Next Wave of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome Survivors: Black Women Resisters in Academia

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Abstract: This study seeks to deepen our understanding of the survival adaptive behaviors, particularly features of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS), identified by Black women professionals who exist at the margins in academia and society. To date, exploration of posttraumatic growth has not been researched concomitantly with PTSS. By examining these variables collectively, this study's model provides an original contribution to a growing but insufficient literature on Black women professionals who endure institutional racism. Using the Listening Guide, this study presents data from seven (7) Black women professionals in higher education. The study finds interviewees adopt Angry Black Women and Strong Black Woman schema, and PTSS features as a survival strategy stemming from gender discrimination rooted in proximity to Whiteness and habitual attacks on their professional acumen. Congruently, learnings revealed (1) Identity and Positionality, (2) Generational [In]visibility, (3), Professional Rage Located, and (4) Voices of PPTTG— Prayers, People, Trials, Tribulations and God. Dismantling White Supremacy must center Black women's survival herstories and healing at the intersection of anti-Black racism and hidden systematic policies. Practice models that nuance PTSS trauma-informed assessments, the addition of PTSS to the DSM, and widely accepted African-centered paradigms are essential for this wave of race work.

Keywords: Black women professionals, post traumatic slave syndrome, posttraumatic growth, voice-centered, anti-Black racism, social work education

> *It is not that Black women have not been and are not strong; it is simply that this is only a part of our story, a dimension, just as suffering is another dimension— one that has been most unnoticed and unattended to.* (bell hooks, *Talking Back*, 1989, pp. 152-153)

Before skipping to cavalier hashtags, illusory moments of cohesiveness, and short-lived movements, full understanding of Black Women Resisters' historical analyses, labor, and their experiences is central to disrupting White supremacy. From Africa to the Americas, during the antebellum era, [New] Jim Crow, civil rights, and now "post-racial" era, White supremacy has aimed to sustain White domination over Black women, and their storytelling of transgenerational stressors has been dismissed from history (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Perlow et al., 2018; Sule et al., 2017).

From the lynching of Mary Turner and her unborn baby, the execution of Breonna Taylor, to institutionalized racism endured by Black women professionals in academia, White supremist values continue to serve to oppress, marginalize, isolate, govern, police, subjugate, reduce, and justify control and violence against Black women (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Collins, 2000; Spencer & Perlow, 2018). In academia, these efforts show up as overt and subtle experiences of discrimination, including silencing of Black women's

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voices and positionality. Compared with their colleagues, disrespect is seen in the refusal to recognize their experiences, lack of acknowledgement of scholarly accomplishments, non-supportive attitudes of colleagues, and unequal racialized labor and service assignments (Daniel, 2018; Speakes-Lewis, 2018).

The subtle abuses of power, policies, administrative practices, and controlling images also referred to as race-based stereotypes, myths and characterizations—Angry Black Woman (ABW) or Sapphire "…ha[ve] many different shadings and representations: the bad [B]lack woman, the [B]lack "bitch," and the emasculating matriarch (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 88). The Strong Black Woman (SBW) schema or superwoman alleges that Black women can withstand anything, because they were physically and psychologically suited for enslavement (Bent-Goodley et al., 2012). As summarized by Woods-Giscombé et al. (2016) superwomen have a perceived obligation to (1) present strength, (2) suppress emotions, (3) resist feelings of vulnerability and dependence, (4) succeed despite limited resources, and (5) prioritize caregiving over self-care. For Black women in academia, racialized subtleties show up as unreasonable service demands, marginalization of scholarship, uneven parity of opportunities that converge to reinforce SBW schemas, and hierarchical structures that usurp their voices and social mobility.

While no studies were found collectively examining race-based stereotypes, Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) features and accounts for Posttraumatic Growth (PTG) in Black women professionals; the SBW schema is evolving in the research literature. Harris-Perry (2011) found that "strong" was a term often used to categorize Black women, with varied meanings. Within focus groups, some respondents interpreted the word strong as positive or a symbol of strength, while others were concerned with the psychological effects of Strong Black Woman ideology on Black women (Harris-Perry, 2011).

In another study, Abrams et al. (2019) examined SBW in 194 participants (of which 98 were college students), the researchers found evidence of the SBW Schema (self-silencing) which has been linked with depression among Black Women's mental health (Abrams et al., 2019). According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC, 2018), Table A-7c (pp. 1-4), Black females 18 years of age and older reported sadness (12.6%), hopelessness (7.1%), worthlessness (4.6%), and felt that everything is an effort (14.1%). These results necessitate continued exploration. Specifically, how are ways of giving voice related to adaptative behaviors and PTG? Fisher and colleagues (2017) assert an urgency for social workers to acknowledge and respond to issues of race and racism. *Advances in Social Work*'s special call for work regarding "Dismantling White Supremacy in Social Work Education" – specifically regarding *policies and administrative practices that are overtly and covertly racist, oppressive, and inherently supportive of White Supremacy culture* – is timely.

Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome Theory

Joy DeGruy (2005) coined the term "PTSS theory," which she describes as "the manifestations of an institutionalized legacy of traumas…reflected in many behaviors and beliefs passed down to subsequent generations" (p. 125). DeGruy notes three "adaptive

survival behaviors" (p. 123) that reinforce positive and negative actions through the socialization process:

> *Vacant Esteem* is the state of believing oneself to have little or no worth, exacerbated by the group and societal pronouncement of inferiority…that is intergenerationally transmitted through three levels: family, community, and society (p. 129). Another manifestation of adaptive survival behavior, *Ever Present Anger*…[is]...both a response to the frustration of blocked goals and the fear of failure (p. 135). *Racist Socialization* is the most insidious and pervasive symptom of PTSS in our adoption of the slave master's value system…the belief that [W]hite, and all things associated with whiteness are superior; and that [B]lack, and all things associated with blackness, are inferior. (p. 139)

DeGruy's (2005) position is that Blacks collectively and culturally have residual and sustained historical trauma passed down through familial interactions and parenting patterns, community practices, beliefs and values, laws, institutions, policies, and media. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition: DSM-5 is the gold standard authoritative mental health diagnosis (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013; Williams et al., 2018). Black women professionals' stressors include accumulated generational stressors different from the dominant White culture interpretation and pathology found in the DSM. There is little agreement how to operationalize historical and contemporary trauma in general and in Black women professionals in academia. Conceptually, Spencer and Perlow (2018) extend DeGruy's PTSS theory, adding "Master"—Post Traumatic Slave Master Syndrome (PTSMS)—to capture ways the actor perpetuates historical patterns of lynchings towards Black women resisters.

Consequences of PTSS in Black Women Resisters

For BIPOC—Black, Indigenous, and People of Color—in academia, vacant esteem is a consequence of questioning their competences and devaluation of their research (Daniel, 2018; Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012). Controlling images have been used to "justify black women's oppression" (Collins, 2000, p. 69). From slavery to New Jim Crow (Alexander, 2012), controlling images include Sapphire, "the angry [B]lack woman [who] has many different shadings and representations: the bad [B]lack women, the [B]lack "bitch," and the emasculating matriarch (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 88). Angry Black Women [ABW], Sistas with Attitude, superwoman and Strong Black Woman [SBW] are characterizations used to sustain domination over the lives of Black women (Harrington et al., 2010; West, 2018). These racialized stereotypes include self-doubt and may lead to traumatic outcomes (Campbell, 2019). In a study of 609 Black women recruited from two college campuses, researchers (Jerald et al., 2017) found that being aware that others hold negative stereotypes of one's group predicated negative mental health outcomes (e.g., depression, anxiety, hostility), and ultimately impacted diminished self-care behaviors and increased maladaptive behaviors for coping.

The weathering of cumulative environmental stressors (social isolation, invisibility, alienation, hostile work environment, labels of incivility and accusations of non-

collegiality) is emotional labor that can exacerbate a myriad of adverse outcomes on Black women's sexual health, reproductive health, physical health and psychological health (Harrington et al., 2010; Prather et al., 2018; Sule et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2018). St. Vil et al. (2019) offered a PTSS conceptual framework to aid social workers to center African American experiences within a historical trauma-informed perspective as response trauma-specific intervention. Compounding environmental stressors have been passed down intergenerationally and internalized by Black women professionals, yet their stories have gained little traction in the empirical literature.

The perpetual and intersecting claims of ignorance and silence, alongside the incalculable amount of time spent resisting White supremacy and the White Fragility defense (Daniel, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Smith et al., 2020; Sule et al., 2017), have left Black women professionals feeling trapped to cope with racial battle fatigue, emotional labor, and negative career-related consequences (Corbin et al., 2018; Speakes-Lewis, 2018). This study privileges the voices of Black women resisters who have turned their ever-present anger and rage into a protective superpower to combat weaponized conditions against them.

The psychological PTSS marker—racist socialization—is another consequence for professionals who are Black and female, stuck at the intersection of "double jeopardy" (Beal, 2008). Born out of a generation that actively speaks out against violence, the Sojourner Syndrome, a term coined by Mullings, is characterized as "an interpretive framework that speaks to the historical dialectic of oppression, resilience, and resistance" (Mullings, 2005, p. 79). Sojourner Syndrome is further explained as a survival strategy response for Black women who are generationally positioned with compromised and detrimental health consequences (i.e., reproductive) due to the multiplicative effects of racism alongside intersecting identities, including gender, class, and age (Mullings, 2005). Within this lens and figuratively akin with Sojourner Truth's life story, Black women "who have faced discrimination, persecution, oppression, and a substantial history of trauma use protective factors to defend themselves from the horrors of their realities" (Campbell, 2019, p. 216). Correspondingly, this study analyzes the adjustments of racialized stereotypes, PTSS and adaptations, highlighting PTG as a protective factor of Black women professionals in academia.

