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BIPOC Experiences of Racial Trauma on TikTok: A Qualitative Content Analysis

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Abstract
Racial trauma has long been an issue in American society. Recent incidents of racial violence, including the attack and murder of George Floyd and the rise of anti-Asian hate have garnered significant media attention. People often use social media to express their emotions and perspectives on national events, and it has become a popular forum for posting and commenting on content related to timely social issues. In effort to understand individual perspectives, and experiences of racial trauma discussed on social media, we analyzed content labeled with the hashtag "racial trauma" on TikTok during significant racial incidents from March 2020 to May 2022. Results of content analysis showed six themes, (1) encountering racism, (2) traumatic experiences, (3) consequences of experiencing racial trauma, (4) expressing difficult feelings, (5) questioning and challenging oppression, denial, and privilege, and (6) a call to action: raising awareness. Findings inform clinicians' understanding of how their clients experience racial trauma. Clinical implications for incorporating a nuanced understanding of racial trauma in mental health treatment are discussed.

Keywords Content analysis · Racial trauma · Social media · Qualitative research

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Introduction

Racial trauma continues to be a powerful and harmful reality in the United States (APA, 2019). Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) individuals have experienced racial trauma throughout multiple generations. These events have contributed to experiences of marginalization, oppression, and trauma that are categorized as historical traumas. Historical traumas are complex and collective trauma experienced over long periods of time, and across generations by people who share an identity, affiliation, or circumstance (Mohatt et al., 2014). Racial trauma is an ongoing effect of historically traumatic events (Chioneso et al., 2020). The effects of racial trauma may be overt or covert and may include exclusion based on assumptions of racial inferiority, racism, interpersonal discrimination and harassment, institutional and systemic racism (i.e., systemic excessive use of force by the police) (Mosley et al., 2021).

BIPOC individuals have similar or lower reports of mental health disorders as compared to their White counterparts (McGuire & Miranda, 2008). However, exposure to trauma can be detrimental to BIPOC individuals allowing them to become increasingly vulnerable to the development of

mental health concerns, leading to adverse mental health outcomes (Trauma, 2021; Magruder et al., 2017). BIPOC individuals are also less likely to seek and receive mental health treatment as frequently as their White counterparts (Hingwe, 2021). According to the American Psychiatric Association, 48% of Whites received mental health services, compared to 31% of Blacks and Hispanics, and 22% of Asians. One possible reason for these reduced help seeking rates may be stigma surrounding mental health, and stigma on the part of the provider. Mental health stigma is often more prevalent in minority populations, in part due to a common narrative within BIPOC communities that mental health concerns are a sign of weakness (APA, 2017). Additionally, the lack of BIPOC providers within the counseling field does not reflect the BIPOC individuals, leading to discomfort when discussing issues of race, identity compromise, and mistrust of the clinicians due to historical traumas when seeking and receiving therapy treatment. Most therapists identify as White; specifically, within the profession of Marriage and Family therapy, White clinicians make up 64.5% of the field while 35.5% of clinicians are BIPOC individuals (Data USA, 2020). BIPOC clients working with a clinician who is racially or culturally different from them may experience differences in expectations and standards for evaluating and trusting therapeutic expertise, credibility, and competence (Chang & Berk, 2009). If White clinicians are not informed and/or trained in understanding of BIPOC trauma experiences, they may not be able to respond empathetically to BIPOC experiences of racial trauma. White clinicians may underestimate the effects that racial trauma on a BIPOC person's mental health, leading to diminished treatment quality and even further traumatization (Sanchez-Hucles & Jones, 2005). Increased understanding of BIPOC issues may lead to an increased understanding and sensitivity to racial trauma for BIPOC clients (Hodgens, 2021). The lack of BIPOC providers, and providers who are sensitive to BIPOC issues leads to limited outlets for BIPOC individuals to express experiences of race related issues, which can lead to racial trauma.

