"I BELIEVE THAT WE WILL WIN":

AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF MY JOURNEY THROUGH RACIALIZED

TRAUMA

A Thesis

by

AJA ANERA HOLSTON

Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Chair of Committee,   Brandy Kelly Pryor
Committee Members, David Scott
                   Phia Salter

Head of Department, Gary Ellis

May 2016

Major Subject: Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Sciences

ABSTRACT

"I Believe That We Will Win" is a transdisciplinary project combining a political and sociological history of race and leisure studies as well as psychological and youth development theories. Utilizing autoethnography, my study centers the killing of Trayvon Martin as my introduction to a developed critical consciousness, recounting my navigation through racialized trauma after Trayvon Martin's killer was found not guilty. In a thematic, narrative analysis, this project investigates the lived reality of suffering from trauma as a result of experiences with institutional racism. In doing so, the critical impact of my participation in social activism as serious leisure before suffering from racialized trauma as well as implications for radical healing through social activism was revealed.

As Black youth activists across the United States drive a national conversation with the tagline #BlackLivesMatter, it is becoming increasingly important for historically white-controlled institutions to recognize ways in which it has silenced or marginalized communities of color, particular Black people. My autoethnography contributes to the dialogue within academia by illuminating the lived reality of racism as trauma, a little-used conception in the field of psychology and mental health, using theories which recognize institutional forces as significant to the development of critical consciousness as foundation.

DEDICATION

To Trayvon Martin. Years ago, I promised I would never give up my fight for your

justice. I pray this work honors you.

To Tracy Martin and Sybrina Fulton, I add this literature to the work of thousands of

Black youth activists who desperately want you to know that you are not alone. We

forever stand for #JusticeforTrayvon.

To God, Almighty. My journey to understand Your love outside of white supremacy

began just over six years ago. Thank You for revealing the path to those answers through

this thesis.

Ashe.

"and when we speak we are afraid/ our words will not be heard / nor welcomed /

but when we are silent / we are still afraid / so it is better to speak / remembering / we

were never meant to survive" (Lorde, 1978)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Wow. After almost four years of suffering from trauma and two years in its analysis, I feel as though this chapter of my life is coming to a close and I am being ushered into a new, more powerful stage. Although I am excited for this next step, I am even more grateful for those who have stood as my community. I know that it has not been easy to do so as I have ventured on this deeply-intimate, often painful, journey of self-discovery. And, although I wanted (and expected) it to be, nothing about this journey has been simple. But, as I was pushed to the limit of my analyses, my community stepped in to lovingly guide me deeper than I'd previously thought was possible.

To my committee members, Drs. Phia Salter and David Scott, let me begin by saying that, every day of this process, I have been profoundly humbled by your expertise, grace and support. Thank you for making up a dream team of scholars who helped shape my analysis of a topic so personal to me that sometimes I couldn't find my way out. More times than I can count, when I found myself lost in the overwhelming amount of research, I reflected on your comments and suggestions which helped to refocus my research intention. In particular, Dr. Scott, thank you for engaging in critical dialogue which theorized social activism as serious leisure. Although it required a level of vulnerability that I'd never reached before, our initial struggling through its theoretical connection sparked an understanding of my experiences. Dr. Salter, your contributions to my theoretical understanding of racism as trauma dramatically shaped

my journey to choosing autoethnography as a method. Thank you for leaning in to this research with me!

To my committee advisor, Dr. Brandy Kelly Pryor, there are no words to capture the impact you have had on my professional and personal journey through graduate school. When we met four years ago, I had no idea I would become your graduate student and struggle alongside you in my investigation of the most important period of my life but, every day, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for its manifestation. When I reflect on our frustrated confrontations with one another and moments of meaningful and sisterly reconciliation, I am filled with a sense of peace knowing that I have been supported by you in every moment of our relationship. To the next chapter!

To #BlackGirlMagic and the women who inspired through their art. Especially to Erykah Badu, thank you for dropping *But You Caint Use My Phone* days before my final writing process began. Tiara, for being unapologetic and vulnerable in your evolution. You were an inspiration to me through this writing process to live my truth without apology. And to Charlene, I honestly don't have the words for the way your #BlackGirlMagic has inspired me but know that I am forever appreciative.

To Aishia, my sister in the struggle. Literally! Thank you for handing me a bowl of pasta, a glass of wine, and letting me cry on your couch. I'm grateful to have had you along the way as we both struggled through consequences of racialized trauma in our projects.

While every professor I had in graduate school pushed me to develop a critical analysis which equipped me with the tools needed for my thesis, I want to especially

thank Dr. Joe Feagin for creating a space that allowed us to safely struggle with understanding complex features and consequences of institutional racism. And, to my classmates in his course, especially Stephanie and Vanessa. Although I was overwhelmed with intimidation at the beginning of the semester, your weekly support and feedback on my developing analyses empowered me to acknowledge my progress in my struggle to understand the violence of white supremacy while owning the value of my experience as a Black woman in the U.S.

To the members of Black Youth Project 100. In the past two years, I have watched you mentally and physically put yourself on the frontlines of this war against white supremacy. I hope this thesis honors the work you do and I look forward to continuing to learn from you. Thank you for ushering me into a stage of critical awareness and social activism that rejects the violence of hegemonies and imagines a world where Black people, ALL Black people, can live full and meaningful lives.

Finally, to Byron, my love. You are the epitome of everything good that I know this world can become. In my struggle to embrace my own vulnerability, our relationship has been the example of what radical Black love can accomplish when it recognizes the devastating effects of hegemonies and strives to love outside of those structures. Thank you for reminding me every day that to survive my story is an act of resistance but to tell it is an active attack on the violence we survive every day. In addition to being my sound board, advisor, refuge, and comfort, thank you for being my gourmet chef, surprising me with chocolate, and always keeping a bottle of wine in the house. As this journey comes

to an end, I am excited that ours is just beginning and I cannot wait to spend the rest of my life with you.

