Adversity and Resilience Science (2022) 3:195–199
https://doi.org/10.1007/s42844-022-00067-9

COMMENTARY

Creating a Sense of Belonging in the Context of Racial Discrimination and Racial Trauma

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Accepted: 20 June 2022 / Published online: 2 July 2022
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The negative sequelae of the USA and European colonization of non-Western nations, the attempted eradication and oppression their cultures, along with historical and contemporary slavery and dislocation, persist unbated to this day. The USA's role in historical and race-based trauma is not limited to policies and practices within these borders. The USA has a long history of colonizing other countries including The Philippines, Guam, Puerto Rico, Guano Islands, and other places (Immerwahr, 2019). Such colonization brought oppression, exploitation, and destruction to these cultures and peoples.

Their deleterious impact of colonization on the lives of children and families of color cannot be overstated. More than 150 years since slavery was banned in the USA, the negative impact of marginalization and oppression—including American Indian Boarding Schools, Jim Crow laws, redlining, redistricting, and unenforced desegregation and equal rights laws—have resulted in persistent racial inequities. These include unequal access to high quality education (Hill et al., 2017), increased exposure to poverty (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1997; Furnham, 2003; Wilson, 2003), diminished wealth accumulation (WIlliamson, 2020), and health disparities due to racial stress (Williams et al., 2019). Further, Native Americans have experienced genocide, displacement, targeted exposure to disease, and denial and erasure of their culture by the US government (G. C. Anderson, 2016).

Racialized oppression, discrimination, and bias has resulted in the devaluation of the lives of people of color, along with racialized violence and trauma. The continuance of racialized violence against children, youth, and adults of color is confirmed poignantly, as I write this introduction, in the most recent senseless and targeted murders of African American people in Buffalo when they were doing the most basic and mundane activity—buying groceries for their families (McKinley et al., 2022). This was followed by the slaughtering of beautiful Latinx elementary school children in Uvalde, Texas (Peck & Goodman, 2022). These are merely the latest tragedies in a seemingly endless news stream of targeted and racialized violence against Black, Latinx, Asian, and Native American/Indigenous peoples. Indeed, the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) reported that incidence of hate-crimes in 2021 is at its highest rate in 15 years (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2021).

Adding to racial stress and trauma, people from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds cannot always count on the community systems and agencies designed to protect them. In both Buffalo and Uvalde, the community systems designed to protect them failed. In Buffalo, the 911 operator hung up on the victim (Holpuch, 2022). In Uvalde, TX, the police unimaginably stood outside of the school for 78 min after the gunman entered, despite receiving numerous calls for police from within the school—failing to follow the established protocols for handling an active shooter situation (Collins et al., 2022). Racial profiling by police and over patrolling of neighborhoods of color, has resulted in mistrust between the police and communities of color.

Experiences of discrimination and marginalization extend into the schools, as schools are sites that are rife with battles for equity (Gold, 2007). African American and Latinx children and youth experience higher rates of discrimination and marginalization at school than do White children. Black and Latinx children face higher disciplinary rates, including expulsions and suspensions than their White peers accused of the same violations (Fabelo et al., 2011; Huang, 2020; Skiba et al., 2015). Such disparities in suspensions and expulsions begin as early as preschool and kindergarten (M. Anderson, 2015). In school, African American and Latinx children are exposed to racialized bias that undermines their sense of belonging, mental health and achievement (Jussim & Harber, 2005; Jussim et al., 1996). In a meta-analysis, compared to the experiences of White students, teachers were found to hold more negative academic expectations for African American

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and Latinx youth, made more negative referrals and fewer positive referrals for African American and Latinx students, and less positive or neutral speech directed to African American and Latinx children (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007).