The effects of racial trauma can be detrimental to how BIPOC perceive race related issues as discussed on social media platforms (Tao & Fisher, 2022). In recent years, social media users have increasingly engaged in dialogue about controversial social issues. It is imperative to understand how, and for what purpose, individuals engage in conversations about race, oppression, and racial trauma on social media (Chon & Park, 2019). It is common for social media users to disclose their personal experiences, as self-disclosure represents 30–40% of social media content (Olteanu et al., 2017). TikTok is a social media platform that has gained prominence primarily with young adults (Montag et al., 2021). TikTok allows participants to create brief videos and share them with the wider TikTok community and social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram (Li et al., 2021). Social media can have pervasive and far-reaching impacts, and can influence how people perceive social issues, how they interact with others, what they disclose, and their own mental health (Karim et al., 2020).

Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to obtain a nuanced understanding of BIPOC experiences of racial trauma as described on social media. Given that social media is a widely used format for self-disclosing experiences and perspectives that may otherwise not be shared, we analyzed social media posts focused on BIPOC experiences of racial trauma. This information informs clinicians' understanding of BIPOC experiences of racial trauma and may inform how they address racial trauma with BIPOC clients.

Literature Review

Racial Trauma

BIPOC individuals have experienced devastating historical events including slavery, mass incarceration of Black Americans in the U.S., health disparities amongst marginalized communities, socioeconomic struggles, and police brutality which often ends in brutal and unnecessary violence and death for BIPOC (Comas-Diaz et al., 2019). These events increase the likelihood that BIPOC individuals will experience racial trauma. Racial trauma is defined as race-based stress that people of Color (POC) and Indigenous people experience due to harmful experiences of racial discrimination, both perceived and actual (Comas-Diaz et al., 2019). Experiences may include threats of harm and injury, humiliating and shaming events, and witnessing racial discrimination towards other POC (Comas-Diaz et al., 2019). The collective experiences of racial trauma can often leave a legacy of trauma within a family system which can be described as intergenerational trauma (Sangalang & Vang, 2016). Intergenerational trauma is the effect of historical trauma and can be expressed as trauma that is passed through generations of a family, by retelling experiences and perceptions to younger generations (Merrill & Fivush, 2016; Sotero, 2006). Racial trauma often affects BIPOC throughout their lives and can even affect younger family members in significant ways (Comas-Diaz et al., 2019).

The effects of racial trauma are widespread and carry psychological and physiological effects (Comas-Diaz et al., 2019). Effects of racial trauma include hypervigilance to threat; flashbacks; nightmares; avoidance; headaches; heart palpitations; and other posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) like symptoms (Comas-Diaz et al., 2019). Black American and Latinx adults suffer from PTSD at higher rates than White adults because of the racial trauma they experience (Sibrava et al., 2019). Black Americans in the United States
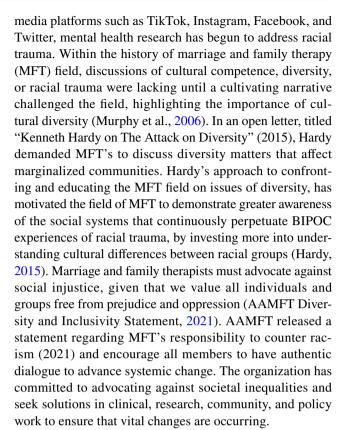
have a 9.1% likelihood of developing PTSD as compared to the 6.7% likelihood of White people who may develop PTSD (Range et al, 2018). Considering the racial trauma BIPOC experience, and their higher likelihood for PTSD, there is a need for mental health literacy, awareness, and advocacy. The severe impact of PTSD symptoms experienced by BIPOC who have experience racial trauma racial trauma, influences their ability to heal from these experiences (Comas-Diaz et al., 2019). The persistent anxiety that people of color face because of continued racial injustice makes healing extremely challenging and perpetuates the cycle and symptoms of anxiety of racial trauma (Sibrava et al., 2019). Racial trauma involves ongoing emotional injuries due to the exposure both directly and vicariously to race-based stress (Come-Diaz et al., 2019). Racial trauma hinders individual health of the people experiencing it, which in turn, hinders health their community because people are not able to function at their best (Cénat, 2022).

