RACISM AND PREJUDICE
AS FORMS OF THE
PSYCHOLOGICAL MALTREATMENT OF CHILDREN

A PROGRAM ORGANIZED BY

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL MALTREATMENT ALLIANCE
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BIASED & PREJUDICED TREATMENT

based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age and other factors
denies, degrades, and corrupts the human dignity, realization of potentials, and quality of life of human beings and their societies.
CHILD PSYCHOLOGICAL MALTREATMENT

CPM

A widespread condition that seriously damages human beings and their societies. As a form of child abuse and neglect --

• Attacks/Thwarts fulfillment of basic human needs
• Highest prevalence level
• Equals or exceeds harm for all other forms of CAN
• Longest lasting negative consequences
The American Professional Society on Abuse of Children (APSAC) has stated:

• “When directed at youth, **racism is child abuse. It is a form of psychological maltreatment** and toxic like physical and sexual abuse.”
Child psychological maltreatment forms are central to the destructive power of prejudice and bias.

**Terrorizing, Spurning** (active hostile rejection), **Isolating, Corrupting/Exploiting**, and **Emotional Unresponsiveness** (denying/withholding needed psychological/emotional nurturing, interaction, caring and support)
REAWAKENING TO RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN RACISM/BIAS – CPM

• Seminal 1983 International Conference on Psychological Abuse of Children and Youth
• 1987 book – The Psychological Maltreatment of Children and Youth
• APSAC 2020 recognition of racism as a form of child abuse & neglect, particularly as CPM
RENEWED – HOPEFULLY SUSTAINED INTEREST IN CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN ACHIEVED WISDOM AND WAYS OF LIFE

The **GOLDEN RULE** (Ethics of Reciprocity) of religious and secular communities/peoples throughout the world

**HUMAN RIGHTS** interpretations/translations of the **GOLDEN RULE**

- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**
- **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**

[Human dignity; equal and inalienable rights; non-discrimination; life-liberty-security; full development of talents/potentials; freedom from slavery, cruel treatment, violence; & …]
This program is intended to help close this gap!

The Psychological Maltreatment Alliance organizes and archives related material for the benefit of interested parties. Examples include:

- Racism, Prejudice, Implicit Bias and Psychological Maltreatment: Orientation, Guidelines and Resources for Trainers
- The APSAC Psychological Maltreatment Monograph
- APSAC Practice Guidelines: The Investigation and Determination of Psychological Maltreatment of Children & Adolescents

The Psychological Maltreatment Alliance is dedicated to advancing research, policy, education and practice worldwide.


(www.psychologicalmaltreatment.org)
Why focus on race...

Racism hurts children & families of color

Marva L. Lewis, PhD
Tulane University
New Orleans, Louisiana, USA
Race-based traumatic stress and oppression

“When directed at youth, racism is child abuse. It is a form of psychological maltreatment and is toxic like physical and sexual abuse.”

The American Professional Society on Abuse of Children (2021)

“Discrimination and racial microaggressions lead to adverse mental health outcomes.”

American Psychological Association, (2016)
INTERGENERATIONAL MEMORIES OF HISTORICAL TRAUMA & PSYCHOLOGICAL TERRORISM

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Seminole Indian Babies, Florida

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Incarcerated Father

I’M GONNA BUST MY DADDY OUT OF JAIL!

Source: Prepared by the Prison Policy Initiative from Bureau of Justice Statistics, Correctional Population in the United States, 2010, Appendix Table 3
COMPLEX RACE-BASED STRESS AND TRAUMA: THE IMPACT ON PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

Social and Political Violence

Community Fragmentation

Family Disruption

Attachment Disruption

INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION
OF TOXIC LEGACIES OF HISTORICAL
TRAUMA

Nappy-Haired Ghosts: Internal Working Model
Grandmother’s CERAR & HCI

Caregiver’s HCI Behavior:
Acceptance/Rejection based on Colorism

Child’s Internal Working Model
of Attachment Relationship with
AFRICAN AMERICAN MOTHER-DAUGHTER INTERACTION STUDY (2004, 2015)

Findings:

Individual differences in Warmth, Acceptance & Parenting styles during HCI

The National Institute for Mental Health Grant No. 1 R03 MH55736-0; Tulane University Summer Grant; and a grant from the Wisner Foundation.
‘Sankofa with the Comb’

Ghana – Akan language – ‘reach back
and get it.’ The bird with its head turned
backwards taking an egg off its back. The ‘Egg’ of
PATH are interrupting the negative messages to
children of Colorism.
HAIR COMBING INTERACTION

ROUTINES & RITUALS

VIDEO GUIDANCE ON STRENGTHS

- Warmth
- Acceptance
- Cognitive skills
- Language skills
- Choice
- Humor
- Emotional attunement
- Humor and fun

• Danielle & Daughter
RE-STORY ROUTINES INTO POSITIVE INTERGENERATIONAL MESSAGES AND MEMORIES

Nappy-Haired Ghosts: Internal Working Model Grandmother’s CERAR & HCI

Child’s Internal Working Model of Attachment Relationship with...
ETHIOPIAN JEW REFUGEES RECONNECT WITH THEIR DAUGHTERS, CULTURE & COMMUNITY
TAKE ACTION! BE A CHAMPION FOR EQUITY

How does racism hurt children in your community?