It is in this context of race-based historical trauma, that minoritized families must raise their children to be strong and mentally and physically healthy, and how they do so, within cultural communities, is the focus of this special issue. Despite these targeted and premeditated attacks on the health, wellbeing, and mere existence of people and communities of color, these communities, families, and children continue to survive and to thrive. This thriving and surviving in the context of stress and duress is captured in the concept of resilience (Masten, 2001; Ungar, 2021). Resilience is a significant change from breaking down to recovery and transformation in the context of risk (Ungar, 2021). Theory and research on resilience has historically focused on the factors that distinguish those who have experienced significant risk and recover from those who do not. There is a focus on identifying salient factors and characteristics and the processes by which they help in the context of stress and risk (Masten, 2007). That is, the ability of the child or family to adapt to the challenges that threaten their well-being, functioning, or survival (Masten, 2011).

Based in ecological theories (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and other integrative theories (Garcia Coll et al., 1996), the resilience literature acknowledges the role of multiple systems that have the potential to both facilitate adaptation or undermine development. These include familial, school, community, historical, and political contexts. Garcia Coll et al. (1996) refer to these as "promoting" and "inhibiting" environments. These systems interact with each other and, for minoritized youth, often serve as meditators of the impact of segregation, discrimination, and marginalization. Resilience often is catalyzed through the interaction of individuals with their environment (Masten & Cicchetti, 2016).

Many of the protective factors that help youth thrive in the context of risk are often conceptualized as being embedded within the child. These include social connectedness, sense of belonging, agency, optimism, efficacy, and problem-solving skills (Masten, 2021). It is equally important, for conceptualizations of resilience, to focus on the interactions among contingent systems that surround children and promote survival and thriving (Holling, 1973; Ungar, 2021). This broadens the focus to the events that occur around the child and result in risk or promote resilience. By also focusing on systems and interactions among systems, the power and onus for resilience rests less on children themselves. For resilience among marginalized populations, collective actions taken at the community level, including social justice movements (e.g., Black Lives Matter, #METOO), have the potential to create resilience by changing social institutions that marginalize and giving voice to and empowering those who might be marginalized. Such public statements draw attention to minoritzed people's rights to not be placed at risk (Ungar, 2021). Resilience is ultimately dependent on each of the systems functioning in synergy; resilience in one system may enable another system to recover from risk. The more integrated the systems, they more they will benefit from resilience across the systems. This means that children who are embedded in families, schools, communities, and political systems that value and affirm them, are more likely to be resilient in the context of risk.

Value and affirmation, which are essential aspect of resilience, undergird the development of a sense of belonging within important communities, including cultural, school, and familial communities. A sense of belonging or a "need to belong" is an indispensable part of being human and undergirds social and cognitive development and is associated with mental and physical health outcomes (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Being valued, included, and encouraged are core aspects of belonging (Goodenow, 1993). The impact of the legacies oppression and discrimination is often felt through a sense of marginalization for youth at school and among their peers. Discrimination, marginalization, and failing to see oneself and one's own culture represented reduces the sense of belonging and is associated with reduced mental health and disengagement from school (Gonzalez et al., 2014; Umana-Taylor & Hill, 2020). To mitigate these negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing requires racial/ethnic socialization and cultural embeddedness that emboldens students' sense of belonging and identity and prepares them to understand the sources and etiologies of racial and ethnic bias. In schools, support from teachers and peers, along with a sense of fairness and equity are associated with belonging and mental health and achievement (Polk et al., 2018).

Each of the papers in this special issue takes up the impact of historical and racial trauma, its impact on children and families, and how families—and especially communities—work together and intergenerationally to mitigate the negative effects of racialized trauma. Central to developing resilience among marginalized and minoritized population is a sense of community, cultural-embeddedness, and a sense of home and place—attachment to place. Indeed, a key factor in historical and racialized trauma is the erasure and destruction of home, homeplace, and the culture and sense of belonging that accompanies home, including displacement.

Home and community attachments and embeddedness are essential to mental health, development, and identity. Home and community contain deep psychological meaning, nurture significant cultural symbols and practices, and have historical significance and, thereby are sources of deep emotional attachment (Chow & Healey, 2008; Smith et al., 2012). Burton and Clark (2005) define homeplace as "a multilayered, nuanced family process anchored in a bounded geographic space that elicits feelings of empowerment,

commitment, rootedness, ownership, safety, and renewal among family members" (p. 166). For families who are marginalized, homeplace can become a "site of resistance" that enables families to navigate and overcome discrimination and oppression and foster identity, power, and cultural legacies (Burton & Clark, 2005). For marginalized populations, who are often made to feel like "others," objectified and stereotyped, a homeplace restores dignity, affirmation, and personhood, despite poverty and hardship.