Racial Trauma and BIPOC in Current Events

Multiple incidents of police brutality in 2020 targeted Black Americans launched a re-awakening of the prevalence and severity of discrimination against Black Americans (Spann, 2021). It is likely that the effects of these incidents have yet to be fully understood by those who have not experienced institutional or interpersonal racism. BIPOC might experience emotional suppression, distress, anger, confusion, vulnerability, and even violence (Jernigan et al., 2015). BIPOC children and adolescents have unique response to racial discrimination (Saleem et al., 2019). BIPOC children and adolescents spend more time on social media in comparison to their White counterparts, making vicarious racism online exposure an acute concern, therefore increasing harassment and discrimination (Njoroge et al., 2021). The adverse impact of racial trauma during child development can lead to insecurities through early adulthood (Njoroge et al., 2021). For BIPOC, racial trauma is a cumulative experience that does not only affect one person but a whole community (Jernigan et al., 2015). BIPOC face the potential to experience discrimination every day as they venture into society and are therefore at a higher risk of experiencing racial trauma. More frequent experiences of racial microaggressions are associated with more frequent and intense trauma symptoms (Nadal et al., 2019). Therefore, it is important to further explore previous and current studies that examine the narrative of BIPOC's on racial trauma.

Racial Trauma: Implications for Marriage and Family Therapists

As systemic racism, oppression, and racial violence move to the forefront of awareness in society and are shown on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, mental health research has begun to address racial trauma. Within the history of marriage and family therapy (MFT) field, discussions of cultural competence, diversity, or racial trauma were lacking until a cultivating narrative challenged the field, highlighting the importance of cultural diversity (Murphy et al., 2006). In an open letter, titled "Kenneth Hardy on The Attack on Diversity" (2015), Hardy demanded MFT's to discuss diversity matters that affect marginalized communities. Hardy's approach to confronting and educating the MFT field on issues of diversity, has motivated the field of MFT to demonstrate greater awareness of the social systems that continuously perpetuate BIPOC experiences of racial trauma, by investing more into understanding cultural differences between racial groups (Hardy, 2015). Marriage and family therapists must advocate against social injustice, given that we value all individuals and groups free from prejudice and oppression (AAMFT Diversity and Inclusivity Statement, 2021). AAMFT released a statement regarding MFT's responsibility to counter racism (2021) and encourage all members to have authentic dialogue to advance systemic change. The organization has committed to advocating against societal inequalities and seek solutions in clinical, research, community, and policy work to ensure that vital changes are occurring.

Presently the traumatic event of George Floyd's death in 2020, and the establishment of recent movements such as Black Lives Matter, etc. have continually challenged MFT's to consider how these events affect their role as helping professionals. Although recognition of racial trauma is on the rise, the integration of a more culturally sensitive approach in addressing the needs of those who experience racial trauma is necessary to the future of the MFT field.

A Call to Support Social Justice, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

MFTs are systemic theorists and must go beyond their knowledge and language of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and take action toward meaningful change (Watson et al., 2020). MFTs are only beginning to consider how systematic racism influences clients' mental health, and therapeutic outcomes. Unfortunately, these experiences are overlooked in the therapeutic space. In a study, White clinicians reported discomfort in regard to administering treatment to BIPOC clients, detailing their discomfort with statements such as "I feel guilty", "I'm not comfortable and they can sense it", "I'm still not clear on how to bring up race", and "I'm afraid of being seen as a racist," and many others all contribute to a lack of talking about race with a person of color (Watson et al., 2020). While mental health treatment alone cannot solve racism in society,

MFTs must be knowledgeable and prepared to discuss the impact of racial trauma on family systems for racially minoritized clients.

Methodology

Data for this analysis were obtained from TikTok, which was founded in China in 2016 and has become a highly popular social media platform (Montag et al., 2021). TikTok content is disseminated in video format in clips ranging from 15 s to three minutes in length. TikTok is governed by an algorithm that determines which videos are seen by users. The order in which videos appear in a user's feed may also be affected by user engagement on the platform, comments made by other users, and the number of likes received. To mitigate these limitations, the first author created a unique TikTok account solely for the purpose of this research, and did not use that account to engage in other activity on TikTok. The last 19 videos added to the data analysis process were exclusively sourced from this account.

Despite TikTok's rapid growth, there has been minimal empirical research conducted that studied TikTok content (Montag et al., 2021). However, social media platforms like TikTok have become a critical medium for individuals to express their thoughts, emotions, and experiences. As a result, TikTok has the potential to highlight the voices and experiences of those who are often marginalized or underrepresented, providing a platform for sharing their stories in settings where traditional research may not be able to provide such opportunities.