Through this extremely intimate project, I have battled, cried, and almost given up more times than I can count. But, it is only because of my community that I can call my autoethnography 'complete.' For those named and unnamed, thank you for your guidance, support, and dedication to the liberation of Black folks across the world.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

KEY TERMS

- **Social media** – internet websites which allow users to create accounts to socially network
  - o **Twitter** – a social media website which allows users to interact in real-time through postings. On Twitter, each post (or Tweet) is confined to a 140-character limit. Here, it is not uncommon to post dozens (or hundreds) of tweets per day as the character-limit encourages brevity
    - **Timeline** – when a user signs into their Twitter account, a timeline appears showing a stream of tweets which have been posted by other accounts. To add a user's tweets to your timeline, you must subscribe to their posts, also known as following their tweets.
    - **Followers** – users who have subscribed to seeing your tweets on their timelines

  - o **Facebook** – online social networking website in which users can post updates to their page by sharing thoughts, pictures, or more.
    - Status – similar to tweets except it is not subject to the 140-character limit
  - o **Hashtag** – the use of a hash character (or number sign) in front of a word or phrase which creates a database of messages by searching the tag

BACKGROUND

TRAYVON MARTIN

On the night of February 26, 2012, Trayvon Martin walked through the gated community in the neighborhood his father lived in Sanford, FL. It was halftime of the NBA All-Star game and the 17-year-old, wearing a hooded sweatshirt (hoodie), was on his way to a nearby corner store to purchase an Arizona iced tea and Skittles (Martin, 2012). Leaving the store at 6:34pm, Trayvon walked home. As he crossed through the neighborhood, he was seen by the head of the Neighborhood Watch, George Zimmerman, who was patrolling the neighborhood in his car. At 7:11 pm, Zimmerman dialed 9-1-1 to report a black man "up to no good" (Prieto & Nolin, 2012). Despite instructions from the operator to remain where he was, Zimmerman began driving slowly, following Trayvon, until he was noticed. At 7:13 pm, Zimmerman informed the operator that Trayvon started running. He exited his vehicle and pursued Trayvon, leading to a confrontation between the two at 7:16 pm (Dahl, 2013). This confrontation ended when George Zimmerman fatally shot Trayvon Martin once in the chest.

After taking a statement from Zimmerman, police officers determine the shooting was protected under Stand Your Ground, a state law which justifies lethal force when one perceives themselves to be in imminent danger (Hussein & Weber, n.d.), and did not file charges. Two days later, when Tracy Martin, Trayvon's father, contacted the Sanford police to report Trayvon as a missing person, he was told his son initiated two confrontations with Zimmerman that turned physical and led to his death (Horwitz &

Helderman, 2012). On March 8, 2012, Tracy Martin and Sybrina Fulton, Trayvon's

mother, circulated a petition requesting further investigation in his killing. Within weeks,

there were hundreds of thousands of signatures and protests occurred across the United

States with demands that Zimmerman be arrested. Forty-five days after Trayvon's

killing, on April 11, 2012, George Zimmerman was charged with second-degree murder

and taken into custody. One year later, July 13, 2013, he was found not guilty, sparking

further protests across the nation.

AJA HOLSTON

The night Trayvon was killed, I was in Charlotte, North Carolina attending a

national conference for student leaders on university and college campuses. For two

semesters, I'd been on the Executive Board of a student-led, campus organization, the

Black Awareness Committee (BAC)[1], and was pegged to be the next president, or Chair.

Bearing in mind the additional responsibilities that come with leading the organization,

both my current Chair and advisor suggested that I attend this conference with other

university students and consider it a leadership training for my future position. At

nineteen years old, there was no higher honor to me than being identified as the

incoming Chair for BAC. This pride was a direct result of my evolution through the

early stages of nigrescence (Cross, 1991), as I confronted the long-held value of my

partial European heritage as superior to my African-American heritage. As a child, I

never missed an opportunity to explain my mixed racial make-up, "I'm three-quarters

Black and one-quarter French and German." However, just four months earlier, I'd made

---

[1] Pseudonym loosely based on the actual organization name

several aesthetic changes with a goal to reflect my growing pride in being African-American, including going "natural" by cutting off my chemically straightened hair. In this process, I recognized that the emphasis during my upbringing on being biracial often overlooked the affirmation that I needed as a Black girl developing into a Black woman who would experience racism. Nevertheless, before I graduated from high school, I learned that such pride did not prepare nor comfort me during my initial, explicit encounter with racism. At 16 years-old, I overheard the mother of a white friend call me a "stupid nigger" while speaking to him on the phone then outstretch her arms to embrace me the next time I saw her. Feeling powerless, I hugged her and continued to visit their home until I left for college two years later.

Although my family was not considered rich, our middle-class socioeconomic status allowed me to the choice in colleges throughout Texas. Following white friends to a predominately-white institution, I soon realized the racial differences extended much further than moments of explicit racism from ignorant parents. Within days of beginning my freshman year, I felt unable to escape the presence of racism. This included hearing mediocre students calling President Obama, the recently elected and first-Black President, a "monkey" and seeing posters of his face with an added mustache resembling the Nazi dictator, Adolf Hitler. Because my friends could not see beyond their quintessential college experiences, I began distancing myself and soon ignored their calls altogether. Before the end of my first month in college, I felt overwhelmed by the sheer volume of white racists on campus and sought to leave the university for safer

spaces. However, a transfer request to another university of my choice was not possible until the end of my freshman year so I was forced to remain a student.

My desire for a safe space to develop a healthy identity as a Black girl facilitated my search for a community of Black students on my college campus. In doing so, I discovered several organizations crafted for and by Black students as well as its associated community made up of hundreds of Black students who also felt marginalized on campus. Elated to have found a home in (what felt to be) a foreign land, I searched for an organization to join, gravitating towards the Black Awareness Committee (BAC) Founded by the first Black students in the 1960s, the members were historically known to be campus activists who emphasized the learning of African/diasporic history. Through my involvement in BAC, I joined the larger community of Black students who were explicitly aware of the unique experiences faced at our predominately-white institution. Situated within this community, I discovered my voice and, soon, considered it gravely important that I raise it against situations which I believed were "unjust."

It was in context of this new college experience that, when my BAC Chair and advisor suggested I attend the student-leadership conference, I briefly hesitated before agreeing to join the other students. On a different occasion, I would have been excited to represent BAC in North Carolina but this conflicted with a protest I was planning with other Black students against a speaker infamous for tirades of racism, which was scheduled to occur on the last day of the suggested conference. However, I chose to attend the conference and follow details of the protest through the online presence of the Black community through their Twitter accounts. On February 26, 2012, moments after

Zimmerman shot Trayvon in the heart and killed him, I climbed into the hotel bed and fell asleep after a full day of flying to North Carolina and participating in pre-conference activities.

Positionality Statement

Almost four years later, I dedicate my graduate thesis to the devastating story of Trayvon Martin through an autoethnographic reflection. Analyzing several dimensions of my experiences and responses to his killing, as well as to the not guilty verdict, I specifically employ the use of both italics and non-italics to share my story. When using italics, I use present-tense to invite the reader into a flashback. Each flashback is critical to the story as they develop the scene which is described in the analysis, or the non-italics. Additionally, when describing conversations in italicized paragraphs, different fonts are used to identify other voices.

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

"I'm going to send a pulse to my right and wait for it to come back on my left. And, I'm just going to say again, send this pulse with the intention of forward movement and the intention of healing. For our community. Let's bring in the energy of our ancestors," she firmly instructs. All additional movement freezes, the nervous conversation quiets, and the pulse begins. I feel mine within seconds and, following directions, continue it with my right hand. Almost simultaneous to the pulse's initial journey, someone in the room turns up the volume on the projector screen. My heart is racing faster than ever as the jury walks into the courtroom. One year and three months after a forty-five-day fight for an investigation and arrest, the jury has reached a verdict in George Zimmerman's trial for the killing of Trayvon Martin.