Posttraumatic Growth in Black Women

In contrast to the dysfunctional behaviors proposed by PTSS (DeGruy, 2005), there is an analysis reflecting on the adjustments and adaptions to trauma. Posttraumatic growth was coined to describe the experience of positive changes or strengthening that may occur as the result of an extreme stressor, suffering, or trauma (Tedeschi et al., 2018). The model of PTG pertains to five domains: (1) renewed appreciation of life, (2) new possibilities (3) enhanced personal strength, (4) improved relationships with others, and (5) spiritual change (Tedeschi et al., 2018). There is evidence documenting PTG in Black women. For example, in a mixed-methods study, Manove et al. (2019) reported small to moderate PTG outcomes in 26 Black mothers who self-identified as having low income and whose homes were damaged or destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. The authors reported that the disaster of

Katrina created new opportunities for survivors who formerly experienced oppression (i.e., improved neighborhoods, educational and economic opportunities, and increased racial diversity).

In another study, Evans et al. (2013) conducted an exploratory study examining PTG and psychosocial and behavioral correlates among a sample of predominantly African American women living with HIV in underserved and under-resourced communities in Mississippi. They found that PTG was correlated with church attendance and aforementioned posttraumatic growth domains (Evans et al., 2013). The widely accepted Afrocentric paradigm (see, Ani, 1994; Martin & Martin, 2002) and healing domains that attend to DeGruy's PTSS model (Campbell, 2019; Carruthers, 2018) are culturally significant for Black women and cannot be detached from their being.

There is recent evidence documenting PTG in Black youth recovering from historical trauma and systemic violence (Ortega-Williams, 2017). Nevertheless, the aforementioned studies do not account for contemporary race-based stereotypes of Black women professionals who fall above the poverty threshold. While PTG (Tedeschi et al., 2018) and PTSS (DeGruy, 2005) refer to growth accompanying suffering, these themes have been researched separately and included Black women who reported low socio-economic status. By examining PTSS and PTG collectively in Black women professionals, this study's model provides an original contribution to a growing but insufficient empirical literature.

Focus of Article

The study extends DeGruy's (2005) hallmark writings on PTSS and adds another dimension to the PTG research, contributing a social work perspective regarding gender discrimination, rooted in proximity to Whiteness and habitual attacks on the professional acumen of Black women who exist at the margins of academia and society. The current research endorsed a heteronormative perspective and reflection of most of the Black women interviewed. The research question was: How do Black women professionals make meaning within the narratives that specifically relate to their perceptions of themselves, their worlds, and the context in which they work? By examining strength, resilience, adjustments, and adaptions, this study seeks to deepen our understanding about these survival behaviors: (a) vacant esteem, (b) ever present anger, and (c) racist socialization, all of which are features of PTSS, and discourses PTG outcomes identified by Black women professionals.

Method

This is an exploratory qualitative design. Specifically, participants completed a semi-structured standardized survey, through a web-based survey platform. Seven qualitative interviews were completed which is the focus of this article. The interviews focused on the participant's perception of gendered racism and the role of race-based stereotypical images on their psychological functioning and used The Listening Guide, a voice-centered relational (VCR) tool (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2008; Brown & Gilligan, 1993). Interview questions used to frame PTSS (DeGruy's 2005) in the current study include: (1) "How

would you describe the role of controlling, race-based stereotypical images (i.e., angry Black woman, strong Black woman) and their impact on the psychological functioning of Black women professionals?" (2) "What is your perception of gendered racism for Black women professionals?" (3) "How would you describe posttraumatic growth (PTG) in Black women professionals?"

Participants

Participants were recruited through snowball sampling and met inclusion criteria. Participants in the current study included self-identified Black or African American women professionals in higher education living in the United States, age 21 and over, English-speaking, who experienced or were exposed to historical trauma rooted in controlling race-based stereotypes. The participants' pseudonyms are—Umoja, Kujichagulia, Ujima, Ujamaa, Nia, Kuumba, and Imani. They were aged 42 to 72 years old, held a masters (n=5) or doctoral (n=2) degree, and worked in higher education (n=6). One participant was enrolled in a graduate degree program. Participants mostly reported annual income between $60,000 and $100,000. Five of seven participants were married, living with a domestic partner or widowed. Three of the participants had children and all were living in the northeastern or southern region of the United States.

Data Collection

Qualitative collection took place over a 6-month period and was part of a larger study. The purpose of the interviews was to create a safe space where Black women professionals could use their voices to tell their stories. Participants described experiences and gave examples of gendered racism and psychological distress they faced as Black women professionals. At the request of participants, interviews were recorded in a private office, apartment, or home with only the principal investigator (PI) present. Interviews ranged from 60 to 120 minutes. The PI obtained Institutional Review Board approval that included verbal consent to audio-record participants. Pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality. The study was funded by an institutional grant.

Data Analysis

Following each interview, audiotapes were uploaded to the PI's secure research program, transcribed verbatim using NVivo software to develop a thematic codebook, and reviewed by the PI for consistency. Initial open coding was conducted by the PI and the research team (PI, graduate social work scholar, research assistant). Inter-rater reliability and validity procedures included member checking (the PI returned to participants to verify the preliminary findings) and triangulation across participants to ensure that findings were in agreement (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Research themes were then organized into categories within a chart. Adhering to the member check process, participants were asked to review the PI's interpretation of their transcript and comment on statements identified as inaccurate, omitted, or unclear.