To develop a timely and nuanced understanding of BIPOC experiences of racial trauma, we gathered and analyzed TikTok videos marked with the hashtag #racialtrauma using qualitative content analysis (QCA). QCA is a methodology that is well-suited for studies involving the interpretation of data to identify patterns, themes, or processes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Specifically, it has been used in studies that require analyzing and interpreting short response data (Schreier, 2012). We used an inductive approach in our QCA to develop categories and themes that emerged directly from the data (Schreier, 2012).

Content analysis is a suitable method for analyzing social media content as it places importance on describing the features of the document's content through an analysis of the speaker, message, and impact (Neuendorf, 2017). In contrast, thematic analysis is commonly applied to gain an understanding of phenomena across a data set, with an emphasis on data obtained from sources such as interview transcripts, in which participants are actively engaged in discussing their perceptions, attitudes, or actions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

Sample and Procedures

The collection of demographic information for content creators was significantly limited due to the nature of social media research. Though content creators are not required to provide such information with their posted content, we were able to identify the racial identities of some content creators of the posts in our sample by examining the content of the post. The racial identities of the creators included 14 (56%) Black content creators, two (8%) Asian content creators, one (4%) Hispanic content creator, one (4%) biracial content creator, and seven (28%) content creators in which the racial identity of the content creator is unknown. Further information can be found in Table 1. We followed Bruckman's (2002) ethical guidelines for online research. Content creators did not provide demographic information in their posted videos, such as gender, age, relationship status, occupation, and socioeconomic status. Since this information was not shared by the content creators, it was not included in the analysis.

The final sample included $N = 24$ TikTok videos. The videos were included in the analysis if they were created after March 2020, which was when the national lockdown began and an increase in hate crimes was widely reported in the media, and during the high-profile protests following the George Floyd murder in May 2020 (Taylor, 2021), and the signing of the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act in May 2021 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2022). To identify TikTok videos for inclusion in this sample, the research team used a unique TikTok account that was never used to search for "#racialtrauma" and downloaded the first nine videos that appeared between March 2020 and January 2022. Each video was reviewed by the first and second authors. Upon this initial review, if the researchers determined that a content creator shared personal narratives or experiences of racial trauma, the video was included. After the initial nine videos were selected, downloaded, transcribed, and coded, researchers repeated the process and identified 15 more TikTok videos that fit the inclusion criteria. Researchers repeated the initial steps to examine whether new themes would emerge. The researchers decided to exclude educational videos, videos without original verbal content, and videos without personal narratives, which cannot be

Table 1 Demographic of the creators

Racial identity	n	$\%$
Black	12	50
Asian	2	8.3
Hispanic	1	4.2
Mixed	2	8.3
Unknown	7	29.2

$N = 24$

transcribed or interpreted. We excluded educational videos to maintain a focus on personal experiences of racial trauma (Table 2).

The research team reviewed 40 videos that were marked with the hashtag "racial trauma." Videos were only included if the content creator self-disclosed their racial trauma experience. Videos were excluded if their focus was to provide education or lip-sync to music. As a result, 24 TikTok videos marked with the hashtag "racial trauma" were gathered and analyzed until further videos did not result in the addition of new information.

Data Analysis

Once it was determined that inclusion criteria were met, the videos were prepared for analysis by transcribing the verbal content into text using Microsoft Word and storing it in a password-protected folder. Transcriptions were analyzed with an effort to protect the post creator's privacy and identity. We followed the data analysis procedures suggested by Mayring (2000) for inductive content analysis. The first step in the analysis process was to review each transcript in its entirety to ensure that it met the criteria for inclusion and would yield useful information necessary to answer the stated research question (White & Marsh, 2006). Next the research team reviewed each transcript and assigned open codes to excerpts of text that conveyed the post creator's experience, perception, emotion, or behavior related to racial trauma. This process allowed the researchers to develop a nuanced understanding of the post creator's experience and perception of racial trauma.

