen. Second, first person accounts are important to understanding the perspectives of those harmed by race and racism. Third, critical race theory is critical of liberalism. Fourth, critical race theorists emphasize the reality of racism (Ladson-Billings, 2009). The idea of a meeting of the minds of minority scholars who question dominant ideas is invigorating. It suggests a strategy for growth for those whose ideas challenge the status quo and are dismissed. To save themselves from extinction, they have honest conversations with others and through these associations move forward.

Although Black women voted in record numbers in support of Obama, only two Black women were assigned cabinet-level positions in the Obama administration (Harris, 2011). At least two Black women in the Obama administration experienced a lack of support from the White House: Desiree Rogers and Shirley Sherrod (Harris). Black womanhood is still debased through negative images of Black women. Constructed as the despised other, morally, culturally, politically, and economically dangerous to society (Ladson-Billings, 2009), there is little hope of convincing the commander-in-chief that Black women are deserving of jobs attached to real power.

An illustration of post-racial critical race theory that relates to Black womanhood surfaces at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. Taylor and Johnson's (2007) attack on the Duke 88 extends beyond the attack on minority faculty members. Focusing

on the training, credentials, and practices related to the hiring of minority faculty Taylor

and Johnson are able to strike the faculty members themselves:

> Professors like Lubiano, Holloway, Chin, Deutstch, Huston, and others trained in
> the race-gender-class approach generally consider American society deeply
> flawed, with the majority and the powerful oppressing women, minorities, and the
> poor. (p. 112)

The word *deeply* indicates a feeling based on the authors' assessment because the

flaw is immeasurable. Considering this statement that names Black women first, it is

difficult to believe that anyone believes that oppression does not exist or that oppression

is exercised by a powerless minority. The statement does, however, call into question the

qualifications of the specific faculty members, the first two who are Black women to

exercise their agency.

On first reading, the idea of using Barack Obama's autobiography to teach social

work students seems promising (Freeman, 2011). However, from a perspective that holds

that race is imbedded in America's systems caution is indicated. It is important to

understand that blackness is not monolithic. Using Obama's (2004) autobiography to

study racial consciousness or using Rice's (2010) autobiography to study Black

womanhood runs the risk of causing psychological harm. Obama and Rice redeem

cultural capital not available for many Americans. Black students with less cultural

wealth need to learn how to navigate a system that despite appearances, does not

acknowledge the reality of their needs. Freeman's article does not capture the

multidimensional aspect of being Black in America.

Critical race theory contributes to the advancement of American society. For instance, the petition of the Research Focus in Black Education did not receive sufficient votes. The Research Focus in Black Education is a Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the largest professional education research association in the world (Ladson-Billings, 2011). Though the petition was not successful in creating a division, the proposal resulted in the creation of the Commission on Research in Black Education (CORIBE). It is remarkable that the proposal was productive.

Critical Race Testimony

The interdisciplinary nature of trauma theory and Critical race theory (CRT) provides an appropriate perspective through which to consider Black women's experiences of violence. Jain's (2010) study of women student leaders of color in community college transfer is helpful for understanding educational trauma. Jain challenged educational theory, policy, and practice's subordination of minorities by noting that while women of color compose the majority group in community colleges, they composed the minority in students who completed transfer to four year institutions for degree completion. This function in community colleges represents to great extent the future level of future opportunity for students of color. The tenets of critical race theory are centrality and intersectionality of race and racism, challenge of dominant ideology, commitment to social justice, centering of experiential knowledge, and an interdisciplinary perspective. However, Black women in Jain's (2010) study are subsumed under the title *women of color*.

For an example of critical race theory combined with autobiographical writing in practice in a minority urban high school, consider Knaus's (2009) article on learning to listen to traumatized students. Young Black women are represented in his class. Knaus applies critical race theory to justify listening to students in a high school writing class. "Applying critical race theory means supporting a class enough to publicly wrestle with some of the violent, scarring experiences that impact many urban youth of color" (p. 150). Under the critical race theory that holds that critical race theorists critique liberalism, Knaus recognizes that students of color are only supported by policies and practices when doing so is in the interest of the dominant culture (Bell, 1980, as cited in Knaus, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1999, as cited in Knaus, 2009). Knaus also successfully employs the rule of "storytelling." Listening to students' stories not only helped the students prepare to express the reality of their lives but helped to narrow the enormous gap of the cultural context between teachers and students by resulting in more self-reflective teaching.

More relevant here is the work of Black women educational researchers. Ross (2009) uses critical race theory to assuage the resistance of White students to social justice courses. Ross holds that "the implementation of CRT in social justice-oriented classrooms holds potential for both decreasing White student resistance to issues of race and privilege and contesting academic capitalism" (p. 524). The current economic downturn has led to a shift of working class White students on the continuum of privilege and disadvantage such that it is questionable whether they are able to realize the privilege of White skin.

Two recent incidents in the media serve as introductory background to the study of the construction of Black womanhood. Ladson-Billings (2009) uses CRT to stand up to the both factual and fictional portrayal of Black women as new versions of images of Black women. These images began in slavery as tools of control but carry on into postmodernity. "Mammy" persists as cold and callous, even neglectful of her own children and family while simultaneously overly solicitous toward Whites. "Sapphire" still represents the archetypical stubborn bitchy, bossy, hateful, spiteful, difficult wife. This image is blamed for the bad feelings between Black men and Black women. And there is "Jezebel," the physically attractive, seductive and conniving temptress who is not to be trusted. Ironically, any individual Black woman risks being equated to all three stereotypes at once, simultaneously. However, because she does not engender sympathy or support in literature, art, film, or social policy, a Black woman cannot be an innocent victim. Bell hooks (2003) also doubts the likelihood of Black woman being understood as a victim.

However, most relevant here is the notion of Critical race testimony (Baszile, 2008). Baszile presents a specific type of storytelling to resist the passive reaction of students to the topic of racism. Critical race testimony is the "kind of story most helpful for recognizing and interrogating the ways in which we make and remake race and racism" (p. 252). It is well suited here because of testimony's "significant role in developing our sense of ourselves as individuals, groups, and nations" (p. 252). What the women in the study tell about themselves provides data to understand their states of minds.

Summary

In this chapter, I have laid the plans to use autobiography as a source to study the psychic trauma in the lives of select Black women who have experienced violence and written about it. It leads to an investigation into soul murder and trans-generational trauma. As Black women who are descendants of slaves it is likely that traces of trauma experienced by their ancestors contributes to their demise.

In addition, I have defined the psychological autopsy as an attempt to reconstruct a state of mind by identifying clues that lead to evidence of trauma. This reconstruction intentionally focuses on the clues that only seem to surface in phenomenological epistemology. How I plan to go about this will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to employ the psychological autopsy approach to search for self-actualization in the lived experiences of Black women as told in the nonfictional autobiographies of Black women. The data are the written texts of selected Black women and is therefore how the authors, Black women, experience violence. When people experience devastation, personal understandings of place and purpose change. The psychological autopsy approach involves the reconstruction of a decedent's state of mind. It involves applying clues to the evidence collected from sources other than a deceased victim in order to determine whether the victim's death was caused by her own behavior. As the investigator, I take a psychological phenomenological approach of qualitative research (Creswell, 1998), an intuitive detailed and rigorous examination of the lived experiences of the selected autobiographies to determine motivations and actions, hopefully, leading to a deeper understanding of how psychic trauma is experienced in a society where the author is also living with racial trauma.

A psychological phenomenological approach is appropriate because in this study I call attention to the inner lived experience of individual women and because autobiographies are the primary source of subjective data. This approach meets the criteria described by Denscombe (2007), Giorgi (as cited in Ashworth & Chung, 2006),

and Polkinghorne (1989, as cited in Creswell, 1998). Phenomenological research involves individuals' meanings, beliefs, and feelings (Denscombe, 2007; Polkinghorne, 2001) and here describes the meanings of psychic trauma accompanied by racial trauma. Additionally, this study is more subjective than objective, more descriptive than analytic, more interpretation than measurement, and more about agency than structure (Denscombe, 2007).

Using a phenomenological psychology course on Husserl and Merleau-Ponty's extensive work on the relationship between phenomenology and psychology Giorgi (2006) developed a descriptive phenomenological psychological research method that involves four steps. The first step is reading without analysis and without reorganizing to try to allow a response to the whole situation to emerge as the approach is holistic. Reading the autobiographies of Black women who have experienced traumatic violence leaves me suspecting that Black people must think critically in order to sustain any hope of a healthy self-esteem (hooks, 2003).

In the second step, the data are divided into meaningful parts. This step was accomplished through coding. This coding meant keeping in mind the psychic trauma the authors experienced according to the (a) levels of Maslow's hierarchy, (b) Trotman's characteristics, and (c) Daniel's examples of racial trauma. This step is a practical tool, neither "theoretically weighty" (Giorgi, 2006, as cited in Ashworth & Chung, 2006) nor analytic.

The third step is seeking the meaning within the accounts provided. After all, "the purpose of the method is to discover, articulate and make explicit the psychological

meanings being lived by the [authors] that reveal the essential nature of the [psychic trauma]" (p. 72).

In the fourth and final step, a relationship is constructed among the meanings creating a structure and expressing the meanings in such a way that all variations are encompassed. In so doing, the meanings the specific Black women authors have attached to their experiences of psychic trauma are centered. Will attempting to see through the eyes of the authors reveal the collective consciousness that has been the trademark of Black autobiography? At least, the importance of each individual author's thinking is elevated and each individual's everyday thinking is treated as neither inferior nor irrational (Denscombe, 2007).

Psychological Autopsy

Understanding the significant trauma experienced by the key informants without further trauma might best be accomplished through a psychological autopsy (Gavin & Rogers, 2006; LaFon, 2002; Shneidman, 2004; & Weisman, 1974). Generally speaking, a psychological autopsy is an attempt to reconstruct the state of mind of someone in her absence. This definition synthesizes historical definitions and confirms my suspicion.

When an autopsy is conducted the corpse tells the story of the cause of death (Gavin & Rogers, 2006). The psychological autopsy, best known for its use in the study of suicide and attempted suicide, has little to do with corpses. Sometimes when a death investigation seems unusual or complicated, it is necessary that a relevant group of professionals and friends of the victim collaborate to determine the most likely cause of death (Eckert & Turco, 1997). Collaborating over information contained in personal and

official documents and interviews with people who knew the deceased, the group of professionals may come to know the deceased better than the deceased knew herself.

A psychological autopsy can also be thought of as a psychological reconstruction of one's life (La Fon, 2002), a view especially beneficial to insurance companies, the military, courts and law enforcement. The psychological autopsy began as a supplement to the medical examiner/coroner's autopsy to clarify the cause of death when the reason the decedent died is unclear (Curphey, 1967; Shneidman, 1977; Weisman, 1974). An important motto explains the construction of the psychological autopsy: In any equivocal situation, whether science or life, additional relevant information is always helpful (Shneidman, 2008), but "forensic evidence trumps psychological speculation" (Curphey, 1967, as cited in Weisman, 1974). Curphey made a determination after considering the experts' opinions.

The psychological autopsy approach serves several purposes: understanding the state of mind at the end of life (Weisman, 1974) and understanding suicidal intention (Shneidman & Leenaars, 1999). In this study, the psychological autopsy approach is used to understand the state of mind of women who have experienced trauma.

Since its inception, the psychological autopsy has made substantial contributions to the study of suicide (Shneidman, 2008), psychology (Anderson, 2010; Shneidman, 1999; & Weisman, 1974), and criminology (Bartol & Bartol, 2004; LaFon & Turvey, 2002). One example of the extension of the psychological autopsy is victimology, the study of victims. A psychological autopsy differs from criminal profiling in that the psychological autopsy has been used to profile a deceased person and the identity of the

person studied is known (Bartol & Bartol, 2004). But victimologists view the psychological autopsy as an extension of victimology, "a technique that entails reviewing the psychosocial aspects of a victim's life" (La Fon, 2002, 2010, p. 157).