The Listening Guide increases the accuracy of thematic analysis, transcription, and a platform to attentively listen (and re-listen) for emergent themes from each participant's stories and how those themes relate to each other (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014). For the sake of brevity, more details concerning the Listening Guide have been identified elsewhere (Gilligan et al., 2003).

The Listening Guide honors the legacy of storytelling and oral tradition rooted in African descendants (Martin & Martin, 2002). To ensure Black women professional's voices were heard, four sequential readings/listenings were employed: (1) listening for the plot, which entails understanding the overall story; (2) writing "I-poems," focusing on how women describe themselves in the first person; (3) listening for contrapuntal or multiple voices such as, contradictory, passive, active, emotional, intellectual, first, and third person; and (4) composing an analysis exploring the research questions and emerging themes (Gilligan et al., 2003).

The Listening Guide data analysis has been used to study the different voices of Black women in their career development (Abkhezr et al., 2018; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2008). This study extends the existing VCR literature to analyze the relationship of Black women professionals to PTSS and PTG. Specifically, the Listening Guide (Gilligan et al., 2003) was used to check the preliminary themes identified during the initial analysis; the PI listened to participants' audio recordings in full and noted initial thoughts on their narratives. Subsequently, the PI then re-listened to the recordings, chronicling ways the participants self-named characteristics for giving to their existence (see I-Poems, Table 1). Afterwards, the PI listened to the recordings to identify overlapping themes. The intended outcome of this data analysis was to identify emerging themes and their relation to the study research question. Selective coding was based on emerging themes and supported by direct quotes from participants.

This research employed Draucker et al.'s (2009) distress protocol as a guide to assess risk related to emotional distress among participants who engage in research on traumatic or aversive events and may exhibit a host of reactions (e.g., crying) when recalling negative experiences. Questions asked in the interviews encouraged reflective processes about the emotionally charged issue of PTSS. The PI, a skilled licensed clinical social worker, has been trained to uncover signs of distress. For several participants, indications of distress included noticeable tears or requests to pause the interview. Assessment was facilitated by the PI using the DSM-IV-TR (APA, 2000, p. 34) *Global Assessment of Functioning* (GAF) to screen the participant's level of functioning. Exclusion criteria included cutoff scores between 0-50 (serious symptoms, e.g., suicidal ideation, etc.) on a scale of 0-100.

Table 1. *Listening for I-Poems, Contrapuntal Voices and Race-based Stereotypes experienced by Black Women Professionals (n=7)*

Participant's Voice	I-Poems	Contrapuntal or Multiple Voices	ABW/Sapphire	SBW
Umoja, 50, married college student scholar	I am Black, this is how God made me, I love that I am dark-skinned, I love my hair I love my heavy voice	**angry**, **aggressive**, the "n" word, loud **argumentative**, Black ugly "B"	**ABW** may be describing myself, because that is how I see myself. I learned to be aggressive.	She upheld that household. I learned how to be **strong** through my grandmother …so I learned how to multi-task & be a **superwoman**.
Kujichagulia 51, married college counselor	I am African American I am Black - #Black…grace… I am strong, I am a Sistah	strong, encouraging, **intimidating**, natural, spiritual, real	I definitely feel that Black women are seen as "**Spitfire**" if she chooses to say that was wrong & I am not going to take it… **Ms. Angry Black Girl**. Always have a 'tude'…	She can do it all. **She does it all**… her men aren't around so she has to do it all.
Ujima 42, single college professor	I am Afro-American I am strong, I am secure I am confident	**angry**, oppositional, defiant, **aggressive**, strong, **intimidating**	We are looked upon as always having to be angry black woman, even before given the opportunity to prove ourselves, we are stigmatized as being the **Angry Black Woman**.	Because I present myself as **"Strong" Black woman** then negative terms are used to describe me.
Ujamaa 72, widowed college professor	I am Black, I am bold I am a chance-taker, I am fearless, I step out on faith & do not worry about opposition	**aggressive**, opinionated, **argumentative**, judgmental, talkative, **intimidating**	**Feminist** in this regard… I am not saying that is a term used to describe them, but that is what comes to mind.	…we have within our race a lot of superwomen… But every **superwoman** has a **kryptonite**… [crying] So, every now & then, she don't make it!
Nia 54, domestic partner college professor	I am American, I am suitably aggressive, I am empathic, I can have any characteristic	Inappropriately dressed, unacceptable, not acceptable, **inferred aggressiveness**, coming across as smart	…Sapphire…is meant to be negative… I think Sapphire is a positive term… I am talking about "**Professional women Sapphire**"…they are aggressive about their business…	Women who feel they **can't let other women down or men down**...who **work to death**…
Kuumba 42, single college professor	I am an African in America, I am strong, I am resilient, I am an outlier	**angry**, **aggressive**, confrontational, **argumentative**, loud, **intimidating**	…We are depicted as **Sassy**…angry. Let me be clear…what I am experiencing is silent rage.	Being a **strong-Black-woman-man** is unhealthy, dangerous… wearing an S on our chest says to the world we can handle anything & everything…but at what cost?...
Imani 70, widowed college professor	I am Black, I am friendly I am even-keeled, I am a family member/person	nice, talkative, agreeable, seasoned, knowledgeable, **Black B** [husband]	…I do not have an example of an **Angry Black Women**…	Black women who have gotten that title, because they are seen in the community, in the church… as really being able to get things done…we do have a lot of… **superwoman** who have been able to keep things together for our community & race.