The first three authors each read and individually coded the same five transcripts. Then the researchers read the same transcripts again and identified preliminary codes. The research team members then discussed any differences in coding until reaching agreement. The goal of open coding was to identify themes and meanings within the data (White & Marsh, 2006). The researchers then reviewed the transcripts and coded them a second time, using focused coding. Focused coding allowed the researchers to connect the initial ideas and themes found in the data and to develop

Table 2 Theme frequency

Theme	Frequency
Encounter racism	23
Traumatic experience	9
Consequences of experiencing racial trauma	24
Express difficult feelings	15
Questioning and challenging oppression, denial, and privilege	29
A call to action: raising awareness	9

these concepts into categories and groups (Saldana, 2021). This process resulted in the creation of six themes and sub-themes that supported the overall content in the data. The first two authors later repeated the previous process for 19 more videos to ensure coding consistency until each theme was fully saturated, and no new themes emerged (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Hennink et al., 2016).

Researcher Reflexivity

We (the first four authors) reflected on factors that impact our perception and involvement in the data analysis process. The authors value diversity in the MFT field, have training in qualitative research at the doctoral level and research interests in diversity issues. The first author is an Asian cis-gender female immigrant, the second author is a Black American cis-gender female, and the third author is a cis-gendered, heterosexual, Latino man. The fourth author is a White cis-gender, heterosexual woman. The primary authors of this manuscript are familiar with TikTok, but they do not actively post content related to racial trauma. The research team members' usage of TikTok ranges from rarely to very often.

Trustworthiness

To ensure credibility, the authors used peer debriefing, reflective journaling, and team debriefing (Connelly, 2016). These strategies allowed the researchers to discuss their perspectives when creating codes and themes for interpreting the results. Discussion between the researchers also helped reduce and refine the codes and themes to ensure dependability and credibility. Throughout the coding and interpretation process, subjectivity was frequently discussed among the research team to ensure that researcher bias did not unduly influence the data analysis. The authors also received feedback from a fourth author, an experienced qualitative researcher trained at the doctoral level who teaches courses in qualitative research and has 10 years of experience conducting qualitative research. The fourth author served as a debriefer to assist with coding and reporting the data.

Results

Six themes emerged from the data analysis: (1) Encountering racism, (2) Experiencing traumatic events, (3) Facing consequences of racial trauma, (4) Expressing difficult emotions, (5) Questioning and challenging oppression, denial, and privilege, and (6) Calling for action to raise awareness. The theme that emerged most frequently from the data was *questioning and challenging oppression, denial, and*

privilege (29 times), followed by *consequences of experiencing racial trauma* (24 times). The frequencies of the six themes are presented in the following table. These themes reflect marginalized groups' experiences and personal narratives of racial trauma, and each one is described in detail in the following sections.

Theme 1: Encountering Racism

Among the content creators in this study, sixteen (67%) video posts reported experiences of racism. The theme of encountered racism was divided into two subthemes, "Individual Racism" and "Institutional/Systemic Racism." Nine of the videos shared encountering individual racism, which refers to incidents that occur between the content creator and another individual such as family members or within a romantic relationship. Seven videos addressed institutional/systemic racism, which depicted content creators' experiences with discriminatory institutional practices including racial profile and lack of access to healthcare services.

Individual Racism

Individual racism included personal narrative describing racist incidents within social settings. A creator shared, "The brand of racism that I have experienced the most in my life has been fetishization or being treated like someone's pet, being treated like someone else is doing good works in my life and helping me out so they can get into heaven".

Another creator shared an experience of being excluded from a "light skin" party because they were "too dark," per a friend of a similar skin tone. Other creators expressed their experiences surrounding the concepts of individual racism such as experiencing racist assumptions or discrimination from their romantic partner or family members ($N = 7$). For example, one Black content creator who was adopted by White parents shared, "I remembered growing up when I would get in trouble, my parents would tell me to shut my cotton-picking mouth."

Institutional/Systemic Racism

Some content creators talked about systemic racism and the double standards within the police system that result in negative narratives against BIPOC. One creator described how "Black kids getting into a fight on the basketball court over a game, and then one of them getting arrested versus the number of times that probably happens in a White community are probably the same in the White community. They kind of just take them home to their parents." Another creator, who is a parent, shared, "We have talked to our children about how to interact with the police, as most BIPOC people have."

In addition to the treatment they received from the police, some creators perceived organizations to misuse their power to prevent progress towards justice. One creator shared their narrative on how the church perpetuates racial trauma: "The Black church grooms members to accept particular types of racial trauma from institutions and authority figures." Another creator talked about their experience with the government, saying, "Privilege is that imperialism the government has been hiding what is going on in the real world." Similar to this perspective, a content creator said, "We live in a racial caste system, and they are doing everything within their power to remain in denial and to prevent any forward progress towards justice in the United States of America."