Some other extensions are a little more distant from the original. For instance, Thurer (2005) uses the term in her title, *The End of Gender: A Psychological Autopsy.* However, the title is the only reference in her book to the technique. She explains that her retroactive study of a client is psychoanalytic; she uses documents and correspondence with people who knew the decedent. She contends that gender has ended. She does not explain the term or why she chose it for her title. Therapist Anderson (2005) has already used a psychological autopsy model to study clients who were suspected of suicide to determine whether she should be alert for warning signs in other clients.

The study looks at the women's thoughts and feelings through their own words. Weisman (1974) describes psychological autopsy as "trying to find how someone else construes the world" (pp. 58–59). Weisman, a psychiatrist who served on Shneidman's (2004) original psychological autopsy team, emphasized the psychosocial component of the approach to make a significant contribution to the understanding of geriatric end of life issues. Weisman points out that "Individual feelings, values, responsibilities, relationships—all come under the scrutiny of the psychological autopsy" (p. 25).

Methodology can mask personal anxieties or a compassionate investigator may use historical data as a shield against too much despair (Weisman, 1974, p. 29). Maslow is important to this work because of his hermeneutic use of empirical psychological instruments to study thoughts, feelings, and emotions.

Shneidman (1999), a thanatologist, focused on the *psychache* that surfaced from

suicide notes and psychological autopsies. Psychache is the unbearable psychological

pain, present in almost every suicide. It also exists when there was no suicide. He

developed a psychological pain assessment instrument useful in the prevention of

suicides. He even developed a particular therapy helpful for those who displayed suicidal

tendencies. The skeleton of information must be fleshed out with the personal responses

of each member of the team . . . it offers something more than hard interviews, schedules,

questionnaires, and rating scales (Shneidman as cited in Weisman, 1974, pp. 28-29). As

Shneidman (2004) explains,

> The psychological autopsy allows us an opportunity to see things from many
> different viewpoints, expressed by many different voices, and affords the
> investigator the luxury of 'cutting and pasting' together details and perspectives to
> construct a cohesive picture. (pp. 11–12)

Shneidman stressed that a mere outline or an accumulation of postmortem data are not an

autopsy.

Some limitations of the general definition include the complexity of

reconstructing a state of mind and the challenge of listening to pain. It is not possible to

reconstruct someone else's state of mind. The best one can do is to get as close as

possible by listening empathetically to all available clues. The listening must be joined by

experience listening to *psychache,* intense psychological pain (Shneidman, 2004). The

contribution of psychache to the study of suicidology is tremendous. After identifying a

thread of psychological pain so intense that suicidal clients describe it as unbearable,

Shneidman (2004) was better positioned to identify potential suicidal clients.

Scholars worldwide use the term *psychological autopsy* to refer to "any retrospective investigation" (Pompili, 2010, p. 239). Such investigations do not experience the benefits obtained from comprehensive data gathering from interviews of key persons. However, if, most data in psychological autopsy come from forensics—physicians or death reports—less from family members and friends who have the clues necessary to make sense of depressive features that are not included in official documents (Pompili, 2010) the psychological autopsy would not be useful. The data could be collected from medical and coroner's report.

Creating a timeline of psychological autopsy from its inception highlights a problem with attempts to standardize the procedure (Connor et al., 2011; Knoll, 2008, 2009; Pouliot & DeLeo, 2006; Ritchie & Gelles, 2002; Snider et al., 2006). Caution must be taken in the endeavor to establish the reliability and validity as an empirical method. The more we try to establish reliability and validity the more we wear away relevance. It is critical to think of the information collected as clues not evidence. The information gathered at the death scene and the autopsy are more likely to be evidence than the information gathered through psychological autopsy (contrary to Snider et al.).

As the psychological autopsy moves toward standardization, reliability, and validity, the farther it moves from its origins as a supplement to the empirical autopsy. The psychological autopsy, "a crude instrument" (Weisman, 1974, pp. 6–7) opened doors for more systematic explorations of death. The focus on mental illness can become more holistic by greater attention to understanding surrounding circumstances through an

analysis informed by a phenomenological epistemology (Gavin & Rogers, 2006). The autopsy is only a contributor to the determination to be made.

Recruiting Informants

Using autobiographies as the source of data for this dissertation, means the autobiographers serve as key informants. The authors detail violence in their lives as a source of psychic trauma. Eight autobiographies represent a criterion sample, but four were born at a time such that they grew up witnessing the Civil Rights era. The other four (the last four in Table 1) will be used: two who were abused by intimate partners (Bandele, 2009; Muhammad, 2009) and two who were victimized as children by the women who were charged with their care (Patton, 2007; Wilson, 2007). The psychological autopsy was used to determine the extent of their violation there was soul murder (Painter, 1995; Schwab, 2010). It is imperative that authors are the females descendants of American slaves (Black women), in order to foreground the state of mind so often muted in literature.

To capture the essence of racial trauma (Daniel, 2000), authors are Black women born after the Civil Rights Era. In order to provide deep and rigorous descriptions of psychic trauma, many Black women autobiographers are not a good fit for this dissertation. Authors who are known as 'the first Black woman to' (i.e., Shirley Chisholm, 1970; Condoleezza Rice, 2010) were excluded because their notoriety and political positions influence what they may be willing or able to disclose. She must have written her own story. Since actress Jasmine Guy authored Afeni Shakur's life story, it was deselected. Felicia Pearson did not write her memoirs. Tina Turner (1986), Pam

Table 1

List of Key Informants: Black Women Authors Whose Autobiographies Fit the Criteria for Living Experiences of Racial Trauma

Autobiography/Author	Short Introduction
An American Story Debra Dickinson	Dickinson chose the military as an avenue of elevation from the St. Louis slum. She was disdainful of others from her neighborhood as part her belief in meritocracy.
Project Girl Janet McDonald	McDonald lived in federally assisted housing with her father headed family, was feared to be an elementary child found dead in the complex, excelled in the integrated schools that she chose and suffered depression.
Straight No Chaser Jill Nelson	Journalist Nelson was from a military family and first experienced segregation when her father was stationed in South Carolina. Nelson saw a neighbor who was beaten bloody turn to Nelson's parents for help.
Laughing in the Dark Patrice Gaines	Gaines grew up befriending boys because she thought that their power would surround her and was disappointed by reality. Her time in jail lead to a significant change in her thinking.
Something Like Beautiful Ashe Bandele	Bandele did not realize that she was perceived as just another single Black mother. She agreed to marry a man imprisoned for his part in violent crime. The birth of their daughter would lead to her reassessment of her situation.
Rewriting the Script Arlether Wilson	Wilson survived neglect, sexual and physical abuse. She lost both of her friends by the age of eleven. She was the one who discovered the death of a childhood friend who died of leukemia. She stood in the crowd as her other childhood friend's body was removed after an arson in their home. It was later determined that her friend was tortured.
That Mean Old Yesterday Stacey Patton	Patton learned enough to survive by running away from her adoptive home at the age of eleven. She parallels her torture with American slavery.
Scared Silent Mildred Muhammad	Muhammad was married to "The D C Sniper." He involved a teenager, who was illegally in the country to shoot and kill several strangers to cover his intention to murder Mildred. She struggled to have her daughters and son returned to her.

Grier (2011), Diahann Carroll (2008), Natalie Cole ((2010), Dionne Warwick (2010), and

Whoopi Goldberg (2010) do not fit the ordinary people required for this study.

Additionally, authors who had famous sons were not useful. Being the mother of

a famous athlete was sufficient reason to eliminate Lucille O'Neal (2010).

My somewhat unconventional qualitative approach leaves few examples in the

literature. I assembled work that was similar in some ways. Political science professor,

Harris-Perry (2011) studies how Black women think and feel about their citizenship in

the U.S. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009) deconstructs U.S. Black women's imperative of

strength. Sociologist, Garfield (2005) extensively interviewed eight women of greater

New York to create a *sociology of knowledge*. Criminologist, Richie (1996) interviewed

pretrial detainees at Rikers Island in New York. Parks (2010), Hendin (2004), and Ferraro

(2006) incorporated other avenues of cultural studies: fiction, movies, television, and

media.

A Team of Professionals

Psychological autopsies have been performed using teams of professionals who

experience the limitations of any team of professionals: conflict or consensus (Weisman,

1974). As members pursue honest differences of opinion, conflicts may arise related to

personalities and disciplines. On the other hand, when consensus occurs, exceptions,

novelties, or breaches of group rules may go unnoticed. Either way the wise investigator

benefits from the input of others who provide different perspectives.

The members of the team of consultants used in this work have disseminated their

thoughts through a variety of venues. These academics and professionals have published,

presented at workshops, appeared on television, radio, and written for the press. They

hold advanced degrees in literature, education, sociology, philosophy, political science,

and African/ African American/Women Studies and all take a particular interest in the

lived experiences of Black women.

Criminologist, Beth Richie (1996) interviewed women detained at Rikers Island

in New York and learned that of the pretrial detainees some experienced what she called

gendered entrapment. Due to their circumstances, these battered black women felt

compelled to crime by external forces which included the men in their lives.

Frances K. Trotman (2000), supervisor of a training center for psychologists and

professor, documents the need for psychologists to realize the significance of

understanding that Black women clients may have different needs than other clients.

Behavior indicates a deficiency of belief that Black women's different history is reflected

in current interactions. For example, Rutgers University recently uploaded a video of a

lecture in which Trotman comments on the status of Black women on predominantly

White campuses (the purpose of the conference). Interestingly, comments were divided in

half. Fifty per cent of respondents (*n*=10) think that Affirmative Action and legislation

have effectively shifted the minds and hearts of the privileged so that they longer believe

their privilege and that of their fore bearers was earned.

Psychiatrist/counselor, Jessica Henderson Daniel (2000) astutely notes that clients

sometimes experience trauma precipitated by their race. When they seek counseling they

may need to address this racial trauma. Examples of racial trauma were divisible into

seven areas: social activism, educational, image distortion, sexual, law

enforcement/judicial, economic, and medical. When this occurs they may be further damaged if counselors require explanations to understand the psychological pain that occurs.

Cultural journalist, Veronica Chambers (2003) questions the successfulness of unnamed celebrities. Chambers defines the changes from the 20th century (macro issues) to 21st century (micro inequalities). Issues of separates schools, "Whites only" lunch counters, and bus boycotts were replaced by a black professor denied tenure, a six-figure lawyer turned down by the a co-op board, and an advertising director whose boss will not assign him the Nike account. She notes that the ability to connect with other Black women is key for women who work in predominantly White environments and live in predominantly White neighborhoods. She further notes that by the time the Civil Rights Movement and the women's liberation movement became interested in the attention of Black women, Black women recognized that they had never been denied the "right to work" (p. 110). Black women knew what it meant to work in fields, homes of others, menial jobs. Black women even worked in the homes of women who sought the right to work.

Professor of Sociology, Gail Garfield (2005) conducted life history interviews with women who knew violence. Her conclusions were sufficient to make her understand how strategies and policies, like Affirmative Action and the organization she led for ten years fell short. Sometimes well intended policies and strategies fail to get to the sources of the problems. For example, "Affirmative Action strategies are intended to decrease discriminatory employment patterns and practices. However, as strategies, they do not

eliminate deep-seated ideas and beliefs upon which discriminatory practices are based"
(206).

English professor, with affiliations in African and African American Studies,
Lynette Myles (2009) uses slave narratives to study the subjectivity of Black women. It is
the self-knowledge, learned from others who have similar experiences of oppression and
domination that "fuels their determination to create new identities and subsist even when
others would prefer their annihilation" (p.36).

Lawanda S. Rutledge (2008), whose doctoral degree is in
Leadership/Organizational Change questions how Black women are motivated to aspire
to leadership in American corporations. To answer this question it is imperative to
understand the history and culture of the women.

Professor of Sociology, Tamara Beaubouef-LaFontant (2009) determines that
there exists a cultural mandate of strength within the collective of Black women. This
mandate is "experienced being strong as an imperative to exhibit an automatic endurance
to a life perceived as filled with obstacles, unfairness, and a lack of assistance from
others" (2007, p. 37).