I can distinctly remember how difficult it was to breathe while we waited for the reading of the verdict. Although I was desperate to believe that George Zimmerman would be held legally responsible for shooting a boy only two years my junior, I could not reconcile why I was unable to stop the crying which began just moments after learning a verdict had been reached. In the following months, I could effortlessly relive the emotions of this experience but rarely recall the sequence of events leading to the traumatic reading. However, when meeting with Black youth organizers in New Orleans, LA later that year, I had the opportunity to watch a video recording of these moments which have forever remained etched in my mind.

There is a man standing next to me, holding my left hand. He is biting his lip and taking slow, labored breaths. Near him, a woman is boldly facing the projector screen with her eyes closed in prayer. Across the circle, two men are holding the hands of those standing next to them but have fallen to their knees, rocking back and forth. A woman, who would become our national coordinator, darts her concerned eyes around the room, observing our expressions as though she knows what is about to happen. Between the ages of 16 and 30, we are Black youth activists who have committed ourselves the movement against racism. We have come together for a strategic convening seeking to politically involve Black youth beyond presidential elections and, at the end of our second day of activities, we are exhausted. Although spirits aren't high, we continue to send the pulse forward with "the intention of healing. For our community."

While I remember feeling both too much and not enough time passed from the moment we formed our circle to the reading of the verdict, it was only two minutes and fifty seconds before we heard "we, the Jury, find the defendant, George Zimmerman, not guilty." Before another word was spoken in the courtroom, the silence in the large conference room that we stood in exploded into screams, curses, and cries of anguish.

"Juror B25, is this your verdict?"

"Yes."

"Juror B76, this is your verdict"

"Yes."

"Juror B36…" I quietly fall to the ground as each juror expressed their agreement with the verdict. Within seconds of bringing my knees to my chest, I erupt into sobs.

Two years later, I recognize July 13, 2013, the day George Zimmerman was acquitted, as a transformative moment of trauma. With a glaring disparity between those who believed Trayvon Martin's killing to be racially motivated and those who did not, "77% of Blacks…and 33% of whites" respectively, I knew that I was not alone in my response to the verdict (Gallup, 2012). Following the acquittal, I suffered from symptoms of depression which I posit are a reflection of experiences by Black youth who are also traumatized from systemic, racial injustices across the United States. Additionally, while I was involved in social activism prior to the not guilty verdict, it was my activism as a result of this traumatic moment which facilitated radical healing (Ginwright, 2015). Utilizing my experience with advocating for Trayvon and subsequent not guilty verdict of his killer as the catalyst to *my* introduction and commitment to social justice, I strive to illuminate cultural and societal implications of racism as trauma through Black Feminist autoethnography.

PURPOSE OF STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to examine my experiences with race-incident based trauma (RIBT)[2] and their relationship to social activism as both radically healing and serious leisure. In deconstructing my experiences following Trayvon Martin's killing, I strive to contribute to a developing body of scholarly research on Black youth which centers lived experiences as valuable. In doing so, I reject the deficit approach which has dominated research on Black youth, resulting in frequent labeling of 'at risk' or 'culturally-deprived' (Baldridge, 2014). Instead, my research is explicitly aware of the realities that Black youth must navigate in the face of institutional, racial injustices as well as additional dimensions which impact experiences, such as gender and income-level. In this study, I pose three questions: 1) What are my experiences with racialized trauma? 2) Did my involvement in social activism as serious leisure impact my navigation of experienced trauma (if so, how)? 3) What are the implications for radical healing from racialized trauma through social activism?

Although my personal experiences with racialized trauma and social justice activism are explored in this autoethnography, it is critical to remember that responses by Black youth to similar trauma will vary throughout the population. Rather than providing a singular narrative, this study offers a nuanced understanding of social activism as one of many psychological responses to enduring, racialized experiences. My journey illuminates both the complexities of living as a member of a marginalized community and the urgent need for a theoretical shift in academic approaches to racism

---

[2] *Race-incident based trauma* (RIBT) will be used interchangeably with *racialized trauma*.

for the psychology field, educators, policy makers, and community organizers. Additionally, leisure scholars will find a meaningful examination of Black youth leisure participation and its centering of an analysis which recognizes the impact of experienced racialized trauma.

CONCLUSION

In Chapter 1, the moment of my racialized trauma was described and briefly introduced. While I reference this trauma throughout my autoethnography, this chapter is the only space where it is reconstructed for the reader. Additionally, the purpose of study and research questions were defined. Chapter 2 provides an in-depth exploration of my chosen literature topics, *institutional racism, Black youth, racism as trauma,* and *social activism as serious leisure.* In this chapter, my description of theoretical frameworks also develops a foundation for my analytical approach to my experiences. In reviewing this literature, I discovered significant gaps which facilitated my choice of autoethnography as a methodology, discussed further in Chapter 3.

Beginning the autoethnographic analysis, Chapters 4 and 5 emphasize my story before and after this trauma, respectively, while also exploring various dimensions of my story. Situating my traumatic reaction to Zimmerman's not guilty verdict, Chapter 4 evaluates the evolution of my critical consciousness from self- to social awareness, levels outlined in social justice youth development (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). It is this critical consciousness which informs both my participation in social action as well as access to spaces with social activists of various, advanced skill sets. Chapter 4 also examines the way in which I pursued activism as a serious leisure activity in a stage of

amateurism, the initial, introductory stage to serious leisure (Stebbins, 1986). Through an evolution into serious leisure, Chapter 5 explores its implication for my responses to racialized trauma and journey to radical healing. Beginning immediately after the narrative which describes the moment of trauma in Chapter 1, this chapter analyzes my experiences with racism as trauma. Additionally, using the five features of the radical healing model (Ginwright, 2015), I examine the ways in which my serious pursuit of social activism placed me in spaces with access to healing features of the model. Concluding the analysis, Chapter 6 describes my conclusions and implications for future research.

CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

There are several academic approaches which can be used to analyze my experience with racialized trauma and subsequent social activism. For my research purposes, I have chosen to emphasize *institutional racism, Black youth, racism as trauma,* and *social activism as serious leisure* as topics which shape my study. Additionally, my autoethnography requires a theoretical foundation to best situate a critical analysis. I have identified racism-incident based trauma (RIBT) and the radical healing model (RHM) as most critical to this discussion. Together, RIBT and RHM provide a multidimensional approach to the nuanced impact of race induced-trauma and potential effects of social activism.

