The Impact of Racism and Historical Trauma In The African American Community
Milwaukee Style - Part One
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LIHF

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Underlying Assumptions about Our Cultural Lens

- Reality is what we take to be true.
- What we take to be true is what we believe
- What we believe is based upon our perceptions
- What we perceive depends on what we look for
- What we look for depends on what we think.
- What we think depends on what we perceive.
- What we perceive determines what we take to be true.
- What we take to be true is our reality.

(Unknown author)
What is Race?

DVD: Race – The Power of An Illusion

Is not a biological construct that reflects innate differences,

But a social construct that precisely captures the impacts of racism.

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Statements From Race: the power of an Illusion

• Race and freedom evolved together in the United States. The idea of race helped rationalize why some people could be denied the rights and freedom that others took for granted.

• Race justified social inequalities as natural. As the race idea evolved, white superiority became “common sense” in the US.

• It helped justify slavery, Indian conquest, the exclusion of Asian immigrants, and the taking of Mexican lands in spite of our belief in democracy and freedom.

• Racial practices were institutionalized within US government, laws, and society.
Types of Racism

• Institutional Racism – Prejudice means differential assumptions about the abilities, motives, and intentions of others according to their race. Discrimination means differential actions toward others according to their race. It includes acts of commission and omission.

• Personally Mediated Racism or Prejudice/Discrimination - Prejudice means differential assumptions about the abilities, motives, and intentions of others according to their race. Discrimination means differential actions toward others according to their race. It includes acts of commission and omission.

• Internal Racism - Acceptance by members of the stigmatized races of negative messages about their abilities and intrinsic worth.

Source: Dr. Camara Jones, CDC

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Microaggressions

• Microaggression Theory - a term coined by Professor Pierce in 1970, used to describe insults and dismissals he regularly witnessed non-black Americans inflict on African Americans. Later, economist Mary Rowe extended the term to include similar aggressions directed at women, and those of different abilities, religions, and other socially marginalized groups. Eventually, the term came to encompass the casual degradation of any socially marginalized group, such as the poor and the disabled.

• It has been argued that the microaggression concept “fits into a larger class of conflict tactics in which the aggrieved seek to attract and mobilize the support of third parties.”

• Psychologist Derald Wing Sue defines microaggressions as “brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership. She describes it as generally happening below the level of awareness of well-intentioned members of the dominant culture.”
Implicit and Explicit Bias

Also known as implicit social cognition, implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual’s awareness or intentional control. Residing deep in the subconscious, these biases are different from known or explicit bias.

Characteristics of Implicit biases

- Pervasive, everyone possesses them, even people with avowed commitments to impartiality such as judges.
- Implicit and explicit biases are related but not distinct mental constructs. They are not mutually exclusive and may even reinforce each other.
- They do not necessarily align with our declared beliefs or even reflect stances we would explicitly endorse.
- Tend to hold implicit bias that favor our own group
- Implicit bias are malleable. They can be unlearned.
The Normalization of Deviance

Normalization refers to social processes though which ideas and actions come to be seen as ‘normal’ and becomes taken for granted or natural in everyday life. As Foucault used the term, normalization involved the construction of an idealized norm of conduct…. And then rewarding and punishing individuals for conforming to or deviating from this ideal

Deviance means departing from the norm and can be biased toward the positive or negative. Most, however, think that “deviant behavior” is someone who is breaking the law or acting out in a negative manner.
The Normalization of Deviance

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Deviance, like conformity, is shaped by society.

Social Foundations of deviance:

1. Structural functionalism – can sometimes bring people together, example 9/11

2. Symbolic interaction- How people define deviance in everyday situations. The negative label is stigma

3. Social conflict – linked to social inequality. What is labeled “deviant” is dependent upon who is in power- I our society- the rich and powerful have the resources to resist deviant labeling.
The Normalization of Deviance

- Prielipp and others ask: Do we (Un)Knowingly Accept Doing the Wrong Thing? Examples
  1. Shuttle Challenger – O-ring erosion problems ignored
  2. MD, breaking sterile field
  3. Flint – water used annually for 2 weeks without incident
Life Course Concepts

• It is the study of people's lives, structural contexts, and social change. In particular, it directs attention to the powerful connection between individual lives and the historical and socioeconomic context in which these lives unfold.