Sherri Parks (2010) asserts that Black women benefit, but no more than others
from the idea of the angry black woman. When the image of the angry black woman is
combined with the image of the strong black woman, members outside the collective
sometimes become anxious and fearful. Parks illustrates how the image of an angry black
woman has a deeper connotation than sometimes acknowledged.

> When carefully considered, the angry black woman is not a sputtering out-of-control maniacal stereotype. She is resilient, resourceful, and strategic, a much more powerful operator, which is why some people have so much trouble with her and try to use the label as a weapon against black women. (p. 139)

Political Science professor, Melissa Harris-Perry (2011) examines the emotional realities of black women's lives to determine their ability to participate as citizens. Framing black women's realities as similar to trying to stand up straight in a crooked room she attributes the difficulties to individual and collective shame and the struggle for "recognition of one's special, inexchangible uniqueness [as] part of the human condition . . . soothed only by the opportunity to contribute freely to the public realm (38). Black women's struggles with shame and misrecognition consume time and energy.

Professor of philosophy, Sybol Anderson (2011) explains that when the mutuality of recognition is violated two alternatives occur. If unequal recognition exists the results are moral subordination. If mutual disregard exists self-actualization is foreclosed.

Evidence Collection

I propose replacing the instrument traditionally used by qualitative researchers with an interrogation protocol composed of a threefold lens. The Schedule of Racist Events (Klonoff & Landrine, 1999) was insufficient for locating self-actualization in this case. As an instrument of study for self-actualization, I propose sorting through evidence with the threefold lens. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory is included in Introductory Psychology textbooks, despite the resistance that it experiences. According to actualization does not co-exist with trauma soul murder (Painter, 1995; Schwab, 2010) has indeed occurred.

Soul murder is a term that refers to trauma so intense and or persistent that a part of one's inner life is destroyed. The belief that humans have souls is not limited to European and African beliefs. When you consider that there must be more to life than unhappiness (Nodding, 2003) and struggle (Shapiro, 2010), you realize that for those whose lives are filled with unhappiness and struggle there must be more than a bodily experience.

Data collection as conventionally understood by qualitative researchers could mean extensive interviews of participants. I use the texts of authors who have already published autobiographies that give the details of their traumatic experiences of violence. My desire to not further traumatize Black women with extensive interviews is part of the reason for using autobiographies. It also deals with the likelihood that many women who have experienced psychic trauma are unwilling to discuss it for a variety of reasons. These authors have already decided to share their experiences in the hope of helping others navigate similar situations. Using in-depth interviews risks the recollection of repressed memories which can further harm the interviewees. Therefore an IRB is not required.

Psychological phenomenologists generally agree to the steps to be used in the method. Similar to Giorgi's (2006) and Denscombe's (2007) steps above, Polkinghorne (1989) suggests some steps for the phenomenological analysis of data (as cited in Creswell, 1998). The first step of the data analysis is horizonalization, dividing the work into statements that conform to each of three lenses: Maslow's (1993) levels of motivation using colored dots, Trotman's (2000) characterizations of differences using

colored stars, and Daniel's (2000) evidence of racial trauma using colored flags. Next these statements will be transformed into clusters of meanings. The results will be tied together to make a general description to present a significance and patterns of meaning describing the authors' interactions and motivations (see Figure 1).

Maslow Hierarchy of Needs	Trotman Characteristics of Racial Trauma	Daniel[1] Examples of Racial Trauma
Self-actualization		Social activism
Esteem	Emotional/ Intellectual characteristics	Educational
		Image distortion
Love belonging	Gender/ Intimate relationships	Sexual[2]
Safety	Historical cultural dynamics	Law enforcement/ judicial
Physiological	Physical characteristics	Economic
		Medical
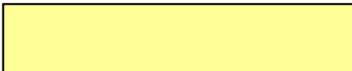
[1] Daniel's reference to threats of violence and actual violence are also located throughout.
[2] Sexual trauma (Daniel) distorts the possibility of loving relationships.

Figure 1. Evidence Coding

As Polkinghorne recommends, as researcher I create a plan to study the psychic and racial trauma that is threaded throughout the autobiographies. The informants describe their everyday lived experience in detail and each has experienced the phenomenon, psychic trauma. Their experiences are clustered using the information in

Table 2. Further, Polkinghorne (1989, as cited in Creswell, 1998) suggests bracketing common sense beliefs. However, I question reliance on those who have the power to oppress exercising proper control over their meaning-making in order to understand psychic trauma through the voices of informants.

Summary

This chapter begins by restating the purpose of this study. A criterion method of sampling is used to select the Black women informants. The selection of four authors is discussed. Evidence collection process in keeping with procedures for the study of psychological phenomenological approach is discussed. Finally the description of the chain of custody relating to the evidence of psychic and racial trauma is discussed. The resulting analysis is discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the data are grouped and organized following the four steps of the phenomenological approach (Creswell, 1998; Giorgi, 2006; Polkinghorne, as cited in Creswell, 1998) and the psychological autopsy approach (Shneidman, 1999; Weisman, 1974). The first step involves reading the data without analysis. In the second step, the data are grouped into meaningful parts. In the third step, the meaning within the authors' accounts is found. In the fourth step, relationships among meanings are constructed.

The key informants' lived experiences reflect their multiple marginalities and present a wealth of clues to the psychosocial meanings available to varying extents for each. Concentrating on the clues leads to a better understanding of the psychosocial elements of the women's negotiations of trauma. How do they describe themselves as their stories unfold? How are they affected by the events they outline? Following an example of a psychological autopsy (Shneidman, 2004), the psychosocial meanings for the women are arranged according to themes obtained from the psychological autopsy team members who have experienced what it means to be a Black woman in the U.S.

It is imperative to understand how definitions of trauma that specify physical violation are "unnecessarily narrow and disregard the severity of such stresses as *nonphysical*; violation experiences of sexual harassment, partner/spousal abuse, and racist incidents" (Bryant-Davis, 2007, p. 137). Healing psyches requires a focus beyond

individual recoveries. Healing psyches means addressing the sources and redressing the

perpetrators and the recipients of passive privilege.

This arrangement of the data is a way of dealing with the complexities of living

multiply marginalized lives and demonstrates how the psychosocial aspects of their lives

are linked to the physical and economic aspects of their lives. The examples of racial

trauma (Daniel, 2000) have been aligned with Maslow's hierarchy of needs establishing

the significance of satisfying lower needs before turning one's attention to needs of

love/belonging and self-esteem. In other words, it highlights the difficulty of learning

while one feels neither relatively safe nor secure. Starting with the darker emotions –

fear, shame, and anger – consider the wealth of clues in the lives of the informants.

Key Informants

Ashe Bandele (2009) was adopted, "chosen" as her adoptive parents described it.

She enjoyed private school, horseback riding, and the trappings of entitlement. She still

longed to know the circumstances of her birth mother's decision to give her up for

adoption. She visited a prison as a service learning experience, reading and discussing

poetry with inmates. While she was there she met, married, and had a child with an

inmate. That offender was incarcerated for his participation in a brutal robbery. While she

dated, visited, and loved her fiancé she felt that others judged her harshly for her choice

to marry a prisoner with a slim chance of release. However, her husband's successful

appeal included the stipulation that he be immediately returned to his birthplace. Bandele

was left with a baby girl to rear without even the legal presence of her father.

Mildred Muhammad (2009) grew up in a Black community in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Her mother told her that her father died in an accident involving the U.S. Navy, but she overheard the description of his death in a house fire as a result of domestic violence. Muhammad's mother told her that she was her father's favorite child but Muhammad had no interaction with her father or her father's family since she was six years old when he left her mother. While living at home because, she said, her mother loved her too much to let her go away to school, Muhammad completed more than two years postsecondary education. After she left school to help her mother with household expenses she started to date a man who was already married. Despite her friend's warning, she was not angry with him for his lie but kept seeing him to help him learn to read. When he sent her a plane ticket to join him in Washington, Muhammad flew across the country to be with a man whom she already knew was a liar. They married after her miscarriage and the rest is homicidal history. This is a long way of saying that she married a liar after her mother lied to her.

Stacey Patton (2007) recalls her life in foster care as warmer than her life with the adoptive couple who chose her. In her foster home she lived with a Black postal worker and a White homemaker and foster siblings. She recalls a Black woman neighbor who attempted to help with her care. In her adoptive family, Patton attempted to end the whippings she received by molding herself into the person her adoptive mother wanted her to be. In her adoptive family, Patton had regular meals, did not share her bedroom with siblings–she was an only child–and she attended a private school. Patton parallels

her beatings with those of slaves, as well as, African American children since slavery. Her running away may have saved her life.

Arlether Wilson (2007) details sexual abuse, physical abuse and psychological abuse. Most importantly, however, it all seems to stem from neglect. Her teenage mother's incarceration left the three-month-old girl passed around among families, friends, and strangers. Can you imagine a 3 month old infant away from her mother and passed around among strangers? Her mother worked as a dancer in a nightclub and kept a man. She left Wilson with her live-in-boyfriends as babysitters. By 12, Wilson had twice been traumatized by death. First, she tried to wake her friend who had died of leukemia. Later, she watched emergency responders bring out the charred remains of her best friend. Her maternal grandmother, her mother, and she represented three generations of women received child welfare services.

At the center of the autobiographies is psychological pain. Psychological pain is woven into their relationships with other women. Too often they treat their interactions with other women as less significant even when they notice difficulties in the relationships.

Team of Experts

Psychology professor Trotman (2000) categorized some differences between the Black women and White women who attended the center. Trotman suggested: "Neither early childhood nor the adult experiences, mothering relationships, and influences, or other developmental issues of African American, can be accurately interpreted in White middle-class terms" (p. 260). She delineated four areas that contribute to the uniqueness

of the Black women's experiences: physical characteristics; historical, social, and cultural dynamics; emotional and intellectual characteristics; and gender role and intimate relationships.

Physical characteristics, like skin color, lips, and hair texture are often the basis of adverse treatment from a client's family or the members of the Black community. Historical, social, and cultural dynamics, such as African oral traditions, polyrhythmic musical influences, Black English, and adherence of extended family, make a major impact on individual's responses toward people and objects that affect perceptions of self. Emotional and intellectual influences include the image of *Black superwoman.*

There exist differences in the incidence of female-headed households, poverty, extended family traditions and the experience of strong female role models; and the expectation to *do all* and *be all* often ignoring one's own needs. And finally in the area of gender roles and intimate relationships, many Black women are geared toward believing it is likely they will have to take care of themselves. Black women who are professionals tend to have balanced home and work life. Black women may experience racism as the major factor in equality rather than sexism. As a result of Black women's subjection to both racism and sexism "[Black women] were subjected to oppression no white *(sic)* woman was forced to endure" (p. 257).

Daniel: Belonging

Psychiatry professor Daniel (2000) claims that clients sometimes experience trauma associated with their race. When they show up for counseling, these traumas need to be discussed, but may be repressed, or their accounts may encounter diversion from

White therapists who may be uncomfortable or unable to provide reflections useful to clients based on their limited experiences. Daniel provided seven divisions of examples of racial trauma: social activism, educational, image distortion, sexual, law/enforcement/judicial, economic, and medical. When counselors need explanations to understand the psychological pain it at least fails to meet the needs of the client and at most may further damage the client.

There is a southern welcome: "Come in and make yourself at home." Certain assumptions come from this greeting. It assumes that this is not your home. It is not a greeting for those who live here. It assumes that you will take care of the home as though it is your own, and that you take care for your own home. It would be unreasonable, knowing that one does not respect their things, to imagine that they will care more for yours. Too often, the discourse surrounding Black women invites Black women to "come in and make yourself at home." If Black women do not belong here, where do they belong?

Patton lived in foster care before she was *chosen* by her adoptive family. During family dinners she noticed how they talked about people she did not know. She could see the warmth of a shared history that escaped her. When they told jokes, she did not know when to laugh. She realized that she did not belong. She was brought into this new family and was treated as if she were invited to come in and pretend this was her home. She made no decisions. She had no friends outside of school, because her parents feared that she might describe how she was treated at home. She had the material trappings of belonging but she knew she did not belong.