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

Generally, writing this autoethnographic reflection/study has been an extremely difficult process. However, as I complete the many layers needed to tell and analyze my complex narrative, I encounter particular sections which have been exceptionally difficult for me to write to satisfaction. While Chapter 6 explores an in-depth reflection on my writing process, I mention it here because this section has consistently been the most difficult for me and, before exploring my literature review of institutional racism, it is important to examine that struggle to better contextualize this section. Almost every day during the formal process of writing, from the proposal stage until moments before my final writing deadline, I have returned to this section with crippling anxiety and

doubt preventing my ability to share the findings of my review in a way most meaningful to my autoethnography. However, as my narrative analysis (found in the later chapters 4 and 5) took shape, I developed a firmer understanding of *why* this section has provided the most difficulty for me and, to embrace the vulnerable reflection of an autoethnography, believe it critical to briefly share.

My introduction to institutional racism as a topic of study began two years before my formal academic training through graduate school. Actually, although I was an undergraduate student when I began an overt study of the subject, it was entirely outside of formal academic spaces and through a community of Black youth activists who challenged my exploration that I developed a scholarly understanding of the relationship between U.S. institutions, historical racism, and Black communities throughout the country. As I developed relationships in the context of Trayvon's killing, close friends and activists supported me through uncomfortable dialogue which facilitated a critical analysis of institutional violence, particularly in our personal conversations and recommended readings. In the years following Trayvon's killing, and in the many suggested reading lists provided by my community, a canon of Black-activist literature was revealed. While there are topic-specific canons as well, such as anti-colonialism or anti-capitalist literature, it is the general canon of work (often written by Black authors) addressing U.S. racism which shaped my conceptualization of institutional racism. This canon includes the work of Angela Davis, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Ella Baker, Assata Shakur, and many more. In a reflection of the impact of work from this canon, my narrative explores the impact of rereading Angela Davis' autobiography after

Zimmerman killed Trayvon and the way that experience helped to ground later confrontations with consequences of racialized violence.

For the remaining two years of my time as an undergraduate, especially after suffering from racialized trauma, I continued reaching out to Black activists in search of knowledge which would better equip me to strategize against U.S. institutional racism. In doing so, I was deeply submerged into a world in which institutional racism was an undebatable concept for all those who I surrounded myself with as an activist. Essentially, institutional racism no longer needed to be defined because it was an inherent feature of conversation and strategy around the way Black people navigate economic, political, and social oppression. However, this world I was navigating in which institutional racism is an undeniable fact came crashing down as I began graduate school in 2014. While navigating my academic spaces, that world seemed to all but disappear as I was forced time and time again to explain to other students, and even some faculty, the way in which racism is embedded in U.S. institutions and results in crippling, traumatic effects for Black communities.

As time passed, I grew increasingly frustrated with my academic spaces which either 1) entirely overlooked the dramatic impact of institutional racism or 2) used partially developed analyses (often disregarding contributions within the canon of Black activist literature) and haphazardly applied them to Black communities. It is in the midst of this frustration that I began my literature review of institutional racism. At a complete loss for how to approach a topic which manifested in fundamentally different ways in my academic and activist spaces, I chose to conduct a review of the chronological

evolution of institutional racism through academic literature which also follows the way it was introduced to me in my academic spaces. Additionally, to provide further context for my review, I have chosen to focus on publications post-Civil Rights era which may, effectively, exclude much of the historical literature on the subject. I believe this exclusion to be for two reasons. 1) There is a specific manifestation of institutional racism which is relevant to my autoethnography that developed as a result of passed Civil Rights legislation during the 1960s and 2) it is literature from this time period (1970s-present) that impacts policy throughout levels of society. Reviewing this literature through a linear timeline, I strive to capture the evolution of the dominant academic thought regarding institutional racism.

1970s

In the 1970s, academia began *critically* exploring the nuances of institutional racism. Terry Jones (1974) identifies institutional racism as "the core or root" of, widely understood, overt racism (p. 218). Such racism extended into the fabric of both leisure spaces and "institutions – the schools, banks, housing industry, and private and public employments sources" in an attempt to maintain the occupation of inferior positions by people of color throughout various levels of society (p. 219). With U.S. racism constructed along a Black-white paradigm, such efforts at continued subjugation were historically documented in federal and state law, such as legal slavery, the accompanying Black Codes, and the Jim Crow era (Jones, 1974). However, although the oppressive system of slavery had been abolished, the subsequent laws passed during the Jim Crow era were ruled unconstitutional, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was signed,

10

racist subjugation did not end for African-Americans. On the contrary, Jones (1974) argues that contemporary institutional racism was introduced in response to these political gains by African-Americans, whereby state and local politicians swiftly enacted policies that discriminately distributed resources. For example, cities quickly created strict zoning policies to keep African-Americans out of white, suburban neighborhoods after the Fair Housing Act of 1968 was passed (p. 220). This early stage of inquiry assisted in academically grounding institutional racism as an unrelenting white-controlled response to the end of overt racism.

1980s-1990s

In the 1980s, research expanded to identify white participants who used institutional privilege to subjugate Black communities were "fundamentally racist" but cautions with explicit racism (Feagin, 1980; Gaertner & Davidio, 1981; Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1990). Such a result was telling in a time when mainstream society was constructing a narrative of moral rejection for explicit racism. In 1990, institutional assaults were no longer as overt as pre-Civil Rights movement but were creating overwhelming systemic inequalities for African-Americans (Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1990). In addition, research concluded that there was a critical "absence of a proper and fully developed historical-cum-social psychological account of racism" (p. 887). Although not yet determined, a working language was being developed in academia regarding contemporary, institutional racism.

2000s-Present

In 2006, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva authored *Racism without Racists: Colorblind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality*, where he describes the ways in which contemporary racism rebukes explicit discrimination and places the onus of equal, lived realities on racially, marginalized communities. Most critically, this contemporary racism is maintained at the institutional level. In 2008, Barack Obama was elected as the first African-American President of the United States. At the inauguration, there were metaphorical resounding cheers for the death of a racist society. With 43% of the white vote, the myth of a post-racial society where people of color "no longer have to deal with the unspoken or spoken belief that opportunities are limited by race" was cemented into the election's narrative (Brooks, 2009). However, very little time passed before scholars invalidated the myth's claim (Brooks, 2009; Dawson & Bobo, 2009; Cohen, 2011). This disproval indicated an unremitting need to explore the ways that racism permeates society in our modern reality that seeks to study beyond overt racism.