Note: The table is organized according to the Nguzo Saba, which in Swahili means the seven principles. Rooted in Kawaida Theory, the Nguzo Saba was introduced by Maulana Karenga in 1965 as the minimum set of African values that African Americans need to rebuild their heritage & restructure daily lived experiences (Karenga, 1988, 1993). The Nguzo Saba is widely celebrated during Kwanzaa, an African American & Pan-African holiday. In addition, the **bold type** reflects the multifaceted forms of oppression reinforced by the social construction & institutionalization of racialized stereotypes & controlling images ascribed by others to Black women professionals. It also highlights the experiences heard from participants.

Reflexivity in Interpreting Research Themes

Qualitative study compels the researcher to examine self-awareness, difference from and identification with the narrator as the story is told, and the influence the researcher has on study participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Brown and Gilligan (1991) argue that use of the Listening Guide (VCR tool) demands researcher reflexivity, a focus on researcher–participant relationships, brings issues of interpretation and representation of people's lives into the analytical foreground, and is a solution to challenging issues raised for both the PI and the researched.

In addition, reflection is employed to analyze the PI's subjective responses introspectively because those responses potentially influence process and outcome, integrity, credibility, and the trustworthiness of qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The PI privileged an analysis in which underlying beliefs were framed by the research question included in the interview guide. The framework assumed that Black women professionals likely reported contemporary race-based stereotypes and PTSS features. To uphold professional social work values, research integrity also included reflective dialogue with colleagues.

The PI's lens was heightened by her own positionality. The PI acknowledges her race, gender, and social class identities—Black, cisgender woman, heterosexual, educated, middle class, and immersed in advocating against White supremacy in the academy, scholarship, governance, union, and public spaces—which intersect with structurally and socially constructed focal points (Collins, 2000; Rodgers, 2017; Rodgers & Lopez-Humphreys, 2020) of participants in the current study. The PI kept a journal to be cautious of her voice aligning with participant narratives.

Results

Within the Listening Guide (i.e., I-Poems, Contrapuntal or Multiple Voices, and Race-based Stereotypes), the PI heard participants' voices to produce Table 1 and provide a foundation for the below themes which emerged from the interviews with Black women professionals in response to the research questions underpinned by theoretical frameworks. Moreover, Table 1 and the study themes share the concept of voicing participants' exemplar statements. Specifically, the key findings identified in Table 1 tended to give voice to Black women professionals' articulations of encounters with race-based stereotypes, features of PTSS and stories of adjustments and adaptations. The themes are categorized according to voices of (1) Identity and Positionality, (2) Generational [In]visibility, (3), Professional Rage Located, and (4) Voices of PPTTG—Prayers, People, Trials, Tribulations and God.

Voices of Identity and Positionality

Imani, a 70-year-old widow, retired college professor, and cancer survivor, was born and educated in the segregated South. Raised by her maternal aunt who worked as a domestic servant, Imani moved to New York City when she was 18 years old. In Imani's

voice:

> *Having been raised in the South, we knew our place. I remember my aunt saying, "know your place." Know your place came north with me! It was a part of me in my marriage. It matured with me as I progressed, even at 70, I know my place. ...I think the pattern is something that follows you...*

At the other end of the spectrum of vacant esteem is a concept that the author is calling present esteem—the state of perceiving oneself and others to have worth and purpose, embodied by Black women professionals who concomitantly resist White supremacy and restore features of African-centered worldview for themselves, family, community, and humanity. Nia, age 54, resides with her domestic partner. She is a college professor, who grew up in a mid-western state during the civil rights era:

> *Reflecting on an article I read some years ago, the actor, Diahann Carroll, who was actually the first African American woman to get a major primetime TV drama played a nurse in the 1970s. It was called "Julia." Don't you know your place? I read this Ebony or Jet article where she discusses this; she essentially wrote back saying, my place is here. Other Black actresses of that era would say the roles they could get, were limited to maid, mammy, or to be somebody's whore or prostitute. Carroll's response showed that she knows who she is.*

Kuumba, a 42-year-old, single, college professor, was born in a major U.S. metropolitan city in the northeast. Another example of present esteem was voiced by Kuumba:

> *My ancestors have fought for our place in society. Yet structural practices assert policies that tell me to, "stay in your place little Black girl." I am tired of having to defend that my place is where I say it is!" I know that always having to defend my place was trauma to my body and ultimately led to my hysterectomy.*

Voices of Generational [In]visibility

Umoja, 50, who is married and a graduate student, was born in the United States and raised in the deep South by grandparents. As a little girl, she listened to frequent family conversations about the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., the Bloody Sunday protest march in Selma, and the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church. Umoja elaborates on racist socialization:

> *My grandparents taught me…I have to portray myself to look like her if I want to be a part of this society if I want to be able to take care of my family. If I…[wear]…hair nappy or in braids, they look at me in a different way compared to if I had my hair straight...I conduct myself the way they [White women] do in order for them to see me and get raises on the job…I have to conduct myself in their image and have had to change my entire image. These have caused me daily distress…When I hit the door, I am no longer me. Distress is having to be two people.…can't separate the two…[Tears up]. As I sit here and talk to you and I think about how far I have had to come and because of these psychological*

stressors it has created a lot of problems with my health. I have to go out into the world and sort of forget about my Blackness…I have to live in a White world. It has caused me at times, Depression and I have had to be on medication.

Kujichagulia, asserted:

I am horrified that in this day and age, that so many of our beautiful sisters of every different hue continue to feel "ugly, unworthy, and as though they don't count." TV, imagery, magazine, we are made to feel that we are not wanted and have no worth. I am completely exhausted. I personally feel offended when our beautiful sisters are not able to walk in their natural selves. "I hope I did not say too much" Black get back, White is right…I love it when we [Black women] say, yeah, my body is a little rounder, and my hair is nappy. And so, what? I love it when celebrities stand and reflect their natural self.

Ujamaa, 72, a widow and retired professor, was born and educated in the segregated South. Ujamaa echoed similar sentiments as Umoja of being dismissed and ignored in public spaces, because of being a Black (dark complexion) woman. In Ujamaa's voice:

I know racism is there so I do not go out expecting it not to be there…when I go out, there is a very strong possibility that when I interact with White people they are going to say or do something that is going to be condescending or patriarchal. I experience this mostly from White women. I remember even as a faculty member, when people have come in the office and would defer to the White secretary and not to me even after they found out who I was.

Voices of Professional Rage Located

Kujichagulia, 51, a married college counselor, born in the United Kingdom, was raised by Black women, and moved to the United States when she was a year old. The example of this theme is heard through the voice of Kujichagulia:

I definitely feel that Black women/African American women are seen as "spit-fire" if she chooses to say that was wrong and I am not going to take it. Wounded people walk with a great deal of hostility that causes us to lash out, hurt others, and live the negatives…she is just so angry all the time.

Ujima, 42, is a single, college professor born and educated in United States and raised by her mother. In the voice of Ujima:

People find that just being a Black woman, you are supposed to be submissive. So, if you present yourself another way, then you are a person that can be intimidating…so I pretend to be submissive.

Participant (Kuumba) verbalized ever present anger as:

I reject being branded an angry Black woman for demanding respect. Speaking up and speaking out against White Supremacy is the rich legacy my ancestors left me. I do not need anyone's permission to use my voice in opposition of unearned power and White domination when it directly restricts my…liberty, and pursuit of my

Blackness and my womanhood. In the voice of Assata Shakur, "I have nothing to lose but my chains."

Voices of PPTTG—Prayers, People, Trials, Tribulations, and God

Umoja described post traumatic growth:

...I know the trials and tribulations that have come with this body, and I have some flaws now, because of the life's journey and the road bumps I had to endure...I am praying as I am driving. I am a superwoman. I could not be a superwoman unless I have a relationship with God. My religion is very, very important...I want to say 98 percent of everything I do includes God, includes devotion...I've learned to pray.

Imani stated:

Posttraumatic growth to me is showing the strength and resiliency and all of those things that will help them get back on target. PTG is God. God made me who I am. I am just different. My husband you call me a Black B-I-T-C-H because I went to church a lot. I am so thankful to have my church family and friends. They are my PTG.

Discussion

This study deepens our understandings about the unique narratives of Black women professionals within a voice-centered domain. Each of the participants voiced ways they identified themselves. Their self-definitions were immersed in positive themes of strength and Blackness aligning with earlier research (Harris-Perry, 2011) which report that Black women have crafted alternative images of themselves. Each of the seven women also used their multiple voices to describe their perceptions of labels ascribed to them by others (see Table 1 for details) as a way to justify and sustain agency over themselves. Listening to their voices individually and collectively, the themes heard in their stories congruently undergird controlling images, PTSS and PTG adaptive survival behaviors, intergenerational strength, and contributions that they bring from their African ancestors.

Umoja's voice, "It has caused me at times, Depression and I have had to be on medication" brings to light the significant impact controlling and race-based stereotypical images have on the psychological well-being being of Black women. This finding is consistent with earlier research reported by Abrams et al. (2019). The acquisition of intersectional occurrences of race-based stereotypes and PTSS can also result in negative reproductive health outcomes. Kuumba's voice, "I know that always having to defend my place was trauma to my body ultimately led to my hysterectomy" speaks to the ways Sojourner Syndrome (Mullings, 2005) operates in the lives of Black women, resulting from multiplicative effects of racism and sustained oppressive circumstances.