As mentioned before, she had a room but it was not a place for rest or relaxation but a chamber of horrors. Even keeping her room ordered to meet her adoptive mother's demands did not stop the beatings and belittling. She could not be perfect and if she could it would not stop the abuse. As an adoptive child, she was brought into the material comfort of their home, but it was not her home. No matter how she tried she could not make herself at home.

Early life can be a vulnerable period. Wilson's experience illustrates the degree to which decisions made by others can influence one's development and obstruct healthy growth. Wilson's satisfaction of her need for affiliation with and acceptance by others was thwarted by the conditions of her earliest years. Her early separation from her mother, her father's absence, and her mother's relationships with men made it difficult to satisfy her need to belong.

Wilson was separated from her 16-year-old mother and "passed from relative to relative and sometimes even strangers."[3] Wilson's grandmother committed Wilson's mother to a correctional institution for Black girls. Only, two years later, after returning home, her grandmother kicked out Wilson and her mother, with only the clothes on their backs. While homeless, her mother met the man who would become her brother's father and moved in with his family. By the time her young brother was born, Wilson's mother was dating someone else and three had lived with *several* people: life was chaotic.

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[3] The quotations are taken from the autobiographies of the four key informants. The page numbers are omitted for ease because including so many page numbers was distracting and cumbersome.

On her 16th birthday, Wilson's father phoned her. He did not call back as he promised. Later, when she tried to phone him she crashed into a series of changed phone numbers. This painful incident led her to question her culpability:

> What did I do to make my parents not want me? Why wouldn't he want to have anything to do with me? I'm a good person. I never got a chance to ask him why he hadn't tried to find me all of these years. Do I have other brothers and sisters?[4] How could he do this to me? (p. 175)

Wilson felt that she was not a priority in her mother's life. She watched her mother "always doing destructive things." She noted that her mother interpreted her constant fighting with men as an attempt to preserve her independence. She was never without a man: "No matter how much Brian beat her, she seemed determined to hang onto her independence." She fought with men but never stood up for herself when it came to her mother. Wilson's mother and grandmother did not get along well. Her grandmother "talked down to [her mother] and cursed her like a sailor."

Wilson observed how the men in her mother's life were more important than her children. Her mother trusted her live-in-boyfriends as babysitters. Upon her placement in an emergency foster situation, Wilson realized how she was accustomed to caring for herself and her younger brother. She realized the significance of a bath, a real meal, prayers, and sleep. She hated leaving. It was the first time she saw herself as a little girl. She preferred the emergency foster care situation over her own circumstances.

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[4] Even though Wilson (2007) mentions her brothers regularly, her brothers will only be included when it is necessary to understanding her experience.

Where did Wilson belong? She moved often, sometimes shared a room with her brother(s) and sometimes shared a bed with aunts. She was shuffled from place to place. Her excessive absence from school probably did not help her to establish roots. She was in and out of foster care. The court shuffled the responsibility for her care to her brother's grandmother. She even spent time with her brother's father who was paroled so that he could help his mother care for the children. She saw him lynch his own son. He could hardly care for a girl no one wanted.

Wilson's life involved a father who didn't want her, a mother who was incapable of caring, a grandmother who threw her out without concern for her welfare, and a legal guardian who gave her to a post-release, violent convict. Making sense of her life was too much to expect. A place where she belonged was so remote to Wilson that she ended up running away to places she had run away from. Her life was marked by chaos of the most difficult to imagine sort. She was never able to make herself at home.

The women's stories reflect their desire to make themselves at home. Patton could not relax. She lived in the home of a woman who saw herself as entitled to beat Patton into submission to her will. For Muhammad making herself at home by cooking, cleaning, and keeping her mouth shut did not work. Bandele failed to make herself at home in prison, while she lived in a non-prison world. And Wilson's making herself at home was extinguished by the unrelenting chaos in her life: she did not know what *at home* was.

Daniel: Love

Why all of us do not live loved and respected? This is a great question posed by Muhammad. Consider the women's understandings of love. Patton felt conditionally loved. Her adoptive mother demanded Patton's love as payment for the food, clothing, shelter, and the private school she attended: Those things were not provided out of love. Her adoptive mother beat Patton to feel powerful and to control her body, mind, and spirit. Patton noticed that her adoptive mother called her own mother weekly out of obligation noticing the lack of affection between them.

Wilson saw little to interpret as love. She sensed the tension between her mother and grandmother. Her mother could do nothing right in her grandmother's eyes. While Wilson's grandmother constantly berated her daughter and would not let her live there with the baby, she expected her to help care for her siblings.

Muhammad thought she had a handle on love. She believed that her mother loved her so much that she should not leave home for school. She claims she dropped out of school to contribute to her mother's household finances. Believing her mother loved and needed her did not hold her back from moving to Fort Lewis. A better understanding of love might have intervened when her friend told her that John was married. Or at least move her to anger about the lie her told her. Muhammad stated that she loved her husband unconditionally "without understanding what that means." This statement must have been made before she really assessed who she was, what she knew and did not know, what she needed, and what she liked or did not like. Let's go back to her origins first. What did she think she was saying? Where had she witnessed love? She knew how

her mother loved. Muhammad's father left her mother when she was four. Her mother compounded it by telling her he died a military hero and that she was his favorite child. Muhammad did not know her father or his family, but overheard people talking at a funeral about how he died in a house fire, a victim of domestic abuse. She took what she overheard men say about the attributes of "a good man" to heart.

Muhammad thought that love meant being self-sacrificing. She admired her mother and her mother struggled to survive. It must have been difficult to leave the Black community in Baton Rouge for the military Fort Lewis, Washington community. It meant leaving a mother who "loved her too much" to see her leave home for college to live with a man who she knew hid his wife and two sons from her. Helping her mother financially was the reason she left her studies at Southern University after two and a half years. From her mother's example, Muhammad "learned that to be a good woman meant to keep quiet, cook, and clean, take care of the children, and not cause problems." This understanding would need to be adjusted.

Muhammad makes several potent comments. After listening to tapes of Louis Farrakhan's teachings, she proclaims that she will never believe anything without researching it for herself." At a shelter for women, she declared that for the first time in her life she "saw [her] life for what it really was and not as [she] wanted it to be." Describing how things that she bought for herself disappeared, she stated she was "still too naïve to consider this level of control … how easily I could be fooled." While sending her children to stay with a friend during her ex-husband's trial she knew that she "had to go to work on myself … needed to go deeper inside myself to recognize my true

feelings." She found shame, rejection, and fear. Even though she declared "I would not

be abused, ignored, dismissed, or overlooked," the only behavior she controls is her own.

Bandele, who married a prisoner started to realize the limits of having a prisoner

for a spouse. What is more, her husband was paroled but was compelled to leave the

U.S. I am suggesting that had she understood the importance of being chosen, perhaps

she could have predicted the need for a mate who was not incarcerated.

Anderson: Recognition and Self-actualization

Philosophy professor Anderson (2011) holds that differing understandings result

in differing experiences of oppression. She asserts that

> While unjustly suffering constraints upon one's opportunities for self-actualization is a necessary condition of oppression, it is not a sufficient one … the hardships you suffer may be severe, both in terms of your compromised ability to sustain your livelihood and the cost to your dignity. (p. 24)

She defines autonomy as "an individual's resilient ability to be ultimately self-limiting in

response to others' claims and to act on the basis of reasons they themselves find

acceptable" (p. 27). Anderson's definitions prove valuable in evaluating recognition and

self-actualization as opposed to misrecognition.

It is important to human integrity to be accepted and respected by others (Taylor,

as cited in Anderson, 2010). It is psychically painful to be constantly misunderstood

(Harris-Perry, 2011). The informants' crises inspired them to evaluate the dissonance

between the images they held of themself and others' evaluations. For instance, when

circumstance forced Bandele to look at who she was and was not, she realized that she

was not the person she thought she was. When her daughter was born and her husband

was gone, Bandele confronted her reality: She was indistinguishable from other single Black mothers. She worried that she would never be selected for love, for anything other than as a target of violence.

Muhammad started to recognize her value after studying Islam and questioning why all do not live loved and respected. Muhammad's belief systems were shattered by tapes of Louis Farrakhan. The tapes suggested the need to rebuild the Black community and offered a new perspective of the history of the U.S. She professed a more critical view: "From that point on, I would not believe anything without researching it for myself." The teachings of Islam touched her; she "stopped looking to external forces for help and looked within."

She expressed more clarity at Phoebe's House: "For the first time … saw my life for what it really was … not as I wanted it to be." However, recovery after such an extreme change of worldview takes time. She said "I didn't know I had so many layers of pain." She saw herself as damaged goods: no place, little money, and three children. Some of her evaluations by others that minimized her victimization included a conversation with a neighbor about the sniper case. The neighbor suggested that she should donate any monies received to the families of victims since she was still alive. Another comment speculated that if she had not left her husband, the sniper would have *only* killed her. And yet another supposed that Mildred's staying on the West coast would have spared the lives of the victims on the East Coast. While Mildred recognized that the best possibility for healing meant keeping her heart open, she also knew that when

authorities do not hear your pain or take your pain seriously, it jeopardizes your freedom of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Patton knew that there was something wrong in her adoptive family. This knowledge did not result from comparing them to White families or through Eurocentric analysis. Her adoptive family was a two-parent, middle-class family where there were no drugs, alcohol, or perverted sexual mores. The family stressed the values of education, hard work, and religion. Patton recognized that her attempt to model herself after her adoptive mother in response to her new way of life failed. She came to understand that, like slave children, she was feigning respect to avoid pain. Patton detected her adoptive mother's regard for her through the whippings and her words "jail or death." These words could have killed her spirit were chosen over words that could have encouraged her aspiration to reach the infinite possibilities within her lifetime. She would face up to how she felt her adoptive mother was more unreal and unfeeling than anyone else.

Patton did not play with children outside of the family. She later deduced that her adoptive mother feared she might reveal how she was treated. She did not really compare herself with her classmates. Beating was part of the Black identity. She recalled a classmate's mother acting out the harsh and aggressive mammy stereotype in school for the benefit of others, beating her son with a rubber hose with the approval of a Black woman teacher and the principal. She beat him into submission, but what about his humanity? Other classmates were being beat, too. She witnessed Black children beaten in parking lots, on the side of the road, in grocery stores, in churches, and in school.

Patton was encouraged by the words she overheard from a stranger in a beauty shop. The woman asserted that beating children was neither necessary nor sufficient. Beating children has less to do with protection from racism than anger. Parents need to learn a different way to teach their children discipline from the beatings that ministers, comedians, and their predecessors encourage. Patton remembered the young stranger's message: "What [Black children] need is love and assurance, not violence and more degradation. We need to teach black boys and girls how to cope and compete in this racist society." Patton wrote: "I didn't know then that this cultural sickness of violence against black children stemmed from America's plantations. I simply thought it was a black thing, and that alone made me wish I had been born a little white *(sic)* girl." Patton was beginning to recognize that as a Black child she had limited value. She did not completely understand but she knew that her life was in danger and she was not resigned to "jail or death."

Recognizing herself among the chaos that was her life had to be difficult for Wilson. She recognized that she was not a priority in her mother's life. Her mother celebrated the men in her life over her children. When Wilson told her mother that her live-in boyfriend was involved with a White woman roommate, her mother kicked out the roommate. Earlier when Wilson told her that the same man sexually assaulted her, her mother's response was nothing that was noticeable only days later. Her mother would stay away for days after fights, leaving her daughter, with the man who lived with them. Wilson had limited encounters with people who would reflect positive images that would encourage her to rise above her chaotic circumstances. An emergency foster care mother

called her sweetheart, and made sure she had a bath, a good meal, and a good night's

sleep. Her fourth grade teacher would recognize her potential and support her growth and

development.