Michelle Alexander (2012) thought-provokingly contributes to previous literature with her book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. In it, she argues that institutional racism is not a novel form of racism, disjointed from the vice of its past. Instead, it is an evolution of the violent, insidious racism that birthed both plantation slavery and the Jim Crow era. More critically, it is supported by both federal- and state-level governments. Essentially, slavery's evolution is manifested through the United States mass incarceration system that is strengthened through the War on Drugs. According to Alexander (2012), the "design of the drug war effectively

guarantees that those who are swept into that nation's new undercaste are largely Black

and brown" (p. 81). Through a stunning deconstruction, Alexander details the ways in

which components of mass incarceration (the round-up, formal control, and invisible

punishment) serve to reinforce a racial caste system by making it legal for a lifetime of

governmental discrimination. Alexander describes the caste's "separate society" below:

> "a world hidden from public view, governed by a set of oppressive and
> discriminatory rules and laws that do not apply to everyone else. They
> become members of an undercaste—an enormous population of
> predominately Black and brown people who, because of the drug war, are
> denied basic rights and privileges of American citizenship and are
> permanently relegated to an inferior status. This is the final phase, and there
> is no going back" (p. 145).

Resulting from institutional racism, such a world is eerily comparable to the results of

horrifying violence during the Jim Crow era. Definitively, institutional racism impacts

the lives of Black and brown communities every day. However, it is the naming of the

insidious, intelligent beast, particularly its evolution in the first half of the 20th century

and extension into to the deepest crevices of contemporary policy, which provides a

necessary expansion to its understanding.

In the third edition of *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future

Reparations,* Feagin (2014) reflects on United States history, the contributions of

African-American scholars, and historical sociologists to argue additional features of the

fundamental racism in the United States. This antiracist argument details the economic,

social, cultural, and political impact of racism and defines institutional racism as:

> "recurring and unequal relationships between groups and individuals. At
> the macro-level, large-scale institutions – with their white-controlled
> normative structures- routinely perpetuate racial subordination and
> inequalities. These institutions are created and recreated by routine actions

at the everyday micro-level by particular individuals…Life under a system of racism involves an ongoing struggle between racially defined human communities – one seeking to preserve its unjustly derived status and privileges and the other seeking to resist or overthrow its continuing oppression" (p. 13).

Feagin argues that, while all communities of color experience racism, it is the Black-white racial paradigm that shapes racial realities in the United States. This paradigm continues to persist in the U.S. because it is reinforced by the white racial frame, an ideology that is both pro-white and anti-Black/other. Understanding racism within the U.S. as enduring, persistent, and sinister will situate and define this study's definition. This definition helps to shape the killing of Trayvon as an act of institutional racism for three reasons: 1) Zimmerman's perception that Trayvon was a criminal is a reflection of the white-controlled perpetuation of Black communities as dangerous and inferior; 2) despite Zimmerman being the aggressor who shot and killed an unarmed, innocent teenager, the white-controlled investigation by Sanford police department determined Zimmerman's irrational fear to be justified; and 3) after national protests pushed an investigation and arrest, a majority-white jury returned a not guilty verdict, reinforcing racial subordination and white-violence against Black communities. With this approach to the manifestation of racism in contemporary United States, literature must seek to continuously uncover both its complexities as well as impact on communities of color. My autoethnographic study will contribute to this need through a focus on navigating the inevitable, traumatic impact that can follow secondary experiences with institutional racism.

Considering both my identities of Black and youth (when this journey begins, I am 19 years old), it is necessary to review literature that has given particular attention to Black youth as a population. For my purposes, Black youth are defined as individuals between the ages of 12 and 26 that identify as African American or Black (they will be used interchangeably). This community of young people is a diverse and multifaceted population. In the year 2015, Black youth are authoring an unprecedented, comprehensive police reform policy proposal (Craven & Reilley, 2015) as well as spurring a national conversation on their experienced consequences of living in a systemically racist society. These consequences include higher risks for experiencing violence, residing long-term in the nation's lowest-income neighborhoods, increased risks of substance abuse, and greater attendance of low-performing schools (Anderson 1990, 1999; "Action Partnership on Interventions for Black Children Exposed to Violence and Victimization," 2012; Wodtke, Harding, & Elwert, 2011; Wilson, 1987).

Often, when Black youth are the subjects of research, authors have been prone to pay particular attention to *deviance* without appropriately centering the effects of navigating racism as a persistent lived reality. Dance (2002) describes the way in which scholarly discussions capture Black life: "… in clarifying the structural factors that lie beyond the control of individual Black Americans…they unwittingly suggest that Blacks are controlled by these forces, when they mean to convey that Blacks are constrained, sometimes severely, by structural forces" (p. 27). This translates to the incredibly diverse community of Black youth frequently labeled within research as culturally deprived, at

risk, and underprivileged (Martinez & Rury, 2012; Baldridge, 2014). Baldridge (2014)

identifies this narrative as deficit rhetoric and argues that it suggests "Black youth…are

broken and in need of saving" (p. 441). Ginwright (2010) notes that such a deficit

narrative significantly impacts both academic and practitioner *empirical* observations as

well as subsequent *theoretical* explanations.

Ginwright and Cammarota (2002) offer a theory to resolve this academic error.

Social justice youth development, or SJYD, enhances previous approaches to youth

development (Pittman, 1991) by extending beyond deficit- or asset-approaches and

paying attention to "the complex social, economic, and political forces that bear on the

lives" of vulnerable youth, particularly Black youth (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002, p.

82). With this focus, SJYD reconciles "the assault on youth of color [that] treats

individuals, families, and their communities as the causes of their own problems" by

instead taking into consideration the societal forces that impact an individual's

experience (p. 83). In doing so, the "relationship between critical consciousness and

social action" is emphasized as having a reciprocal relationship (p. 87). Aligning the

principles of critical consciousness with that of Freire's (1993) *conscientizaçao,* the

authors conceptualize it as "an awareness" of the "institutional, historical, and systemic

forces" which hinder or encourage "life opportunities for particular groups" (Ginwright

& Cammarota, 2002, p. 87). In developing this consciousness, people must directly

confront the systems shaping their realities to truly know their ability to control their

fate. This confrontation is realized though social activism, an intentional act to create a

change in one's social reality, which is impacted by the three required stages of critical

consciousness, *self-, social*, and *global* awareness. In a reciprocal, interdependent relationship, social activism responds to an individual's level of awareness as well as facilitates an increased level of awareness through its confrontations with power systems.

   Self-awareness introduces the individual to critical consciousness through "self-evaluation and self-exploration," discovering ways in which "identity is closely tied to privilege or oppression through the use and/or misuse of power" (pp. 80-89). In this stage, individual social activism critiques harmful stereotypes while uplifting positive identity development. Referencing my narrative shared in the Background section, when Trayvon Martin was killed, my level of awareness was firmly established within self as I recognized that having a biracial identity was not protection against individual experiences with racism. This awareness facilitated pride in my racial identity and confrontations with stereotypes, which was best represented by cutting off my chemically straightened hair and committing to the Black Awareness Committee (BAC). In its second stage, critical consciousness expands upon self-awareness to *social* awareness. Here, youth are encouraged to critically think beyond individual experiences and analyze ways in which systemic and group power impact community-level inequality (p. 89). As a result, social activism is utilized as a tool to emphasize community problem solving by questioning the "roots of social inequality" (p. 89). Finally, g*lobal* awareness expands one's critical consciousness to connect the experiences of "oppressed people throughout the world," facilitating an outlook of "possibilities and change" (p. 90-91). As one progresses through each stage, critical

17

thought is increasingly needed to expand beyond micro levels of interaction in a search

for global connections of struggle. In turn, youth are increasingly encouraged and

motivated to confront these systemic challenges and improve environmental conditions.