The places where we live our lives become a part of our identity, whether it is affirming or not. Humans develop an attachment to place (Chow & Healey, 2008). Place identity and attachment reflect the how individuals' development is inextricably intertwined with their environment and community, with place shaping and molding a person's sense of self and identity (Proshansky et al., 1983). It is both the structures of community—as well as the people—who provide a sense of belonging and a launching pad into their future. Home and community provide healing when youth are marginalized in the broader world (Burton & Clark, 2005).

Disruptions to the bonds with place through violation and displacement have the potential to threaten self-identity, sense of purpose and belonging and result in increased stress (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Dixon & Durrheim, 2004). However, homeplaces and attachments to home are essential for development. The set of papers, taken together, document how historical and racial trauma have attempted to destroy the both the physical and psychological homeplace of people of color and the lengths families and communities take to hold onto and reestablish a sense of homeplace and belonging for their communities, families, and children.

Cai and Lee's (this issue) article sheds light on the historical and intergenerational trauma due to US colonization, which destroyed cultures and communities, especially in southeast Asia. Such destruction, ironically, resulted in migration to the USA. However, in the USA, these communities experienced silencing as well as a lack of recognition of this history and their cultures. This history is shrouded in silence and shame, which undermines families' ability to create a positive narrative and identity for their youth. As noted in Cai and Lee's article, colonization and displacement is not just the loss of place, but stressful and painful loss of identity.

Similarly, Ivanich, Clifford, and Sarche (this issue) take up the issue of the intergenerational effects of historical and racialized trauma by focusing on the eradication of indigenous cultures. Based on the lived experiences and cultures of Alaskan Native, American Indian, and New Zealand's Māori peoples, they examine the meaning and manifestation of resilience among these communities. This paper challenges the field to broaden its Western individualistic assumptions of resilience to understand resilience as a function of community and culture and in connection with ancestors, rather than focusing solely on individual outcomes

Focusing on African American and Latinx families, Carlo, Murry, Davis, Gonzalez, and Debreaux (this issue) document the systemic racism and trauma experiences and the vestiges of oppression and slavery that continue to impact these communities and families. They provide integrative models documenting the pathways from legacies of slavery and migratory stress and trauma, through current factors of marginalization and their impact on positive youth development. In each of these models they highlight the role of families and other relational assets for supporting youth.

To guide the field in developing culturally sensitive interventions to support marginalized families, Smith, Yzaguirre, Dwanyen, and Wieling (this issue) outline how to create parenting and family intervention programs that are embedded in culture. As they highlight, to effectively support marginalized youth, intervention programming needs to be culturally relevant, responsive, and adaptive to families' culture. Moving beyond representative photos and materials, Smith et al. challenge the field to take up and embed the linguistic and cultural worldviews into effective interventions.

In each of these papers, the significance of knowing, understanding, and identifying with one's culture and history cannot be overstated. As Seaton, Iida, and Morris (this issue) demonstrated through their daily diary study, internalized racism is associated with depression among youth. Although Seaton et al. do not highlight this finding in their paper, their data show a positive association between miseducation and self-hatred. When youth are miseducated about their culture, they lack the ability to develop a strong sense of self and sense of attachment to place and culture.

All the papers in this special issue point to the deep need for families to be embedded in communities that acknowledge and affirm their cultural histories—both legacies of trauma and of resilience. Through being embedded in and developing attachments to cultural homeplaces, youth and families can develop and maintain their own senses of self and belonging that connect them to a history that is bigger than themselves, that began prior their lifetimes, and extends beyond their lifespan. This special issue is timely and significant given that many school districts across the United States are banning books that talk about the painful histories of colonization, slavery, exploitation, genocide, and displacement. Only through learning about and discussing these painful histories and the resilience that communities exhibit to survive in the midst of historical and racialized trauma can we as a society acknowledge, repair, begin healing, and say never again.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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