Despite the obstacles, these informants recognized the positive reflections that

were offered. They proceeded toward growth and self-actualization. Their growth and

development was not without setbacks. It was neither quick nor steady, but they

persevered.

Groups form with or without intent. For associations (voluntary groups) the shares

socially salient 'interest' is usually a set of chosen values or projects. For non-voluntary

group social groups the 'interest' typically follows from the shared burdens or benefits

that accrue to their group (Cudd, 2006, as cited in Anderson, 2011). Black women

constitute a non-voluntary social group and should share a value for Black womanhood

based on the historic background that assigns them to a multiply marginalized position.

Anderson holds that "It is a mistake to conclude that the concept of a social group is

meaningless. The concept of a social group is indispensable for describing some social

phenomena involving non-voluntary groupings" (p. 28). The women would describe the

level of attachment to the social groups in which they spent their childhoods.

Bandele's (2009) yearning to be seen as worthy of being chosen for "something

more" than the target of violence illustrates an absence of consent to be part of the social

group labeled Black women. She learned that her husband was symbolic of the

supportive resources absent from the women whose experiences she dreaded.

Simultaneously, she learned that both she and her daughter were assigned to this group.

After growing up in a Black community in Baton Rouge, Muhammad (2009) moved to a military environment. he interacted with friends with whom she reported no distinctions and no conversations related to race or gender. A defining moment for Muhammad centers on her introduction to Islamic studies through two tapes while with her husband was stationed in Germany. The tapes preached that there was value in Black life and that Black Americans had a responsibility to learn about that value and to care for themselves and their communities. Muhammad was trying to stand up straight in a crooked room (Harris-Perry, 2011). Muhammad clung to those teachings as she tried to establish a foothold of dignity in her own life.

As a child, Patton's (2007) recollections challenge the commonly held belief that adoption is better than foster care. Patton recalls her foster care family, Black postal worker father, White homemaker mother, and siblings warmly. It is when she is placed for adoption with a Black Christian couple in contemplation of adoption that her nightmare begins. Her beatings with this mother are so brutal that Patton compares them with the (mis)treatment of slave children from parents and owners. More importantly, she examines the reasons for and effects of these beatings on the children.

During the extreme dependency and vulnerability of infancy, Wilson (2007) was passed around among family, friends, and even strangers while her mother was incarcerated. From the description of her surroundings, readers cannot know who the strangers who kept her were. However, as she proceeds to describe the chaos that constituted her childhood, it becomes clear that there was probably little if any reflection of unconditional love. What seems more likely is that her status as "a problem" was

reflected. If one is told enough that she is a problem, she grows to think of herself as a problem.

Beaubouef-Lafontant: Strength

Sociology professor Beaubouef-Lafontant (2007, 2009) focuses on voice, discourse and racialized gender to illustrate how in Black women's lives, strength serves as a cultural mandate. She explains this mandate as "an imperative to exhibit an automatic endurance to a life perceived as filled with obstacles, unfairness, and a lack of assistance from others" (2007, p. 37). As gloomy as it sounds this is an apt description of the lives of self-sacrificing.

Bandele's (2009) riding lessons and private school in her adoptive family might be indicative of her adoptive parents' attempts to provide a life of privilege for her. However, Bandele longed to understand the circumstances of her biological mother's decision to "take a pass' on her. Bandele did not meet the cultural mandate of strength. She may not have even realized it, through her adoptive parents' intent to encourage her to recognize that she was entitled to chart her own course. If she could have imagined her similarity to the other single Black mothers she might have made a different choice of father for her daughter. She might have spotted the unfairness, obstacles and lack of assistance that the women she scorned knew well.

Muhammad's (2009) account of her life with and following her marriage presents her as someone who strived to live the American dream. Her descriptions of herself paint her as a patient, self-sacrificing wife and mother trying to live up to her mother's notion of a good woman. In her mother's opinion to be a good woman meant to "keep quiet,

cook, clean, take care of children, and not cause problems." Living with the man who would become her husband she was intent on conducting herself within the mandate to be strong. She became pregnant and miscarried without the military benefits (because she was not married). She worked in the business with her husband to the extent that he allowed. When he left, she applied for public assistance but found she was not qualified. She was a single, Black mother trying to live on the money that her estranged husband supplied.

For Wilson (2007), it seems unlikely that within the environment of her community, she felt mandated to be strong. She was surrounded by death, struggle, and turmoil. It is more likely that what she saw around her was as similar to her own situation. Perhaps in school some people knew that a child's life was not necessarily meant to require that the child improvise ways of survival, care for a younger sibling(s), prepare meals, listen to fights and try to save her parent before the next morning's school. She missed many days of school, moved often, and may not have had the opportunity to develop friendships with students who were not experiencing obstacles similar to those she bore or witnessed. Wilson's resources were limited. She was the third generation involved in child welfare as a client or subject of investigation. This made her fourth grade teacher's attention even more valuable.

Chambers: Community

Cultural journalist, Veronica Chambers's (2003) contention that successful Black women who live in predominantly White neighborhoods and work in predominantly White environments need Black women is applicable to three of the authors. In fact each

describes how Black women assisted them dealing with the obstacles they confronted. Another important assertion relates to the need to examine our inner lives: "the challenges I've discussed . . . body image, social integration for black middle-class teens, weight issues, depression, materialism—are all powerful reminders that if we want to have it all, we need to begin with . . . revolution from within" (p. 200).

Chambers (2003) notes that "not until White women scholars and activists . . . listened to our anger without defensiveness that a level of honest substantive communication began." Definitions of success aside, change begins inside. Chambers sounds unsure if the women she interviewed should be responsible for their own development. She contends that while White women are able to accept the "old boy network" it is harder to admit White privilege. Sometimes beyond actually positioning themselves as peers, they position themselves as rivals. Chambers claims that "Black women no longer suspect that White women look down on us, morally or professionally; White women no longer expect us to be in a position of servitude" (p. 112). While I readily accept that this is true in some cases, I wonder who is it that takes the women in her book to be working, to serve them regardless of status when she writes "Every successful Black woman I know can spin a tale about being mistaken for a salesperson, a domestic, or a secretary into a humorous ditty about ignorant white [sic] people" (pp. 119–120). She also says "Every middle-class black person has one, if not many, stories to tell about having been mistaken for the help, or a criminal, at some horrific, now humorous point" (p. 128). I find the thought of Black women benefitting from turning responsibility of their development over to anyone else.

Another important assertion in Chambers's (2003) book is her reference to the benefits resulting from the support of the Black community. "It would be easy to underestimate the historical psychological benefits we've derived from having both the support and sympathy of the black community" (p. 119). Chambers ties the 20th Century breakdown of the Black family with the consistent emphasis on luxury goods: "Manifestation—the consistent emphasis on luxury goods for sex or money for punishment of sexual betrayal— . . . are all indications that what held our families together through hundreds of years of slavery is not holding us together now" (p. 199). The media often makes references to culture that are veiled and therefore difficult to critique. For example, men rowing in the hull of a ship and singing "I'd like to know . . ." to advertise candy and "hip hop" chipmunks selling automobiles do not go unnoticed. Black communities have evolved. Some Black children of working class and professional parents are less likely to socialize with each other inside and outside the classroom. This was helpful to children because what they saw modeled was the behaviors that were associated with upward mobility.

Helpful to this study is Chambers's (2003) description of the changes in Black consciousness into macro and micro issues. In the 20th century the issues were group centered: separate schools, "Whites only" lunch counters, and the (Rosa Parks) Montgomery bus boycotts. The 21st Century micro inequities are "me" issues. For example, a Black professor is denied tenure; a six-figure lawyer is turned down by an Upper East Side coop board; or an advertising director's boss won't assign him to the Nike account.

The safe, clean neighborhoods that once were the homes of working-class and professional middle-class Blacks have become the domain of drug dealing and gang violence, encouraged by the glorification of the gangster lifestyle in rap videos and video games. The result for some is more striated neighborhoods (Chambers, 2003). Those who live in the remnants of these neighborhoods face more intensive struggles to survive.

Because Whites still represent the mainstream, a Black woman is far more "intimately aware and comfortable with how things operate in the White world than vice versa" (Chambers, 2003, p. 129). Comparing Black women with the cultural myths serves to distort White women's understandings of the Black world. But Chambers adds a somewhat encouraging note:

> Those who are among the few in our work place have the opportunity to help or hinder the Blacks around us. . . . A century ago, as domestics, Black women yielded a tremendous amount of power—especially in the lives of children they raised and the white women whose homes they ran . . . nannies, cooks, and maids taught generations of whites about sensitivity, humanity and the dignity of our race. . . . as peers [we have] an even greater power to banish stereotypes and broaden perspectives. (p. 130)

Women who are White sometimes have little incentive to understand how things work in a Black woman's world.

Between Black Women

Bandele (2007, 2009) describes the aid of friends but does not describe the friends. In Germany, it was a Jamaican woman who introduced Farrakhan's tapes to Muhammad (2009). A friend told her that John was married when she met him. Muhammad suspects a friendship cost her friend's daughter as retaliation. Upon seeing

the need for food, her friend bought groceries and food for Muhammad's mother. The friend's daughter was the first victim of the DC Sniper. When Muhammad needed to fly from the East Coast to Washington to claim her children, it was her friends who donated the money for the flight. The women were not without resources. They had human capital.

Patton's (2007) help came from overhearing a young Black stranger in a beauty shop suggest to the other patrons that beating Black children was less about protecting them from racism than the anger of the abusers. The stranger's comments stayed with Patton as she returned home and fought to survive the realities of her beatings. She was discouraged from making friends outside of the family. Patton believed this to be so that she would not describe the beatings to anyone else. In the family she was treated differently, even if unintentionally, because she was not one of them, did not know the family secrets or jokes. She had no connection to the history that they shared. Shared history is important to recognition and self-actualization.

For Wilson (2007) Black women who reflected her value included foster care mothers and her fourth grade teacher. Her fourth grade teacher, introduced Wilson to some friends. as an encouraging Black woman and introduced Wilson to young friends with whom she could reflect and be reflected as worthy. A Black woman intervened in the extended abuse of male relatives. That Black woman refused to remain in the tumultuous reality of Wilson's life after trying to bring some order to it. Though the woman recognized Black women who modeled caring, they were surrounded by patterns of behavior that were restrictive to their development of sense of self.

Much in people's relationships is influenced by how people see themselves and how people are seen by others. Black women need Black women to reflect the real and psychic pain of misrecognition. Each of the informants was both helped and hurt in their interactions with other Black women. Often the hurt started with Black women within the family. Patton and Wilson both emphasized the difficulties between the women in their families, not only them but between generations of women. Muhammad clung to her mother's self-sacrificing behavior. Bandele was stuck trying to understand why her mother would "take a pass on her."

Garfield: Self-knowledge

For sociology professor Gail Garfield (2005), the study of the social and cultural threats to the needs, interests, and aspirations of Black women led to a sociology of knowledge. Garfield came to understand how her years as executive director of The Institute on Violence, Inc. led to her invitation to meetings where her opinions as a Black woman were subsumed by the agendas that dominated the discussions. Exploring what Black women think, feel, and do in relationships to the cultural and social worlds she concluded that attempts to make their experiences fit neatly into the discourse of inclusion required "distorting, fragmenting, and ultimately marginalizing the meaning of violence in women's lives" (p. 246). This denotes another level of violation.

The women in Garfield's (2005) study remembered their mothers fondly. Their mothers were the disciplinarians, in charge exercised corporal punishment. However, the daughters did not think that the mothers intended to harm them physically, were

vindictive in the use of whippings, and did not resent their mothers for physical punishments. The women understand their mothers positions on whippings.

Patton noticed the tension between her mother and maternal grandmother. Patton's mother was the product of an era when a woman's value was measured by marrying, serving her husband, keeping her house clean, worshipping God and having children. She dropped out in junior high school and scoffed at people she considered "high minded." Once in a while, they went to her grandmother's house where they were likely to encounter her mother's nearly two dozen siblings. While the men gathered around the television, the sisters worked in the kitchen. The children played house and cousins often ignored Patton because she was not really one of them. In their game of house, the 'mother' seemed to enjoy swinging the switch that was always in her hand at the smaller children. On one holiday visit, Patton watched her mother fawn over the little girl that she really wanted: she kissed her, stroked her hair, hugged her, and told her how beautiful she was, things she never told Patton.