See Table 1 for further examples given by Ginwright and Cammarota (2002, p. 94) of

social action and outcomes.

Advocating for the importance of exploring issues that face Black youth, their

relationship to institutionalized realities, and the ways in which youth navigate their

experiences, Ginwright (2010) posits that failing to do so produces a "narrow focus on

problems that obscures the complex ways in which Black youth respond to, challenge,

and change conditions in their schools and communities" (p. 14). The academic focus on

problematic behaviors of and challenges faced by Black youth, without considering

environmental realities or the unique ways Black youth navigate these experiences,

overlooks opportunities to explore methods of resilience and resistance by the

Awareness Level: Self
Forms of Action: critique of stereotypes; active engagement in identity development **Community/Social Outcomes**: Political awareness and actively engaged citizens; general emotional, spiritual, psychological wellness **Youth Social Justice Outcomes**: Pride of ethnic physical features; positive self-regard, racial, and ethnic esteem. Empowerment and positive orientation toward life circumstances and events.
Awareness level: Social
Forms of Action: Community organizing; political educations; youth exercising power in community institutions. **Community/Social Outcomes**: Equitable institutional practices; innovative solutions to community and social problems. **Youth Social Justice Outcomes**: Social problematizing, critical thinking, asking and answering questions related to their social environment. Capacity to change personal, community, and social conditions. Feeling of being a part of something meaningful and productive.
Awareness Level: Global
Forms of Action: Connection to others' struggles. **Community/Social Outcomes**: Safe and healthy community; social well-being. **Youth Social Justice Outcomes**: Sense of life purpose, empathy with the suffering of others, optimism about social change.

Table 1. Social Justice Youth Development Awareness Levels (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002, p. 94)

population. To counter this narrative, Ginwright suggests researchers and practitioners examine "assets in neighborhoods and families and how institutions support youth as they confront daily problems" (p. 15). In doing so, one can better understand how "youth behaviors, values, and beliefs are often a rational response to irrational, and often toxic, social, economic, and political conditions" and better identify intervening strategies, such as encouraging involvement in social activism (Ginwright, 2010, p. 16). This is noteworthy for both scholars and practitioners to recognize as a continued disregard of these lived realities seemingly supports the existing institutional inequities experienced by this population, particularly considering the dramatic impact that academic exploration of issues has on programs targeted towards and made available to this community (Baldridge, 2014). Recognition beyond problematic behaviors can be attained through the centering of narratives and experiences, from youth participatory action research (Sabo Flores, 2007) to authentic engagement in various levels of society (Hart, 1992; Cohen, 2010).

Centering the narratives and experiences of Black youth involved in antiracism (social) activism deepens scholarly understanding of the costs that accompany living with racism, particularly the nuanced consequences to mental and physical health, as well as the benefits to confronting systemic inequalities. In particular, through a centering of these narratives, to explore the ways in which one may become traumatized by the relentless presence of racism places value over the unilateral focus on the consequences of racism that ignores its relationship with institutional racism and inequality. In order to reconcile this complex understanding, research must begin with eliminating deficit language as well as creating academic spaces that strive to capture the intricacies of Black youth. To contribute to this gap in academic literature, this study will illustrate the way in which social activism impacts the navigation of and response to institutional racism through a centering of my autoethnographic narrative.

RACISM AS TRAUMA

For generations, scholars have identified the traumatic experiences resulting from racism, particularly scholars of color (Clark, 1945; Clark, K. & Clark, M., 1940; Du Bois, 1903). Although this literature has astutely described symptoms or costs of racialized trauma, the explicit language of racialized trauma is not used in academic literature until much later. It is this literature which explicitly utilizes the language of *trauma* which I chose to explore for this review. Supporting the (largely, political science and sociological) literature on institutional racism previously highlighted, mental health researchers also identify racism as having evolved within the U.S. so that covert racism is replacing the overt racism of the past (Harral, 2000; Jones, 1997; Spanierman

& Poteat, 2005). Covert racism manifests itself as "subtle, ambiguous, and complex racist incidents that operate at institutional and cultural levels" (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005a, p. 575). Dialogue concerning covertly racist occurrences can be challenging to comprehend for perpetrators, as well as some victims, as they are difficult to discuss in explicit language because we are often "born into these forms and, hence, without tools of critical thinking, may not question or even recognize them" (p. 575). Nevertheless, because of its implicitness, covert racism experiences are never far from the consciousness of a person of color "and require expenditures of cognitive energy, hypervigilance, and coping" that often impacts an individual's mental and physical health (p. 575).

As academic literacy on institutional racism continues to increase and uncover the nuances of covert racism, scholars also seek to deconstruct its mental impact on people of color. Generally, researchers have documented physiological effects of racism and presented the experiences as stressors (Clark et. al, 1999; Harrell, 2000; Kwate & Goodman, 2015). This scholarly conceptualization of various experiences with racism as potential stressors impacted the governmental narrative and subsequent policy around racial health disparities (Smedley, Stith, & Nelson, 2003; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). However, Carter (2007) describes academic understanding of racism's impact as "elusive" due to the "failure to clearly understand the emotional, psychological, and…physical effects" (p. 11-13). While recognizing the stressors associated with racism was necessary to furthering the broader discussion on its costs, there was a critical component missing that significantly limited this dialogue: the

identification of racism as trauma. For the purpose of this study, trauma is defined as "stress [that] violates one's existing way of making sense of self and the world and creates intense fear and destabilization" (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005, p. 485).

In 1990, a theoretical foundation was developed that would allow future scholars to shift boundaries preventing a comprehensive discussion on racism's impact within academe. Wyatt (1990) explored the difficult relationship between childhood abuse survivors, their race/ethnicity, and their traumatic experiences. In doing so, she became one of the first psychologists to discover parallels between the psychological impact of racism and childhood trauma. Exposing similarities in responses of shock, betrayal, powerlessness, and the stigmatization as "not good enough", Wyatt (1990) introduced theoretically the way in which experiences with racism can result in symptoms of trauma.

Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005) utilized a similar framework to parallel racist experiences with both rape and domestic violence. Among the results, they found that some survivors of rape may respond to their trauma with "self-defense, either at the time of the…event or later by pressing charges or becoming active in antiracism or antirape work." (p. 489). They further illustrated the tools of control utilized by perpetrators of domestic violence and racist incidents, economic dependence and isolation. Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005; 2005a; 2006) shifted the scholarly dialogue towards a comprehensive narrative. The authors challenged future researchers to develop treatment models in order to thoroughly address the unique experiences of individuals suffering from racialized trauma so as to "effectively serve" these communities. Carter (2007)

23

builds upon this theory through an illustration of the ways in which race-based trauma can grow over a lifetime: "slight cuts and scratches in time grew into gaping wounds" (p. 91). Carter (2007) joins Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005) in their challenge to future research. In addition, Carter suggests the inclusion of racialized trauma in the curriculums of "mental health and counseling psychology training programs" to supplement the existing theoretical impact of defining racism as a stressor (p. 93).

Although responses will vary among individuals experiencing racism, the frameworks for the various possibilities (stressor, trauma, etc.) must be explored theoretically and empirically to further the understanding of racism so individuals and institutions can appropriately respond and intervene. Therefore, as a result of the limited literature documenting racialized trauma, scholarly research, practice, and policy must expand their focus for racism's psychological impact from micro experiences to include (primary or secondary) confrontations with racism on the institutional and cultural levels. In order to do so, the authentic narratives of individuals within these communities must be centered. In particular, my journey will reflect on a small number of overtly racist incidents as well as my own traumatic confrontations with institutional racism.

SOCIAL ACTIVISM AS SERIOUS LEISURE

In its initial development, serious leisure was conceptualized for individuals who are in search of "ways to express their abilities, fulfill their potential, and identify themselves as unique human beings" outside of work-related spaces (Stebbins, 1982). This is situated as an alternative to casual leisure, exemplified as eating or taking naps. Three distinct categories, amateurism, hobbyist pursuits, and career volunteering, are

explored through casual leisure or work, as opposing possibilities, with serious leisure situated between the two. Although the language of its definition would come later, beginning preliminary characteristics included elements of work features, such as the potential for payment, as well as the leisurely freedom to abandon the pursuit in entirety (Stebbins, 1982). However, those seriously pursuing leisure are "usually more obliged" to remain engaged than the average participant as it makes "life worth living" (p. 255; 268). This theory evolved in the 1990s when Stebbins (1996) defined serious leisure as "the systematic pursuit of an amateur, a hobbyist, or a volunteer activity" that is "substantial and interesting" enough to oblige participants to pursue the "acquisition and expression of a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience" (p. 215). It is this definition of the serious leisure perspective, along with casual and non-leisure (work), which guides critical analysis of serious leisurely pursuits.

Additionally, scholars began exploring and challenging the position of leisure pursuits as dichotomous, either casual or serious. Joining features of recreation specialization (Bryan 1977, 1979, & 2000) and serious leisure, Scott (2012) shifts away from the binary compartmentalization towards a serious-to-casual continuum in which serious leisure can be quantified. An idea that was gradually developing on the side of serious leisure with the addition of neophyte, moderate devotee, and core devotee as stages within serious pursuit (Stebbins, 2012), Scott (2012) expands upon its ambiguity through the inclusion of four features of recreation rationalization: diversity among participants, ability to quantify total participants, various levels of pursuit, and the existence of "practical applications of understanding that participants vary along a

specialization continuum (p. 371). Instead of the former dichotomy, this approach to serious leisure sees the value in casual leisure as an important, initial step towards serious pursuit. In a response, Stebbins (2012) supports this expansion into a continuum theory while clarifying features of serious leisure that, in particular, emphasize the application of the continuum. While some casual leisure activities do not allow for serious pursuit, such as relaxation, there are activities that require basic levels of skill/knowledge to begin (i.e. crocheting, swimming, etc.). Additionally, other activities may not require such knowledge, allowing for dabblers in the activity to become neophytes and begin their serious pursuit.

As I described previously, when I began graduate school in August 2014, I was determined to center my research around trauma experienced by Black youth as a result of institutional racism. However, when I was accepted to a youth development program situated within the recreation, parks, and tourism sciences department (RPTS), I struggled to understand what space my research would occupy within a leisure context. Soon in my first semester of school, I was introduced to serious leisure as a theoretical concept which sparked a connection to its definition with my involvement in social activism. It was here that I began the theorizing of my experiences through a leisure lens, seeking to explore it further within my research. After a preliminary scan of literature revealed a limited body of work connecting these two topics, I presented a crude connection to my committee during my thesis proposal. In support of my theorization, Dr. Scott facilitated my introduction to Dr. Stebbins so I could better conceptualize and

define social activism as serious leisure[3]. In our conversation, Stebbins suggested I explore social activism through its form of volunteerism. According to Stebbins and Elkington (2014), volunteerism is defined with serious leisure as "un-coerced, intentionally productive, altruistic activity engaged in during free time" through which participation "provides a service or benefit to one or more individuals" (p. 17). In my initial stage of analysis, before I felt a sense of control over my research, I embraced his suggestion as analysis and began to apply the volunteer-perspective to serious leisure to my research. Yet, as I began feeling empowered to own my research, meaning I trusted my analysis as sound in the face of academic scrutiny, I did not feel volunteerism accurately captured the way in which social activism acts as serious leisure but recognized the features which logically connect social activism as another label for volunteerism. I felt it necessary to continue in my search of the connection to social activism and serious leisure and, while volunteerism is described in detail as part of the serious leisure perspective, the specific involvement with social activism is not explicitly discussed as a serious pursuit.

However, in a recent book, Lamond and Spracklen (2015) author a theoretical conception of social activism as serious leisure through the grounding of protests as events. In doing so, the authors challenge the depoliticizing within events management of a variety of events intended as protests. Lamond and Spracklen (2015) position several international acts of protest within leisure studies by theorizing "activism as a

---

[3] This conversation was a refreshing introduction to the academic dialogue required to sharpen scholarly arguments and had a significant impact of my understanding of ways to deepen my level of analysis. Thank you Dr. Scott for making the conversation possible and thank you Dr. Stebbins for engaging me through the initial steps of my analysis.

form of leisure activity and leisure lifestyle, and protests (events) are leisure spaces (p. 4). Despite the increased commodification and commercialization of leisure, its importance as a pursued activity is unwavering. Maintaining the small space provided by leisure in which "humans can work to resist the colonization of their Habermasian lifeworld," activism serves as a mode of leisure resistance that counters hegemonic struggles (p. 4). It was through my review of this literature that I began to analyze social activism outside of its characterization of volunteerism and, instead, conceptualize under the category of science in *amateurism.* In this category, there are "three kinds of participants: observers, armchair participants and applied scientists" (Stebbins, 1980, as cited in Stebbins & Elkington, 2014, p. 62). Observers represent amateurs of this serious pursuit "directly experience their objects of interest through scientific inquiry," armchair participants center their learning pursuit largely through reading and applied scientists "express their knowledge of a branch of science in some practical way" (p. 62). In particular, my experience with social activism (while further developed through the analyses in Chapters 4 & 5) is explored as an evolution through the three subtypes: apprentices, journeymen, or masters (p. 63). Consider social activism, particularly the antiracist activism of Black youth, to be a specialty within amateurism whose implications of my evolving through apprenticeship, journeymen, and mastery are explored through my autoethnography.