With respect to gendered racism, Black women professionals in this study share many adaptive survival behaviors akin to those found in the earlier conceptual work on PTSS (DeGruy, 2005). These oral histories and traditions of survival behavior are interwoven

and passed down from prior generations through familial relationships, community bonds, and social transmission (Ani, 1994; DeGruy, 2005; Martin & Martin, 2002; Halloran, 2019). For example, Imani shared her experience of being raised by a village of relatives who, paradoxically, nurtured her and yet reinforced self-doubt and White supremacy values. Imani's reference to her aunt's verbal command, "know your place" aligns with vacant esteem (Identity and Positionality) and feelings of inferiority and self-doubt that slavery fostered (Campbell, 2019). Unlike DeGruy's vacant esteem, this study revealed a new construct—present esteem. Nia and Kuumba named their liberatory voices to assert their location in opposition to sustained White supremacy.

Multiple voices in this research validate racist socialization (Generational [In]visibility). Umoja and Kujichagulia voiced the insidious nature of European standards of beauty. Umoja mentioned her grandparents taught her to look like [White] society if she wanted to be able take care of her family. Voices described in Table 1 and examples of Umoja and Ujamaa's reports of emotional distress related to their being dark-skinned are attributes of habitual covert and passive-aggressive attacks on their personal characteristics, professional acumen, and reinforce colonial beauty standards. Umoja's willingness to endure, even alter herself (also referred to as code-switch or double consciousness) might be assessed by mental health experts who rely on the DSM as a schizophrenic way to cope with isolation and internalized racism (Cross & Strauss, 1998; Du Bois, 1920/2011; Halloran, 2019). Moreover, existing between dual identities— Blackness while navigating everyday Whiteness—becomes part of Umoja's adaptive survival skills. These findings confirm the work of Harris-Perry (2011) who explores the confluence of racial- and gender-based stereotypes that have been used to control and subjugate Black women in America. Umoja's skills allow her to shift and exist within dominant White society and speak to the physical complications and mental health disorders that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Brody et al., 2018) enumerate. This finding is consistent with early research (Jerald et al., 2017) that revealed being aware that others hold negative stereotypes about Black women is a predictor of mental health outcomes, including depression.

White male domination was expressed by some participants (Umoja and Imani) surviving the White supremacy/Black racial stereotype binary for silencing, masking and know their place. Professional Rage located in Black women resisters—Kuumba and Kujichagulia showed up as switching between their superpower (Cooper, 2018) and justified anger (rage). Towards surviving "post-racial" America neutral rhetoric (Bonilla-Silva, 2015), they use their voices of "spit-fire" and "sass" as liberatory practices to speak against gendered suppression, controlling images, and colorist microaggressions (Hall & Crutchfield, 2018; Hunter, 2007; Mena & Vaccaro, 2017; Spencer & Perlow, 2018).

In analyzing Tedeschi et al.'s (2018) PTG framework, Black women professionals in this study held a master's degree or PhD. This finding upholds scholars' (e.g., Atta, 2018; Bent-Goodley et al., 2017; Campbell, 2019) assertions that protective factors such as religious beliefs and spirituality including healing circles and movement, can help Black women professionals to reclaim their present esteem, total selves, and ritualistic movement. It has also played a crucial role in the survival and connectedness passed down generationally by African slaves and their descendants. This finding also acknowledges

early research (Manove et al., 2019) that reported PTG among Black women with historical experiences of depression voiced new educational opportunities following the disaster of Hurricane Katrina.

The finding of PPTTG—Prayers, People, Trials, Tribulations and God, adds to the PTG model, specifically, spiritual change, improved relationships with others, and personal strength. In the face of Umoja's daily microaggressions and Imani's verbal abuse by her husband, they voiced endorsing religious and spiritual rituals, such as God, prayer, going to church, and devotion as anchors for their existence and strength. Previous research (Evans et al., 2013) found church attendance and older age was associated with New Possibilities and Personal Strength. The findings also affirm earlier empirical findings supporting the need for incorporating Afrocentric paradigms for African-descended people to restore family structure, community connections, communal existentialism, spirituality, survival, oral tradition, and rituals (Ani, 1994; Atta, 2018; Martin & Martin, 2002; Mazama, 2002; Rodgers-Rose, 1972), which accord well with holistic experiences of Black women.

Strengths and Limitations

This research aims to expand the literature on historical trauma, specifically PTSS. The core strength of this study is that Black women professionals' voices are no longer isolated from discussions about PTSS. Instead, their counterstories, naming or voicing one's own reality (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Landson-Billings & Tate, 1995), are shifting the existing narratives toward empirical discussions of present esteem, spit-fire, and sass.

Several limitations are also noted. First, the small sample size of seven may not reflect the voices of all Black women professionals therefore, the study used a non-representative sample, thus the study findings cannot be generalized beyond this sample. Second, as a Black woman professional with similar experiences as the participants, there is the potential for biased interpretations of participants' oral stories. To reduce this bias, the principal investigator (author) maintained a reflexive journal throughout the data collection process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), discussed transcriptions with the research assistant, and invited university fellows to critically review qualitative analysis, pose questions, and offer feedback. In keeping with Gilligan's et al. (2003) Listening Guide method, the research team cross-checked the data analysis multiple times. This process enhanced the maximum confirmability and trustworthiness of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Third, because the sample of Black women professionals is educationally privileged (master and doctoral level education), additional exploration is needed to determine how education might affect study variables. Fourth, this research endorsed a heteronormative perspective and reflection of majority of the Black women interviewed, and therefore limited the translatability, diversity, and inclusivity of Black female and non-binary identities. Future investigation must address this omission.