Out of duty or respect her mother phoned her grandmother weekly but their conversations were short and not warm. Patton sensed that mother and daughter had an invisible and intense veil between them. That veil may have been the result of her mother feeling that she had been whipped more than her siblings and grandmother knowing deep down inside that something was wrong with her daughter. They said they loved each other but their behavior revealed that they did not like each other. Patton paralleled her life to the brutality of U.S. slavery. "Past trauma and pain wrought out of enslavement

grounded African Americans' individual and collective sense of identity … because racism continued and still continues, to perpetuate the memories of exploitation."

Muhammad's interaction with her mother is an obscure example of transgenerational trauma. Her description of her mother's self-sacrificing love (Beaubouef-Lafontant, 2009) illustrates the harmful effects. Muhammad's father left her mother when she was four. Her mother's account would prove untrue on several levels. He did not die in an accident in the U.S. Navy but in a house fire of domestic violence origin. If she was his favorite child, why did she never see him or his family between his departure and death? Still Muhammad professed that her mother loved her too much to let her move away and she left college after 2 years to get a job to help her mother financially.

Bandele questioned her own value because she felt that her mother "took a pass on her." Her riding lessons and education were clues to her parents' attempts to offer her a life of privilege, a chance to know herself. By marrying and having a child with a violent man demonstrated a diminished sense of her own worth. Because he was controlled by the prison system they were unable to develop an equitable relationship. Intellectualizing his availability ended with his deportation upon parole. Further clues to what she thought of herself lie within her assertion that her mother took a "pass on her," her description of a woman as "a mean boss," and her questioning whether all women were alike. Even though her adoptive parents tried to assure her that she was chosen.

Wilson's rejection and abandonment began before she was born. According to a child welfare worker, her maternal grandmother wasn't doing such a great job either with

the five children she had left at home. To Wilson, her grandmother never seemed remorseful. Wilson's mother never forgave her and her grandmother soon expected her mother to care for her siblings. Her mother's behavior was confusing to Wilson. Her mother complained to Wilson about how her mother mistreated her but she never treated Wilson any better. Her mother would, on the one hand, decline a caseworker's offer to take the children for the night even though she had no place for them to go. On the other hand, she "called welfare to pick her children up because she felt like it and asked for [them] back when it was convenient for her." After fights with her boyfriend, her mother would leave the house for several days. As she grew, Muhammad's attempt to care for herself and her younger brother resulted in child welfare involvement and foster care. I suspect her mother had mental health issues.

The constant chaos of Wilson's life was punctuated by the recognition of her fourth grade teacher. The teacher genuinely cared and "at that moment I knew that my life had meaning . . . really felt safe." The teacher made a tremendous impression on her by pointing out that she had choices and introducing her to a friend. The two friends made another friend, but unfortunately, the triad meant Wilson's loss of both friends through the deaths of children. She discovered one friend dead in her bed of leukemia and witnessed a suspicious fire in the neighborhood where her best friend was tortured, raped, and killed.

Patton thinks she paid for regular meals, a room of her own, and private school with her mind, body, and spirit. She interprets her relentless beatings as her adoptive

mother's sense of entitlement to her love. Almost being adopted from the foster care system by a married couple who chose her is *lucky*.

The women experienced difficulties with Black women, but other Black women also came to their aid. While the Black women closest to them failed them, other Black women contributed to their survival. Patton overheard a young woman in the salon. Muhammad's friend made sure Muhammad and her family had food, friends pooled their money so that she could get her children back. Bandele was strengthened as she learned to understand the Black women with whom she came into contact. Wilson had various women who aided in her positive development. Her fourth grade teacher, a friends' mother, some foster mothers left positive, supportive impressions on her life.

Myles (2009) emphasized female subjectivity and self-knowledge through slave narratives. Survival might be accomplished through self-acceptance and a consciousness that connects individuals with their roots in "hegemonic spaces that attempt to render them invisible and valueless" (p. 146). One way of becoming interested in understanding oneself can occur through observation and listening. "Self-knowledge is learned from other females who have experienced like situations in oppression and domination" (pp. 112–113). Once Black women understand how hegemony functions to destroy Black female consciousness, Black women must relocate in order to complete their transformation in spaces where female spirits are nurtured and revitalized. Due to their differences and objectification, Black women need to move outside the dominant space— a space in which they are invisible—to reevaluate and reassess their social positions. "It is self-knowledge that fuels African American women's determination to create new

identities and subsist even when others would prefer their annihilation" (p. 36). I contend that this self-knowledge is not optional, it is imperative that women who are Black recognize the significance of the history of struggle.

How each woman knows who she was is important and telling. Self-knowledge depends to great extent on environment (Myles, 2009) and influences daily choices. For instance, Bandele compares herself with the dominant culture. Bandele held fast to the idea that "her mother took a pass on her." She does not exactly describe her relation to the parents who adopted her or say much about her sibling(s). She is shamed by the image of the single Black mother. She wants to be chosen for something other than as a target of violence.

Bandele limits her divulgence of her sexual abuse to snippets. Ironically, she comments on the importance of Black women bearing witness to their victimization by racism and sexism because not bearing witness is equivalent to disappearing. At the same time she understands a nuanced claim that Black women live: "Black women are never victims . . . never weak."

Muhammad explains that she loved her husband unconditionally "without understanding what that means." After they were married, she said, "if I bought something for myself that he didn't like, it would mysteriously end up missing," but she was "still too naïve to consider this level of control." She portrayed herself as *insecure* and *easily fooled*. She had not discussed psychological symptoms in her earlier life. She does begin to question, "Shouldn't we all be living a life filled with love and respect?" I would answer yes and wonder how a woman gets to this place.

Muhammad did not know her father or his family, but remembered his funeral. At another funeral she overheard that her father died in a fire, as the result of domestic violence. As an adult listening to tapes by Louis Farrakhan she started to wonder about who she was. When a therapist gave her exercises to help her accept the loss of her children she demanded that the therapist aid her understand why she was so passive. She described herself as naïve and easily fooled. By describing herself as *easily fooled,* she relinquished control and the adherent responsibility.

Psychological abuse was manifested not only in issues of esteem and affiliation but in economic and law enforcement/judicial issues. While she had not discussed racism with her husband before they lived in Germany, it was a reality. They had both grown up in the Black community of Baton Rouge, where the students were all Black. She spent two and a half years at predominantly Black, Southern University. In the U.S. Army they had friends of all races. Yet she knew "Racism is not a general topic of conversation among my friends. If you are black in [the U.S.], it's going to have touched you in some way." The tension of being Black in America is obvious in time spent out of the environment where it is constant.

Muhammad gives a personal example of how racism touched her that might escape the imagination of those who may never have experienced it. Following up on her phone response to a newspaper advertisement, Muhammad arrived to fill out an application and was told that the job was already filled. Leaving she passed a White woman in the halls. She heard the woman get an application to fill out.

Without physical scars proving that she suffered domestic abuse was difficult. Perhaps, the slow response of law enforcement and judicial officials is attributable to her inability to produce evidence of her husband's abuse. But a clue she could have noticed is buried within the number of times her husband stated directly, "I don't mind because you don't matter." How many times did he need to tell her before she became alarmed?

Patton's experiences with the adoption process casts a shadow on the system's reputation for saving children from the harsh realities of the foster care system. Instead of feeling gratitude for her rescue from a horrible foster care placement, she describes the foster care placement as warm and her adoptive home as unbearable: "I knew my adoptive family was dysfunctional, but I didn't realize this by comparing it to white *(sic)* families or by using Eurocentric modes of analysis to come to my conclusion." She knew that crying might have made her feel better when she lived with her foster mother, but she instinctively knew that tears could get her hit again in her adoptive situation. She did not live in poverty, drugs, or alcohol. Their sexual mores were conservative. Education, work ethic, and religion were constant themes. More than just herself, she always represented her family and her race. In her adoptive family she notes how she felt strange at family dinners, where she was not familiar with the history they shared, did not get their jokes, and did not know the people they talked about. Patton was impressed by the school principal's apology for failing to recognize her suffering. The principal added she did recognize Patton's potential. Patton did not know that she had deep wounds that would affect how she functioned in the world and how she saw herself and others for years. Her survival depended on her ability to disassociate from all the pain.

Generations of complications are evident in Wilson's family. Her biological father only spoke to her once by phone on her sixteenth birthday. Her mother abandoned her time after time for days after fights with her live-in-boyfriends. Wilson was left indiscriminately with the boyfriends She felt that her mother celebrated and chose her men over Wilson (and her brothers) daily. Eventually, the court granted custody of Wilson to her brother's grandmother, a sickly woman with a brutal family. As Wilson described it, a child services worker assisted her new guardian in convincing the parole board that her son, who was serving time for a violent armed robbery, was needed to help with the children. Wilson spent "most of her life in the midst of chaos" and "barely understood the concept of family." What the women knew is that something was wrong in their lives. What they knew was separate from comparisons with the dominant group.

Myles (2009) emphasized the importance of female bonding. Female bonding is useful and essential for Black women's survival. Female bonding allows for shared recognition of threats to Black women paramount for continued existence. Within and through Black women's connections, a Black woman can avoid self-annihilation. Myles comments on Black female acceptance of the values of the dominant culture. When a Black woman accepts the values of the dominant culture, she is not prepared to fend off White values that distort her thinking. She is out of touch with reality to compare herself to Whites with whom she comes in contact.

> Instead of seeing how the system works to suppress Black women like herself and instead of falling back on the support of Black women's community . . . loses part of her Black female knowledge when she believes that entering White society is the only avenue in escaping the margins of White society.

Cultural domination of Blacks by Whites means that the Black self is placed at a distance even from itself.

When a woman asserts herself and moves away from the spaces of oppression and difference, she claims the right to move freely toward a fuller understanding of herself and casts off the identity imposed upon her by *controlling images*. This might be considered a metaphorical *running way*. Black women's running sometimes aids in healing from the physical and psychological oppressions of race, gender and class. The women need other women because it takes the communal effort of Black women to place Black women's experiences at the center of any discourse (Garfield, 2005; Myles, 2009).

Myles: Wherever You Run, There You Are

Understanding who one is and where one belongs has a link to trying to escape one's circumstances (Myles, 2009). Wilson actually ran away so often she returned to where she started. She needed to identify the source of her problem, possible solutions, and decide what follows. Her explanation was provocative "Since I was always afraid and didn't get enough sleep at home, I had no problem taking my chances on the street." It would be in the running that she started to realize that she had to consider that, as a strategy, running did not solve her problem.

Each woman's account bears traces of *running*. While Patton's escape may have saved her life, for Wilson realizing that she arrived back at the source of her trouble was a critical moment. Wilson did not live anywhere long enough to grow roots and yet, she ran away. Muhammad's and Bandele's running way was more covert and a matter of interpretation.

Patton's experience of the foster care and adoption systems contradicted common complaints. She remembers her foster care family as pretty unremarkable. Her foster care mother was a White woman, mean drunk; her foster care father was an African American mail carrier. It was not until she lived with a married African American couple who wanted to adopt her that she felt physically and psychologically tortured. It was especially noticeable during family dinners that she felt she did not belong. She did not share the history that they talked and laughed about. At family dinners they shared stories about people she never knew. She did not feel close to the people with whom she lived. If it were not for her foster care experience and hearing a young woman's admonition of the Black practice of whipping Black children, she may not have realized her life was in danger.

As mentioned before, Patton had her own room but it was a chamber of horrors. She needed a safe space. She had to keep her room ordered. It was not the ordinary expectations of putting used towels and clothes in the hamper, not the usual picking up of toys, but an impossible to meet demand to satisfy her adoptive mother's fantasies. It was also the place of most of her beatings. It was an example of a *crooked room* (Harris-Perry, 2011). In a crooked room the impossible task of standing up straight is made more strenuous because no matter what adjustment the individual makes, the room still reflects her image distorted as in a carnival mirror. When Patton learned that perfection was not an option, she realized that residing in a place where she does not belong might exact her life.