Theme 2: Traumatic Experience

Some videos explicitly stated how the discrimination they encountered was traumatic ($N = 5$). A content creator shared that her 10 year-old son witnessed a police officer being aggressive toward his African American father during a traffic stop, while his son was in the back seat. She said when she checked in with her son, he was crying and said, "Mom you know he (the policeman) was yelling. He told Dad that he was a threat to society." Another creator shared, "It's re-traumatizing for us having to explain the same story and the same reasoning over and over again. I don't know how many times I've had to explain to people why it's so disrespectful to gag at a certain cuisine or scent of something like a cultural dish." Another creator stated that witnessing people within their own cultural perpetuating these negative events was upsetting.

Theme 3: Consequences of Racial Trauma

Half of the content creators discussed the effects of racial trauma ($N = 12$) they experienced. Many creators recognized how the effects of racial trauma influence them biologically, psychologically, and socially. For example, a creator said, "All of these factors (trauma on a daily basis and historical trauma) impact us on a cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and physiological level." Another creator shared that racial trauma shows up in the same way that other trauma shows up, specifically in the body. This creator said, "I feel like I'm going to throw up. My stomach is really unsettled." In addition to physical symptoms, other creators talked about the mental health effects of racial trauma. In one TikTok video, a creator indicated they experience "constant paranoia, low self-esteem, and jealousy of White people." Another creator described, "experiencing panic attacks when hearing police sirens" another stated, "there's constant paranoia of the White gaze."

Additionally, one content creator identified as a racial or ethnic minority who was raised by a White family. They
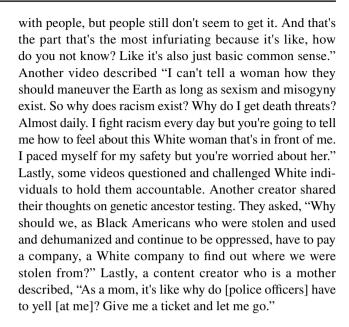
mentioned that messages such as "I don't see color," "you're mixed," or "you only got your scholarship because you're Black" can lead to struggles with self-identity. For instance, one creator experiences "self-hatred" and "feeling like a race traitor." Furthermore, some content creators described the social or relational effects of racial trauma, including relationship struggles with family members or significant others. One creator said that racial trauma impacts "the ability to form intimacy."

Theme 4: Express Difficult Feelings Regarding Racial Trauma

Twelve content creators expressed their difficult feelings regarding the racial trauma they have suffered. Common feelings included unfairness, alienation, anger, resentment, loneliness, hopelessness, and fear. As one creator said, "I hate hearing White people talk about trauma because only now is the veil being removed, and they are realizing that there are systemic things happening. The wounds that they think occur only on the individual level are intergenerational." One content creator who grew up with White parents said, "It's not fair whatsoever for any Black child to have to go through these [traumatic family events related to race]." Another creator described, "It's demoralizing and infuriating, and it makes you lose faith in humanity all over again." Finally, two content creators utilized sarcasm to express their difficult feelings. For example, one creator shared, "The most amazing fact that I learned in college studying American history was that my White friends and family sincerely believed that my ancestors loved them during [slavery] because they were caring for their children."

Theme 5: Questioning and Challenging Oppression, Denial, and Privilege

Over half of the content creators questioned and challenged oppression, denial, and privilege in their video ($N = 13$). This theme often emerged in a compare-and-contrast structure. The creators were comparing their own experiences to others who perpetuated oppression, remained in denial, or held positions of privilege. For instance, one content creator said "I listened to therapists talking about the collective trauma we've experienced this past year with the pandemic. You don't think 400 years of trauma is greatly impacting us today?" Another creator said, "What if instead of being afraid of going out in public because of a virus, you were afraid of acid being thrown and the pool you're swimming in, your child being kidnapped from their home, beaten, eye gouged, lynched shot in the head because a White woman said they were offended." Some creators directly questioned oppression, denial, and privilege "These stories aren't new, though. We keep telling people and sharing our trauma