• The family is perceived as a micro social group within a macro social context—a "collection of individuals with shared history who interact within ever-changing social contexts across ever increasing time and space" (Bengston and Allen 1993, p. 470).
Life Course Concepts

• This approach encompasses ideas and observations from an array of disciplines, notably history, sociology, demography, developmental psychology, biology, and economics.

• The concept of life course implies age-differentiated social phenomena distinct from uniform life-cycle stages and the life span.
Life Course Concepts

- Life course examines an individual’s life history and sees, for example, how early events influence future decisions and events.
- The life course perspective elaborates the importance of time, context, process, and meaning on human development and family life.
Life Course Concepts

• The increased research on life course offers unique opportunities to interconnect historical and cultural location and changes in the societal institutions with the experiences of individuals and families.

• The advancement of research in this area will enable researchers to extend the knowledge pertaining to continuity and discontinuity in family life amid ever-changing social, economic, and global environments.
Life Course Principles

• Social historical and geographical location
• Timing of lives
• Heterogeneity or variability
• Linked lives and social ties to others
• Human agency and personal control and how the past shapes the future.
How the Past Shapes the Future

• Early life course decisions, opportunities, and conditions affect later outcomes.

• The past has the potential to shape the present, and the future. This can occur at various levels. Cohort and/or individual/family.

• The timing and conditions of events can set up a chain reaction of experiences. e.g. reproduction of poverty, cycle of family violence, cycle of community violence or community resilience.
How the Past Shapes the Future

- The past, therefore, can significantly affect later life outcomes such as SES, mental health, physical functioning, and marital patterns.
- This long term view, with its recognition of cumulative advantage or disadvantage, is particularly valuable for understanding social inequality in later life and creating social policy and programs.
Historical Trauma Theory

• New concept in public health

• The premise is that populations historically subjected to long-term, mass trauma—colonialism, slavery, war, genocide, Jim Crow, Mass Incarceration, exhibit a higher prevalence of disease even several generations after the original trauma occurred.

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Historical Trauma Theory

- It incorporates and builds upon three theoretical frameworks in social epidemiology:
  - 1) Psychosocial which links disease to both physical and psychological stress. In this framework it not only believed that the stressors create susceptibility to disease, but also acts as a direct pathogenic mechanism affecting biological systems in the body;
2) Political/economic theory which addresses the political, economic and structural determinants of health and disease such as unjust power relations and class inequality; and

3) Social/ecological systems theory which recognizes the multilevel dynamics and interdependencies of present/past, proximate/distal, and life course factors in disease causation.
Historical Trauma Theory

• According to Elder “lives are lived in specific historical times and places….if historical times and places change, they change the way people live their lives. I.e. Pre and post industrialization in Milwaukee for the African American community.

• According to Sotero, Understanding how historical trauma influences the current health status of racial/ethnic populations in the US may provide new directions and insights for eliminating health disparities.
Historical Trauma Theory

Sotero states that based on the literature, there are at least four distinct assumptions underpinning this theory:

1) Mass trauma is deliberately and systematically inflicted upon a target population by a subjugating, dominant population;

2) trauma is not limited to a single catastrophic event, but continues over an extended period of time;

3) traumatic events reverberate throughout the population creating a universal experience of trauma; and

4) the magnitude of the trauma experience derails the population from its natural, projected historical course resulting in a legacy of physical, psychological, social and economic disparities that persist across generations.
Historical Trauma Theory
Three Basic Construct

1. The Historical Trauma Experience- All trauma experiences are technically historical in nature.

The experiences of chronic trauma created deep emotional scars affecting life-long patterns of interpersonal relationships, the ability to master life-skills and role performance.