Patton is convinced that running away saved her life. But the details of her life might save those who are alarmed by so many young runaways justifying their rebellion. The level of her abuse far exceeds most teenage angst. She demonstrates the level of her psychological wounds by beginning her story with her return and an aborted attempt to kill the woman who abused her. In a shelter she was able to evaluate her circumstances and claim her own life and affirm her estimation of the cost of her adoptive life. When she tried to attend the private school, she found that her adoptive father had denied responsibility for her and demanded a refund of remaining tuition.

Bandele's and Muhammad's running away is perhaps a bit more heuristic. Bandele was running away when she chose to marry a man whose only hope of freedom depended on a protracted and difficult process. Personal judgment demands some reasonable questions. Was she escaping the dating scene? Did she find safety in the predictability of knowing that a prisoner would be controlled? But, what possibilities followed?

Similarly, Muhammad, travelled from Baton Rouge to Fort Lewis for a man who she knew was not available to her. Earlier, she claimed that her mother loved her too much to see her move away. Her mother's love did not convince her to stay at home. Her evaluation of this man was based on the criteria she heard men describe as "a good man." She went with him to Germany. Muhammad was reared in a community in Baton Rouge where she overheard gossip about her father's demise. She was impressed by a man who lied to her about his availability. Perhaps her impression was encouraged by her knowledge of desirable attributes of men and her beliefs about her place in the world as a

woman. When her friend advised her that he was married, her response may have been influenced by her ease with the lies that her mother told her for her own good. She learned that her father died a victim of domestic abuse and it was questionable whether she was his favorite child.

It is purely conjecture that moving across the country to be with a man who lied about his availability is shortsighted. However, time would expose the flaw in her decision. During her miscarriage, the base hospital refused to admit her because she was not married. She realized that "if she bought something for [herself] that he did not like, it would mysteriously end up missing." She noted several times her husband's warning: "I don't mind because you don't matter." All of these were clues to how he saw her.

Seeing how Bandele ran away requires a mind that is open to the pain of listening to her psychological pain. Consider her state of mind when she went to a prison to read and write poetry as an educational project. At least in her mind, her mother "took a pass on her." She didn't know who she was or where she came from. She longed to satisfy her need for acceptance and love. She feared being recognized as a single Black woman. To her that meant only being chosen as a target of violence. Would her vulnerability have been diminished if she thought that she could have found an intelligent conversation outside the prison walls? After all, she knew that he was incarcerated for a violent crime and would require an appeal to hope for release. It seems that she satisfied her needs for acceptance and love within the prison wall, running away from her world. She essentially cut herself off from her world. Once she made this decision, her interactions centered on

trips to the prison, phone calls, and letters. In reality she further limited the possibility of being at home in her world.

Wilson's young mother was hardly capable of caring for her children. Wilson sometimes shared a room with her brother(s), sometimes shared a bed with (fictive) aunts. Wilson was shuffled from place to place. Her excessive absence from school probably did not help her to establish roots. She was in and out of foster care. Until she became a ward of the state, and her brother's grandmother took custody of her. Her brother's father, who was convicted of a violent armed robbery, exercised authority over her. His parole was hastened because his mother needed his help with the children. Under his guardianship, the children experienced more beatings and she was molested.

A place to belong was so foreign to Wilson that she ended up running away to situations she had run away from. Her reasoning softens the suffering: "Since, I was always afraid and didn't get enough sleep at home, I had no problem taking my chances on the streets." Her life was marked by chaos of the most difficult to imagine sort. Yet, deep within her something inspired her to seek safety and shelter over violation, neglect, and chaos. Her running away was an expression of her need to belong.

So the women ran, whether physically or mentally, to escape the anguish that they knew intimately. It proved a sometimes successful strategy. In Patton's case, it may have saved her life. During her running, she learned that she had value and pursued a life that was unlike the one she had known. Muhammad ran away from a home where she learned that love did not demand truth across the U.S. to a life where she lived the diminished life of love that was not truthful. At first glance, it appears that Bandele's running was

unsuccessful. She was running away from her history. However, her confrontation helped her to value who she was, while accepting how others saw her.

Rutledge: Motivation

Rutledge (2008) investigates the motivation of Black women to become leaders in American corporations. A nutritionist, with a doctorate in leadership change, Rutledge shares the responses to her question. Rutledge explained: "people are motivated by a variety of elements, aspects, and factors. Motivation is individualized based on childhood experiences, environment circumstances, and incentives" (p. 54).

Motivation is a by-product of recognition, achievement, relationship, and growth potential. What motivates Black women is still unclear because of the variety of elements and different stages in life. Her participants (n=16) defined the motivators as an internal force or influence, something that comes from within. The motivators identified included family, community or other people, desire to succeed, money, spirituality, recognition, and personal growth and development. She reported seven themes that emerged: (a) motivation is intrinsic; (b) ignorance is a barrier; (c) discrimination is a driving force; (d) mentorship is needed and impactful; (e) leadership is situational; (f) leaders should lead by example; and (g) maintain a winning attitude. She explained that a major part of understanding the motives of the participants is linked to understanding their history and culture. Rutledge explains how ignorance is a barrier: "The lack of knowledge of the cultural beliefs, ethics, character, and behavior of African Americans, according the participants, continues to be a barrier, and challenge as it relates to growth and

promotions" (pp. 82–83). Rutledge stresses the importance of understanding the history and culture of those who are studied.

Political science professor Harris-Perry (2011) investigates the emotional realities of Black women's lives, specifically shame and misrecognition, to verify their citizenship behavior. She introduces an analogy of trying to stand up in a crooked room. Harris-Perry asserts that there are three elements of shame. First, the social element of shame occurs when shame is felt in response to an (real or imagined) audience. This component of shame transpires when we fear exposure and evaluation by others. Second, shame may be global and manifest when the monitoring of our actions, extends to an "indictment of the whole self." The third element of "shame transforms our identity. We experience ourselves as being small, worthless and as being exposed" (Lindsay-Hartz, 1984, as cited in Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 104). This shame is based on the urge to withdraw, submit or appease others and has psychological and physiological consequences. Shame and recognition work hand in hand.

Bandele (2009) expressed several fears. She described herself as a descendent "from a long line of women forced to live lives with the fear that if we speak, we will lose . . . be separated from our children" As a writer it seems reasonable that her fear might center on limitations of self-expression. As a mother it seems reasonable that she would fear the possibility of separation from her child. She also suspects that contemporary young Black women are picked up on minor or false charges and held until their babies are put in foster care. She asserts that once in foster care, it would be hard to get them out. Bandele feared limitations and self-expression. She feared being grouped

with Black women. She feared that education and health care systems would continue to fail some.

It is within reason that Muhammad should have been afraid believing her husband's threat on her life. When she moved back across the U.S. to the east coast she did not describe it as resulting from fear. If Muhammad was afraid, she masked it and we can only speculate why, except while she was at a women's shelter where they stressed the women's safety. It leads me to wonder how often the fear being experienced is a result of those who intend to help.

Patton's and her peers' fear of Black women is a response to the harsh treatment to which they were accustomed.

> When black women came near us, we got quiet, stepped back from them, or ducked if they moved suddenly . . . We expected to be yelled at, hit, criticized, called names, and handled roughly when they fixed our clothes, hair, and faces.

She describes how these regular little hurts made her made her feel. "Learning to live with a woman I didn't love or respect and I felt didn't love or respect me was like learning how to die, become a shell, denied what I felt, hated without showing it, wept without tears." She describes herself as docile and not liking herself and feeling inferior. She felt "small, insignificant, devalued and powerless." By paralleling her childhood with an abusive adoptive mother to slave children, Patton (2007) raises the level of her fear to psychological terror:

> This psychological terror wreaked havoc on slave children well before puberty and adulthood. Were slave children full able to maintain belief in themselves as worthy human beings? Did slave children who were forced to curtail their anger

become too submissive? Did their concept of themselves reflect their master's treatment and perception of them? Or did black children express the aggression toward their masters and attempt to avoid total dependency? Did they turn on each other? Did their spirits survive? (p. 87)

Patton describes how denying her right to satisfy her psychological needs threatens her life and ties her psychological distress to her physical beatings and whippings:

Though hunger pains in my stomach are rare, my mind and the middle part of my body where all my feelings came from experienced relentless craving. My yearning for love, affection, attention, trust, and safety wouldn't let me breathe right or sleep peacefully. The kind of hunger I had made me feel so wary at the dinner table that I couldn't digest my food right. Everything that I ate went right through me. Fear kept me on the toilet. Fear kept me skinny. Fear kept me hungry. (p. 70)

Patton further describes her experience of psychological terror. "My daily struggles defined my strength, tenacity and black girlhood. I felt a deep, deep gash in my soul that I couldn't touch or adequately describe." Patton relied on herself because there was no one to share the experience with. She didn't know her origin and could not experience the relaxation of being at home: "Having no clue who I was or where I came from made me feel my life was meaningless." Patton summoned up enough strength for self-definition: "As a form of resistance, I began to define myself in total opposition to her and her life." These psychosocial factors are not isolated from the physiological and safety aspects of her life. Patton deduced that daily whippings and beatings were the price of having a room, regular meals, and private school.

Wilson's fear of the unknown streets was less than her fear of what would happen to her in her home. So she took her chances. She ran away. She could not get anyone to hear her while she was being rebellious. Not that she was listened to at home.

Without using the word, Bandele succinctly declares her shame. She describes her desire to be recognized in contradiction to the image of single Black mothers. Ironically, while Bandele complains that she does not know who she is or where she came from because her mother "took a pass on her" whoever she is, she goes to extreme lengths to avoid being identified as the single Black mother she is.

Bandele, feeling abandoned, a single mother started to anticipate her child's need for "a strong healthy mother" must come first. Bandele's existential shock reflects a great illustration for some Black women's self-evaluation. She might have overestimated the stature of legal marriage. What was she thinking when she decided to marry a man imprisoned for a criminal violence? We cannot know, no matter what she says. Was she hoping against hope? She went to the prison as part of an educational exercise and found him intelligent. She was taken in by his intelligence and his ability to hold conversation. Was this something she was unable to find outside prison? The availability of desirable partners is a psychologically painful reality for many Black women.

Taking unfulfilled desires into a prison could mean getting them fulfilled in prison. However, I contend that her mistake is the failure to know who she is and what she wants and needs, what she likes and does not like. In her previous book, she encourages those who evaluate her to be more open-minded. Who dares think harshly of her because she chose to marry a prisoner? After all, who is to say who she should love?

It is a judgment on my part that she should have thought better. That judgment is based on my personal experience.

Bandele's marriage ends when her husband's release from prison deportation. She is also geographically alone and she realized the marriage was a mistake and she realized her true status. Bandele actually documents her cultural shame. She outlines her fear that she will be misrecognized as the stereotypical single Black mother but she is the stereotypical single Black mother.

American Studies professor Parks (2010) focuses on the myth of the Angry Black woman. She says that significant dimensions of the myth hold benefits not only for Black women but for the larger society as well. She makes a subtle but significant statement. Conditions exist in which anger is a reasonable response.

No one is angry all the time, but there are times when anger is a reasonable response to conditions (Beaubouef-Lafontant, 2009; Harris-Perry, 2011; Parks, 2010). But when anger is associated with strength in Black women, it often stimulates fear. Each woman depicts some reasonable conditions for anger.