with people, but people still don't seem to get it. And that's the part that's the most infuriating because it's like, how do you not know? Like it's also just basic common sense." Another video described "I can't tell a woman how they should maneuver the Earth as long as sexism and misogyny exist. So why does racism exist? Why do I get death threats? Almost daily. I fight racism every day but you're going to tell me how to feel about this White woman that's in front of me. I paced myself for my safety but you're worried about her." Lastly, some videos questioned and challenged White individuals to hold them accountable. Another creator shared their thoughts on genetic ancestor testing. They asked, "Why should we, as Black Americans who were stolen and used and dehumanized and continue to be oppressed, have to pay a company, a White company to find out where we were stolen from?" Lastly, a content creator who is a mother described, "As a mom, it's like why do [police officers] have to yell [at me]? Give me a ticket and let me go."

Theme 6: A Call to Action: Raising Awareness

Raising awareness of racial trauma was a common theme that was present in our findings ($N = 9$). Many videos mentioned the need to recognize racial trauma ranging from the individual level to the institutional level. The creators discussed strategies that could help people who experience racial trauma. For example, one creator emphasized the importance of educating oneself when adopting or raising children of color, saying "If you're going to have (adopt) children of color, you need to educate yourself a lot better." Another content creator said, "These [consequences of racial trauma] are trauma responses, and we can't heal from it until we recognize it as that." Among this theme, many creators felt that most people do not understand racial trauma, and as a result, they felt compelled to use social media to raise awareness about it.

Discussion

The present study aimed to develop a nuanced understanding of BIPOC experiences of racial trauma. Six themes that emerged from the data: (1) encountering racism, (2) traumatic experience, (3) consequences of experiencing racial trauma, (4) expressing difficult feelings, (5) questioning and challenging oppression, denial, and privilege, and (6) a call to action: raising awareness. Content creators shared their personal experiences of racism or traumatic events, including witnessing discrimination, or threats of harm, which are consistent with findings from Comas-Diaz et al. (2019). The effects of racially traumatic experiences may align with PTSD diagnostic criteria such as anxiety, hypervigilance, and isolation (Nadal et al., 2019; Sibrava et al., 2019). Many of the findings emerged

from content related to police brutality, specifically the George Floyd attack, suggesting a renewed awareness of the seriousness of racial violence (Spann, 2021). Content creators discussed emotions such as anger, hopelessness, and loneliness in relation to racial violence.

Despite growing evidence of the impact of racial trauma on BIPOC individuals, there have been few research studies that have examined individual experiences of racial trauma as described on social media. Our findings provide mental health professionals, including MFTs, with insight into the experiences of BIPOC individuals and the impact of racial trauma on their mental health. Given that BIPOC clients often avoid discussing racial and cultural issues during therapy because they feel their White therapists may not understand or relate to their experiences, (Chang & Yoon, 2011) these findings may offer additional insight into BIPOC clients' experiences. Therapists can best serve their BIPOC clients by initiating discussions about race, oppression, marginalization, and racial trauma (Meyer & Young, 2021; Ratts, 2015). Discussing racial trauma with BIPOC clients can have a positive impact on both the individual and the entire relational system in MFT practice. Race-related issues are often intricately woven into the couple's functioning, the presenting problem, and their ongoing experiences with racial trauma and oppression (McGoldrick & Hardy, 2019). By helping clients and their families understand how racial trauma may be impacting their relationships and family functioning, MFTs can enhance communication and empathy.

Many TikTok content creators encountered "White gaze", or the assumption that Whiteness is the default, or the standard to fit (Boffone, 2022). By posting on social media about their experiences with oppression, denial, and privilege in society, content creators provided in-depth descriptions of their experiences of not fitting within the standard of Whiteness. Furthermore, content creators shared experiences of Whiteness not only as the standard but also as the preferred choice. For example, content creators shared overt and covert messages they receive in society that suggest their culture and race are a threat to society or that mock their traditions. These experiences of a hierarchical society where Whiteness sits at the top of the hierarchy further negative narratives onto the BIPOC community. These findings are consistent with the concept from critical race theory (Crenshaw et al., 1995), which asserts that racial hierarchies are present in American society, with Whiteness seen as the normal standard and Black people being demonized.