Implications

The unique contribution of this study is documenting a descriptive experience as well as a prescriptive strategy for the survival adaptive behaviors, particularly features of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome and Posttraumatic Growth, identified by Black women professionals. More specifically, this paper describes their actual experience; and then goes further to prescribe policies and practices that will empower these women's lives.

Practice. Black women's holistic wellness extends the margins established by the diagnostic criteria outlined in *DSM-5*. The current research gives voice to Black women professional's adaptive survival responses to PTSS and disrupts practice changes to the *DSM-5* (2013), the authoritative guide for diagnosing mental disorders for health care professionals around the world. The study's findings also support the implication that assessment and interventions must include sustainable interventions (anti-Black Racism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion—ABRDEI) trainings grounded in community care approaches that empower and center storytelling, language and liberatory strategies to protect future generations of African ancestry against transgenerational trauma (Campbell, 2019; Jones, 2020).

Policy. Laws are needed to decolonize precolonial beauty standards that foster an environment that privileges Black women while disrupting values of Whiteness phenotype (Barlow & Dill, 2018). The CROWN (Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair) Act of 2019 (2020), under the Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) and education codes will ensure a sense of belonging to society and protections against discrimination that Umoja and BIPOC women with ethnic hair textures endure. The findings also call for position statements [Black papers] and policy reform.

Towards addressing the disparate institutional policy responses impacting Black women's health and wellness, stakeholders (Barlow & Dill, 2018) call for transdisciplinary courses to be produced in Black studies and other fields (history, journalism, nursing, sociology, social work, women's studies), including race-based scholarship. Regardless of education and social status, findings for this study reveal that even Black women professionals are forced to conform to the pathology of White America's norms through domination of racist socialization, gendered, racial, colorist microaggressions (Hall & Crutchfield, 2018; Perlow et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2020), and the killing of Black women professionals. Maliciously calculated, on September 22, 2020, the same day no murder charges were returned for the three officers involved in the killing of Breonna Taylor, Donald Trump, the 45th President of the United States, issued an Executive Order "on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping" (Exec. Order No. 13950, 2020). The EO instructed that no divisive rhetoric would be tolerated by that administration. The 46th United States President Joe Biden issued an Executive Order "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government" (Exec. Order No. 13985, 2021) revoking EO 13950. To memorialize ancestor Taylor, funding in her name is needed to expand racial justice initiatives that center Black women's voices and curriculum that combats performative activism and White supremacy rhetoric. Rightfully taking a seat at the executive branch table, United

States Vice President Kamala Devi Harris can serve as a superlative BIPOC voice for the next wave of Black Women's Health Imperatives, social justice priorities, and global goals.

Conclusion

This study gives us a glimpse of the lives of a few Black women professionals. However, articulations and consequences of adaptive survival behaviors are not yet well understood. Future research is likely to reveal a greater range of solutions for the effects of PTSS. Solutions can revolutionize the ways that social work and health care practitioners serve the mental, emotional, and physical needs of Black women professionals. Future studies with larger numbers of participants may also provide a greater argument for why PTSS and PPTTG cannot be gainsaid; together, they provide a critical theoretical framework for addressing the invisibility of Black voices.

Social Justice Race work scholars (i.e., Fisher et al., 2017; Hall & Crutchfield, 2018; Ortega-Williams et al., 2019) call for justice frameworks to respond to historical traumas and colorist microaggressions. As such, PTSS must become part of the larger DSM discussion. Whether protecting forebearer's stories, fighting for justice against neo-lynchings of Breonna Taylor and unnamed generations (Spencer & Perlow, 2018), or advancing the wellness of Black women professional resisters in academia who have suffered from race-related trauma, disrupting White Supremacy must be at the forefront of everyone's agenda. The resurgence of the racial, hyper-sexual female objectified on stage (i.e., Saartjie "Sara" Baartman [1789-1815] Hottentot Venus, enslaved women purchased at auction blocks) was perceptible in 2019. Chicago male police officers inhumanly bound naked Black social worker Anjanette Young and placed her on worldwide display. Within the context of Healing Justice work (Carruthers, 2018), this author calls social workers to action to communally respond to insidious acts of violence and their consequences inflicted on Black women's bodies. This article ends where it started—with Black women professionals talking back and speaking forward to defy societal White Supremist structures that seek to silence and dominate their stories and lives.

> *Even the most subjected person has moments of rage and resentment so intense that they respond, they act against. There is an inner uprising that leads to rebellion, however short-lived. It may be only momentary, but it takes place. That space within oneself where resistance is possible remains.* (bell hooks, 2014, p. 29)

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