Bandele's memoir reflects a unique perspective in that she actually explains how she did not want to be *mistaken* to be a stereotypical single Black woman, while in some ways she was. Bandele was pregnant with her husband's child but she met and married him while he was incarcerated for his part in a violent crime. She felt abandoned and questioned whether she looked "like a statistic walking" or "what the world thought of me." Before she recognized that her daughter needed a strong, healthy mother, she practiced behaviors to try to appear loved. She continued to squeeze her ring on her

swollen finger and she phoned people working something about her husband into phone conversations so that others in waiting rooms knew she was married**.**

Muhammad (2009) shares her life as affected by the *DC Sniper*. Within the pages of her text she demonstrates how psychological abuse and the absence of scars can contribute to her mind body split. Several situations reflect the level of her affect. Her friend told her that John was married, but rather than end the blossoming relationship, she allowed herself to become involved under the guise of teaching him to read and write. She described her impression with John as everything that she had heard the men in her family say a man should be. She expressed "little anger toward him for lying to [her]." Accepting lies seemed to be a constant since her childhood.

Muhammad's father left her mother when she was four and she had no contact with that side of her family. She overheard that he died in a fire, the victim of intimate violence. Her mother told her that he died in an accident in the Navy. Muhammad stated that her mother may have said that she was her father's favorite to make her feel good about herself. Another indication of her level of affect was her saying that her mother loved her too much for her to move away. Yet, she moved from Baton Rouge, Louisiana to Fort Lewis, Washington to live with a man who was still married. She "depended on what John told me . . . [it was] not always reliable." Acceptance of his first lie, signaled her as a target for more lies.

Additionally, she explained that she dropped out of college to help her mother with the costs of maintaining a household. Her mother's failing health was the reason that her mother moved to California. Her medical problems, from "arthritis and cataracts to

diabetes and heart problems" were her reason for asking to move across so far share a bedroom with the children in a small trailer.

Muhammad did not directly express anger. However, when an FBI agent who failed to properly file her case suggested that she return to Tacoma and serve as a decoy to draw out her ex-husband, reasonable emotional responses surface. Several other incidents were potential stimulants for which anger would be a reasonable response. Despite the rules of ethics, her son's counselor encouraged her son to write about his experiences with his father and to question his father's young accomplice for information to write a book. A neighbor discussing the drama surrounding Muhammad's life suggested she divide any money that resulted among the victims. Such a suggestion fails to include Muhammad as victim and implies that she is responsible in some way. Denial of the victim state compounds the trauma (Daniel, 2000)

The adoption system failed Patton. When she first ran away the police returned her. When she went to the emergency room with injuries, it was not reported and she was never away from a guardian. Perhaps this preceded required reporting of suspicious injuries. As she experienced the constrictions in her mind, body, and spirit, Patton grew angry. She went from trying to anticipate her adoptive mother's whims to defining herself in opposition to her adoptive mother. Eventually, she wanted her dead. In fact her account begins with her aborted attempt to murder the woman who abused her.

For Wilson, living with physical, sexual, and psychological abuse meant moving often. Sometimes she lived in public housing. Living in public housing is not in itself a reason for anger, but when, as it did in her case, lead to slow and poor response in

emergencies; when it means no security, no safety; when it is coupled with child welfare system failure; anger is a reasonable response. Wilson lived through the deaths of two young girls her age. She found one dead in bed of leukemia. She witnessed a fire in her neighborhood in which her best friend was raped, tortured, and murdered. This all occurred before she was 12 years of age.

Her mother often relied on boyfriends as babysitters. When she was six, one of her mother's boyfriends forced Wilson to perform fellatio. This was the first of Wilson's sexual molestations. Wilson realizes how naïve and careless her mother was to leave her with men and her mother was never without a man. Before the age of 8, she felt worthless. A man started getting into the bed Wilson shared with his sisters. She became introverted and withdrawn. She described it. "[He] started getting into bed with me and his sisters … did things that shattered [her] sense of self-esteem" Headaches and stomachaches attributed to anxiety for 2 years. Wilson is within reason to be angry at her mother for not only neglect but for placing her in harm's way and then blaming her for the outcome.

From her experiences, Wilson learned to detect insincerity: When her male caregiver smiled and asked about her day, she became "nauseous and getting angrier by the second. I don't think he knew that I could see right through his so called polite demeanor." The caregiver, who actually was not a relative, was her legal guardian, her brother's father. Since she witnessed his drug use and he crawled into the bed with her, she needed to belong somewhere, and to someone. Seeing through the shallow attempt to feign politeness strikes me as a predecessor of misrecognition. How old does one have to

be to recognize the condescending smiles that do not match behavior, especially when it occurs repeatedly and permeates so many settings in one's environment? This is another nuanced understanding of Black women made more psychologically painful because no explanation is required on the perpetrator's part. The perpetrator of this "so called polite demeanor" need only act hurt at the suggestion that they are anything other than sincere and well-meaning.

Each woman experienced several conditions in which anger was a reasonable response. Wilson was physically, sexually, and psychologically abused. She was abandoned and rejected. She was rebellious and ran away. Patton's dysfunctional family threatened her life. Had she not aborted her attempt to kill the woman who abused her, she would likely have suffered a different outcome. Muhammad's husband killed random people as part of his plan to murder her. Muhammad received minimal support from the justice system. Bandele's circumstances and the circumstances surrounding her daughter were not priorities to be a priority to the officials deportation. The rationality of her anger is questionable.

Criminology professor Beth Richie (1996) interviewed the women who were detained at Rikers Island and detected a difference between their responses women. She explained the difference as engendered entrapment. She was able to describe ways in which the Black women were caught in circumstances in which the women's choices were sufficiently limited such that the women felt trapped into committing crimes.

Only Wilson (2007) gave an account that would fit the specifications that Ritchie (1996) described. Wilson was forced to steal by an uncle. She was not the first family

member forced to steal. This, in my estimation, was by no means the worst experience she recalls.

Summary

The informants' stories demonstrate how societal conditions diminish opportunities to meet certain psychosocial needs. Highlighting examples of anger, shame, and fear illustrate the informants' human vulnerabilities in opposition to cultural images of strength. Participation in the discourse that surrounds Black women without understanding these vulnerabilities can contribute to the amelioration of the psychological pain that these women suffer as they struggle to satisfy their human needs for affiliation, acceptance, and belonging.

Their running away reveals an approach for navigating the impediments to fulfilling their human needs. Running away is more than a physical relocation; it refers to the adjustments made in state of mind. Some of them ran away in their minds. The negative images of Black women are powerfully pervasive enough to make some Black women attempt to distance themselves from Black women. Stated another way, the negative images can encourage them to invest resources in the futile exercise of trying to be someone they are not. Bandele's case illustrates a woman trying to distance herself from herself.

The ability or likelihood of satisfying the need for unconditional positive regard is limited by the socialization that might influence one to believe that they are not worthy of that regard. The negative self-concepts must be extinguished before one believes and presents herself from a position of genuine strength and confidence. This requires

understanding one's self, as well as what one wants, needs, and likes versus what one

does not want, does not need, and does not like.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

By exploring the themes of anger, shame, and fear, the inner realities of the informants are highlighted. Whether expressed or repressed, anger obstructs the ability to make judicious choices. Unacknowledged shame skulks within the recesses of the mind, stopping one from experiencing the safety, security, love and belonging that all humans need. By diverting energy, justifiable fear threatens to impede one's movement toward growth. These negative emotions misrepresent one's understanding of self and purpose, and ban the possibility of making oneself at home, or feeling relatively secure.

Outcomes

These women's avoidance of annihilation may sound like success stories. However, such perspectives overlook the psychological pain involved and do not take into account that their lives are not over. The common thread throughout these accounts is the shared essential nature of psychic trauma: reflections of intrinsic values as a human being. The positive reflections came from their children, their teachers, and even from strangers. Positive influential reflections could potentially come from anyone.

As the informants moved toward growth they changed. Bandele confronted her shame. By recognizing that she was the woman she did not want to be she reevaluated her assumptions about the reality she struggled to deny. By recognizing her personal value, Patton determined the dysfunctional reality of the environment of her adoptive

family and fled. Muhammad recognized that keeping quiet is not a reasonable response to psychological violence. Wilson learned that she had personal value despite her chaotic surroundings. Understanding this enabled her to stop running and walk away.

Knowing if or how the informants will continue to grow is not possible. Deducing what these informants were thinking is only helpful when we take their accounts of these experiences and practice self-evaluation. What are – scholars of sociology, political science, criminology, and education – thinking? Do they recognize the decisions that oppress Black women and others? Do they know when their decisions marginalize and when their decisions determine who can afford or who is putting forth effort or who deserves to have their basic human needs met? What thought goes into supporting and rejecting taxes, subsidies? What do votes mean? Are they support for a neighbor, or colleague, or a friend? How is fear, anger, or shame handled responsibly? Who do we want to change?

Are educators and scholars encouraging growth or maintaining the status quo? These women fought, often with themselves for the basic needs of human beings. Institutions such as the education system, the criminal justice system, child welfare agencies, social services, and the political system whose missions are to help those in need were sometimes culpable because they were unresponsive and, just as importantly, not relevant. Bandele's education was insufficient if she did not understand the history of her country and the effects race has had and continues to have in the lives of Black people. Understanding one's history and culture puts one in position to exercise agency in ways that illustrate responsibility to self and community.

Contemporary Black women sometimes embrace their womanhood and circumvent their blackness. This is a reasonable response to covert pressure to assimilate as part of their development. However, it may be psychologically healthier to come to an understanding of who they are.

In Patton's and Wilson's cases, those who work in child welfare might see the need to scrutinize the policies and procedures of those institutions. This is not necessarily an indictment of these institutions, but these institutions could benefit from developing a relevant psychosocial dimension. Keep in mind that the descriptions of the informants do not tell the stories of the many others whose lives are saved because, as both Patton and Wilson pointed out, caring human beings attended to the needs of children. So I wonder how well the policies and procedures of these institutions capture the needs of children.

All of the women navigated psychological pain, but Muhammad was not involved with adoption or foster care. So, we see more clearly through her account the potential benefits of education. The two and a half years Muhammad spent in college did not help her see that living a life of love and respect does not coexist with keeping quiet. It seems that the highest obligation of education might be to help one know oneself: to know who one is, what one needs, and what one likes.

The world is better when Black women critically testify about their lived experiences. The first step of problem solution is acknowledging the problem. To be truly independent and self-sufficient one must make one's needs known. Weakening the relevant obstacle to young Black women's realizing human potential can have sweeping effect. Such work benefits individual Black women. It benefits society by increasing the

number of productive contributing members in the community. Hopefully, these new contributing citizens help others to maximize their human potential.

New Directions for Study

Several areas surfaced that suggest potential areas of study. These areas include corrections, social services, child welfare, and education. The corrections system, represented by the prisons is not responsible those who marry inmates. However, it is responsible for inmates and purports to protect the public from them. If the corrections system is not responsible for rehabilitation, what is the extent of their responsibility? One area for future study is the direction of corrections. At one time, being incarceration for felony meant loss of right to vote, but should it mean loss of right to marry? What is the psychological impact of marrying felons while they are incarcerated?

For social service and child welfare organizations, the experiences these women have shared might encourage us to examine the policies and procedures of these institutions for ways of becoming more responsive to the basic human needs of clients and ways of reaching those whose basic human needs are not met. Perhaps outreach needs to be expanded or recreated if not for the sake of those in need for society's sake. Studies that take seriously the accounts of those who are not having their needs met and the accounts of those who are successfully reflecting something valuable in clients could improve individual and family lives.

Integration of the public space may leave those who are or may be taken as part of the dominant group feeling that the power has been redistributed in such a way that they are powerless to have their needs satisfied. For instance, integration of schools addressed

inferior structures and distribution of teaching materials, but there are other markers of the quality of education that foster psychological harm by conveying messages of inferiority. For instance, as long as textbooks describe the Civil War from the perspective of White northerners and White southerners, while the perspectives of Free Blacks and slaves require extra reading, internal racism is built into the curriculum.

Making education more relevant to Black women means that Black parents' practice of critical testimony that held up Black men and women as role models needs to be reinstated. Contemporary Black women scholars have contributed to a body of work that can be used to supplement or replace this practice. Some Black parents attempt to shelter their children from the harsh reality that racism is still a reality. Black women, women, all of us must practice reflecting the unique human value of those with whom we have contact to improve the world.

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