Trauma as the result of deliberate intent produces a profound sense of dismay and alienation. Intentional violence threatens basic assumptions about an orderly, just world and the intrinsic invulnerability and worthiness of the individual.
Historical Trauma Theory
Three Basic Construct

2. The Historical Trauma Response - The psychological and emotional consequences of the trauma experience are transmitted to subsequent generations through physiological, environmental and social pathways resulting in an intergenerational cycle of trauma.

3. The Intergenerational transmission of historical trauma - Many survivors of historical trauma exhibit psychological problems such as denial, depersonalization, isolation, memory loss, nightmares, psychic numbing, hypervigilance, substance abuse, fixation on trauma, identification with death, survivor guilt and unresolved grief.
Historical Trauma Theory
Three Basic Construct

Recently, researchers have begun to identify historical trauma as a precipitating condition influencing racial/ethnic health disparities. They identified race-related historical trauma as a large-scale, systems-related macro-stressor that adversely impacts both the physical and mental health of the affected racial/ethnic group. It has been asserted that African Americans have sustained traumatic psychological and emotional injury as a direct result of slavery, perpetuated by social/institutional inequality, racism and oppression.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME SPAN</th>
<th>CITIZENSHIP STATUS -YRS</th>
<th>Experience accounts for this proportion of time in US</th>
<th>STATUS</th>
<th>HEALTH &amp; HEALTH SYSTEM EXPERIENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1619-1865</td>
<td>246 years</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>Chattel slavery</td>
<td>Disparate/inequitable treatment poor health status &amp; outcomes. “Slave health deficit” &amp; “Slave health sub-system” in effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865-1965</td>
<td>100 years</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Jim Crow virtually no citizenship rights</td>
<td>Absent or inferior treatment and facilities. <em>De jure</em> segregation/ discrimination in South, <em>de facto</em> throughout most of health system. “Slave health deficit” uncorrected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965-2020</td>
<td>55 years</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>Most citizenship rights: <em>USA struggles to transition from segregation &amp; discrimination to integration of AA as equal Citizens</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>401 years</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>The struggle continues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Historical Trauma

• Primary generations are the direct victims of subjugation and loss, which threaten their population and economic and cultural survival.

• Secondary and subsequent generations are affect by the original trauma through various means. Extreme trauma may lead to subsequent impairments in the capacity of parenting. Physical and emotional trauma can impair genetic function and expression. Secondary and subsequent generations also experience “vicarious traumatization through the collective memory, storytelling and oral traditions of the population. Traumatic events become embedded in the collective memories of the population.

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Historical Trauma

• Offspring are taught to share in the ancestral pain of their people and may have strong feelings of unresolved grief, persecution and distrust. They may also experience original trauma through loss of culture and language, as well as through proximate, first hand experiences of discrimination, injustice, poverty, and social inequality. Such experiences validate their ancestral knowledge of historical trauma and reinforce the historical trauma experience and response.

• Finally, the cumulative effects of historical trauma on the population mitigated to some degree by the existence of resiliency and other protective factors, result in a surfeit of social and physical ills that ultimately lead to population-specific health disparities.

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Historical Trauma
Implications for Public Health and Research

- Modern epidemiology embraces a paradigm that “focuses on the individual, blames the victim, and produces interventions that can be harmful.”

- Some professionals have begun to change this by developing intervention programs that integrate theories of historical trauma, community capacity and community empowerment.

- These programs are designed to be holistic, culturally relevant, and respectful of indigenous self-understanding of historical trauma and its impact on community health.

- Connecting the past with the present is inherent in many cultural traditions. It creates an emotional and psychological release from blame and guilt about health status, empowers individuals and communities to address the root cause of poor health and allows for capacity building unique to culture, community and social structure.

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