- Identify **structural inequalities** that create racial disparities for children, families and communities of color.
- Use a child-centered, trauma informed, relationship-based approach for **services** for families of color.
- Build on the **cultural strengths** of families and communities.
- Incorporate the **psychosocial** impact of racial disparities on children of color in all services.

Work as a Team to create **anti-racist policies** that nurture the well-being of all – children, their families, communities and helpers.
“Power at its best, is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best, is love correcting everything that stands against love.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.
GLOBAL COLORISM:

PSYCHOLOGICAL MALTREATMENT AND AFFECTIVE CAPITAL IN CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXTS

Presented to the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children

Elizabeth Hordge-Freeman, Ph.D. | July 13, 2021

Associate Professor of Sociology
PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

1. Introduce colorism and “affective capital” as integral to psychological maltreatment

2. Illustrate the relevance of global and cross-cultural examples for understanding race-based psychological maltreatment

3. Discuss solutions and interventions for practitioners
“FEATS OF HUMANITY” AND “MARVELS OF SCIENCE”?
“Aw, yes. In a family, people are happy to have children. They have the dark one first … but when the white one comes everything changes! The white one is treated really well and the dark one is forgiven … The black one is punished because it is said to have the face of a slave …”
GLOBAL LEGACIES OF TRAUMA AND OPPRESSION

- Largest slaveocracy in the Americas
- Largest population of Black people outside of Africa
- Myth of Racial Democracy
- “Whitening” (Embranquecimento) and legislative policies
PSYCHOLOGICAL MALTREATMENT AND HISTORICAL TRAUMA

Pigmentocracy
METHODOLOGY

The Color of Love (Brazil)
In-depth interviews: 116 respondents
Participant observation: 10 core families + 5 extended families

Research on U.S. Families
300+ survey responses with Black women in the U.S. from Latin America, Europe, and the Caribbean
(Colorism and hair texture in families, relationships, schools, and workplace)
AFFECTIVE CAPITAL

- Theories of capital: Bourdieu (1977; 1990)

Affective capital refers to “the emotional and personal resources that a person gains from being positively evaluated, supported, and frequently on the receiving end of meaningful displays of affection” (Hordge-Freeman 2015:5).
AFFECTIVE CAPITAL AND COLORISM

- Quality of Affective Interactions in Families
- Stigma and Identity
- Maltreatment over the life course and in different domains
THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE

- **Parental Anxiety**

“I have dreams about what she will look like. Sometimes she is white and sometimes she is *morena*. I hope she gets her nose and straight hair from me. That’s why I sit here all day and watch *gente bonita* on television. If an ugly person walks by I try not to even look in their direction.” (Damiana, 28)
Shame and Disgust

“When Neguinha was born she was totally black, I mean really black. When I came home from the hospital and her father saw her he said, ‘Ugh! Where did you get that black baby? Take her back!’ (Dona Elena laughs)
“I remember my mom doing this to my sisters. She would light a small candle and warm her fingers over the flame and then she would pinch the baby’s nose and hold it. They said it would correct the nose. Who wants a wide nose? I remember the women … our neighbors would shout to us from their windows: “Don’t forget to pinch her [the baby’s] nose!” (Tania, 54 years old)
RACIAL ROULETTE AND SIBLING RIVALRY

• Sibling Comparison

• Invisibility

• Shame

• Intragenerational Transmission of Trauma

“Look how light she is. Go on and touch her hair. She doesn’t even look Brazilian!…” (Juliana, 52 years old)

R: … I am afraid of losing the love of my parents. (whimpers)

E: Why do you think this will happen?

R: (looks at me incredulously) Because of the baby! You saw her didn’t you?! She was born *limpinha* [clean] and with straight hair. I’m afraid they will love her more ... her hair won’t give them as much trouble... Everybody is saying it. She will get everything and I’ll have nothing. (She then covers her face with her hands and sobs) – Conversation with Regane, 9 years old

Other References:
Comas-Díaz (1996); Wilder (2015); Jorge (1986)
HOME IS WHERE THE HURT IS: AFFECTIVE CAPITAL, STIGMA, AND RACIALIZATION

• Low levels of affective capital lead some Black Brazilian respondents to engage in behaviors and make decisions that limit their life chances and reproduce their racial position.

• Affective capital exists alongside other forms of capital to advantage people who approximate the dominant group.

  • Yasmin
  • Dilson
  • Elisa
“WHERE THERE IS POWER, THERE IS RESISTANCE.”
FOR PRACTITIONERS: POINTS OF INTERVENTION

- Recognize colorism and race-based psychological maltreatment as a unique source of distress.
- Invest in multi-dimensional forms of validation, including from role models for all family members.
- Observe behavioral cues (schools especially)
- Consider in-person and virtual communities as resources.
- Engage in frequent self-evaluations to identify patterns of practitioner bias (interpersonal, affective, and environmental)
  - Harvard Implicit Bias Test - [https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html)
THANK YOU!
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PERSPECTIVE

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