Chapter 3
The Intersectionality of Race and Trauma in Children and Teens Who Are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)

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ABSTRACT

Children in America are suffering from an abundance of trauma that many bring to school with them daily. Children, teens, and their families, who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), may have experienced historical racial trauma which is unique to students of color. Professionals working with students of color (SOC) must develop cultural competency around racial trauma in their understanding of trauma informed pedagogy to meet the needs of student populations that are becoming increasingly diverse. The overall purpose of this chapter is to provide professionals working with BIPOC children and teens the necessary skills to meet their needs.

INTRODUCTION

Traumatic stress can impact individuals as early as infancy and until adulthood (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, n.d.). Although racial trauma's impact on children and teens who are BIPOC may not be as well known, an abundance of research exists on how racial trauma adversely affects children and teens socially, emotionally, and academically (Assari, S., Moazen-Zadeh, Caldwell, & Zimmerman, 2017; Berger & Sarnyai, 2015; Douglass, Mirpuri, English, & Yip, 2016; Saleem, Anderson, & Williams, 2020).

According to the most recent Census data available, America's K-12 classrooms were compromised of 50% White students, 25% Latinx, 14% Black, 5% Asian, and 5% other in 2017 (Census, n.d.). Although U.S. classrooms are becoming more and more diverse, that increase in diversity is not occurring among

the teachers and other professional staff in schools. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that in 2017-2018 approximately 79% of public-school teachers in U.S. schools were White, 9% Latinx, 7% Black, 2% Asian, 1% American Indian/Alaska Native, and less than 1% were Pacific Islander (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). As professionals working with children from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, educators must develop a comprehensive understanding of racial trauma. Racial trauma refers to the stressful social interactions that some racial and ethnic minorities may experience.

Racial trauma can further be defined as the result of a person experiencing psychological distress and fear after experiencing or witnessing racism, racial violence, racial intimidation, immigration issues, or other forms of systematic racism (Chavez-Duenas et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2018). However, this list is not exhaustive. For example, racially and ethnically motivated traumatic events are often linked to Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Additionally, PTSD has been connected to an increased risk for adolescent suicide (Williams et al., 2018).

The racial strife that communities of color experience— and have historically experienced over the years— is very real. The severity of these racialized encounters has led the American Public Health Association to declare racism "a public health crisis" (American Public Health Association, 2017). Even children and teens' exposure to racially charged incidents can lead to racial trauma or race-based trauma. Racial trauma can impact youth mentally, physically, and psychiatrically, ultimately causing them to feel overwhelmed, hopeless, and helpless (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Carter, 2007; Daniel, 2000; Harrell, 2000; Hemmings & Evans, 2018). Research indicates that this racialized stress may lead to low academic motivation, low graduation rates, poor grades, less self-confidence, and even PTSD for students of color (SOC) (Neblett et al., 2006; Wei et al., 2011).

The purpose of this chapter is to provide educators and educational leaders, those who work with BIPOC children and families, with greater insight into the possible experiences of historical and current racial trauma that these students may bring into a school setting or organization. Moreover, this chapter can equip these professionals with the necessary knowledge about trauma-informed pedagogy in relation to racial trauma.

BACKGROUND

This chapter provides the reader with insight into the historical and current instances of racism— both institutional and systemic— that may lead to racial trauma for the BIPOC students and families. These include those with Asian, Arab, Black, Indigenous, and Latinx racial backgrounds. This chapter also examines how these racialized experiences can also impact White Americans in unique ways, leading to a form of White racial trauma.

Defining Race and Racial Identity

Defining a person's race, specifically determining who is Black or African American, has been met by centuries of debate. This debate often includes unsubstantiated theories since people of African descent were forcibly brought to the United States as slaves and indentured servants between 1525 and 1866 (Winker, 2004). Although it has never been scientifically proven that there are any biological differences between people who identify as Black or White, some argue that to be considered Black in the

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