Clinical Implications

The findings presented in this paper provide clinicians with firsthand accounts of BIPOC individuals who have experienced racial trauma. Therapists are expected to be culturally sensitive and competent, but due to their diverse personal identities, there is no standardized method for honing these skills. Additionally, a mandatory diversity course in the MFT curriculum may not be adequate in promoting continuous development of cultural competency. In the wake of the George Floyd murder, and numerous recent incidences of racial violence, therapists practicing in 2020 and beyond must consider their level of sensitivity to racial issues, awareness of racial issues, and ability to hold such conversations with clients. Conversations about racial trauma may evoke a range of emotions and behaviors for therapists. If therapists find themselves experiencing strong emotional reactions to the concept of racial trauma, they may choose to seek guidance from a supervisor, a trusted colleague, a mentor, or a therapist of their own. Therapists might consider exploring their own ideas about racism, racial trauma, and the messages they have received about BIPOC individuals, and how they are influenced by societal biases and prejudices. Continual case consultation, continuing education, and supervision are important first steps to increasing therapists' comfort discussing BIPOC issues, including racial trauma.

Narratives about race, racial trauma and racism exist in language, therefore, narrative therapy may be a useful approach for exploring racial trauma. Therapists can listen to clients' unique trauma narrative, support them in re-authoring their story to create a new and more positive understanding of their identity and experiences (White & Epston, 1990). Through this process, the client can build resilience and develop a more hopeful and empowered outlook on their life and future. Further, therapists who explore the impact of systemic oppression and racism clients identify ways they may have internalized negative messages and stereotypes about their identity and culture. In addition, a therapist working with a BIPOC client who has experienced racial trauma may be attuned to the impact of microaggressions or other subtle forms of discrimination they may experience and help their clients identify ways to respond to these situations.

Limitations

Although this study offers a novel understanding of BIPOC experiences of racial trauma, it is not without limitations, and this topic warrants further research. First, data were retrieved from TikTok, which did not allow researchers to interact with content creators or obtain comprehensive demographic information. Further, the data we obtained were publicly available. We did not have the opportunity to ask specific questions of our participants. There is no way to confirm whether the experiences described by content creators actually occurred, or the identity they disclosed on social media was accurate. Moreover, our criteria for

inclusion and exclusion of social media content were specific to the hashtag racial trauma (#racial trauma), and content creators that disclosed their BIPOC identity. It is possible that other social media posts that met these criteria but lacked the hashtag, or identity disclosure, and were therefore excluded from our sample. However, social subjects research is to some degree limited to participant self-report and self-identification of participant identity and experience. We recommend that researchers conducting future studies of BIPOC experiences of racial trauma recruit and sample participants using interview or focus groups in order to be able to ask specific questions about their experiences. In further social media research of BIPOC experiences of racial trauma, sampling criteria could be expanded to other relevant hashtags or markers.

The TikTok content creators included in the study did not discuss any experiences they had with mental health treatment related to racism and racial trauma. It is important to note that these creators may have different perspectives and goals compared to the clinical populations seeking therapy. The creators might aim to educate and advocate, while clients seeking therapy need support to heal and process their experiences. Therefore, therapists must be mindful of these differences and adjust their approach to meet the specific needs of clients. Also, therapists should be mindful of balancing the tension between promoting awareness and advocacy while also respecting client confidentiality. Future research studies on this topic may include the perspectives of clients who have received mental health treatment related to racism and racial trauma. Additionally, researchers may sample White therapists to explore their comfort levels in engaging in conversations with BIPOC clients about racism and racial trauma. Such studies would continue to advance conversations about how racism and racial trauma are discussed in mental health treatment and ways to improve those conversations so that BIPOC clients feel supported. Finally, the researchers' backgrounds may have influenced this study. All authors are affiliated with academic institutions and are passionate about supporting and advancing BIPOC issues. Therefore, our interpretation of the data may reflect our own views of this phenomenon. To address this potential limitation, several strategies were employed, including memo writing, consulting with different team members, cross-checking perspectives, and adhering to QCA procedures.

Conclusion

Racial incidents that have occurred recently have drawn attention to the persistent issue of racism in the United States. Social media has become a platform for individuals to express their opinions and ideas on this subject. For mental health professionals to have meaningful conversations with individuals from BIPOC communities, they need to understand their experiences of racial trauma. This study aims to enhance the understanding of mental health providers on this topic and enable them to support individuals in their healing journey.

Declarations

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