To my knowledge, Lamond and Spracklen's (2015) theorizing of activism as serious leisure is the only contribution to leisure studies with this particular topic. Nevertheless, with a grounded approach of protests as events available to academic

inquiry, there is a significant opening for further research. In particular, the authors frame their theorizing alongside international examples of protest that often addressed economics and patriarchy with little space given to race as a subject matter. Considering both that, within the U.S., race is constructed along a Black-white paradigm and protests are leisure spaces, social activism performed by Black youth is a topic in desperate need of further analysis by leisure studies. This thesis makes such a contribution to the study of serious pursuit as I analyze personal experiences with antiracism activism among Black youth as serious leisure. This pursuit existed along a continuum in which a particular database of knowledge, language, and experience was needed to elevate in skill.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are two frameworks guiding the positioning of the traumatic impact of racism on Black youth for this particular study, race-incident based trauma (RIBT) and the radical healing model (RHM). Together, RIBT and RHM approach experiences with systemic inequality (particularly by Black youth), whether primary or secondary, as traumatic and allow for a profound exploration of social activism as healing when it confronts such inequality.

Race-Incident Based Trauma

Although there is recent documentation of trauma as a consequence of overtly racist experiences (Allen, 1996; Daniel, 2000; Sanchez-Hucles, 1998; Woodard, 2001), there are limited models addressing trauma suffered as a consequence of systemic racism. As described in its literature review, in 2005, Bryant-Davis and Ocampo

29

theorized race-incident based trauma (RIBT) which addresses experiences uniquely

impacting people of color. Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005) define racism as

"cognitive/affective assaults on one's ethnic self-identification," elaborating it as

"sudden or systematic…perpetrated by an individual (individual racism) or institution

(institutional racism) or by cultural hegemony (cultural racism)" (p. 480). More

specifically, while some individuals maintain persistent attitudes of racism towards

people of color, it is cultural and institutional racism that permeate the fabric of Black

communities throughout the U.S. and can cause significant levels of trauma (Bryant-

Davis & Ocampo, 2005). Defining racism as both attitudinal and institutional, overt and

covert, allows for a more thorough analysis of its traumatic impact on communities of

color as it disregards previous theoretical compartmentalization and recognizes that

people of color are definitively impacted by and must navigate racism in many forms.

This deconstruction of racism is critical to understanding it as a psychologically

complex, insidious reality for people of color, particularly Black youth.

RIBT groups the impact of racist incidents on an individual's mental health into

three categories: (1) direct consequences of institutional racism (i.e. unequal access to

resources), (2) primary or secondary experiences with racism that hinder one's mental

health status due to physiological and psychological reactions, and (3) negatively

impacting one's well-being due to the internalization of stereotypes (Bryant-Davis &

Ocampo, 2005). In particular, this study will contextualize RIBT's second category

through an exploration of my lived experiences with and responses to racialized trauma

as a result of George Zimmerman's acquittal. Comparing features of racialized

experiences with rape, the authors discovered parallels in motivation, effects, survivor

responses, secondary trauma, consequences for perpetrators, and societal responses.

Perpetrators of racist incidents place blame on their victims while maintaining power

and privilege. Such an experience can cause similar physical and physiological

responses as rape victims, including symptoms of PTSD, sleeplessness, nausea,

headaches, muscle ache and more. Self-defense can become critical to survivors of

trauma because the act of empowerment reclaims both their power and recovery process.

Secondary trauma can also occur with rape and racist incidents for those who are not

primary targets of the assault but navigate the symptoms, often occurring with women

and people of color. It is secondary trauma that will be central to my narrative.

Navigating its healing serves a critical role in both the development of this study and

potential for future research.

Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005) identify five barriers to the acceptance of

RIBT in psychological practice; (1) the DSM-IV-TR's definition of trauma as exclusive

to physical acts, (2) the moral disengagement of trauma's existence and impact, (3) the

assumption that an inclusive definition of trauma will dilute the experiences of victims,

(4) a complicated response to trauma-compensation benefits, and (5) the mis-

categorizing of a victim's response as problematic. The authors challenge scholars to

perform future qualitative and quantitative research to implore RIBT's recognition.

While the field of psychology navigates the acceptance of RIBT, I seek to describe race-

based trauma by performing "qualitative research to determine the complexity of racist

incidents" (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005, p. 495-6). In doing so, RIBT will frame the

deconstruction of self-defense responses, or involvement in antiracist activism, by

defining George Zimmerman's acquittal as the initial, traumatic experience.

Radical Healing Model

To conceptualize a dimension of the relationship between my subsequent social

activism and racialized trauma, I turn towards youth development literature. It is through

SJYD model's framework that Ginwright (2010) develops the radical healing model

(RHM) addressing the racialized experiences with trauma, particularly that of RIBT's

first category defining trauma as a result of direct consequences from systemic

inequality. The RHM, designed while working with Black youth in urban settings,

"builds the capacity of young people to act upon their environment in ways that

contribute to well-being for the common good" through a meaningful encouragement of

social activism (Ginwright, 2010, p. 85). In 2015, Ginwright revised the RHM through

the lens of the healing justice framework, which addresses ways in which activists and

teachers can work with Black youth to facilitate radical healing: "healing justice is the

broader framework; radical healing is the specific process" (Ginwright, 2010, p. 8).

Prior to exploring the radical healing model, *healing* must be defined. Within the

healing justice framework, healing is understood to be a political act in direct opposition

to a distinct suffering accompanying oppression. It requires conceptualizing "oppression

as a form of social and collective trauma" and frames well-being as a direct result of

social justice (Ginwright, 2015, p. 9). According to Ginwright, there are "subtle"

differences between healing justice and the more widely recognized social emotional

learning. Rather than an individual act or characteristic, healing is political in that it is

defined by "the capacity of communities to respond to injustice," highlighting both agency and collective engagement (p. 8). In particular, collective engagement is critical in understanding the dependence of this theory upon a healthy, collective identity that facilitates a meaningful sense of cultural identity and belonging, feelings that are not addressed in social emotional research. Additionally, social emotional research does not identify the development of a critical consciousness that enables confrontations with "the social conditions that threaten social emotional health in the first place" (p. 8). Finally, healing differs from social emotional learning in that its collective suffering is understood as a "result of political priorities and decisions" (p. 8). Approaching healing through a healing justice framework must give attention to both an individual's psychological state as well as the policies that cause the mental/psychological disruption.

There are five elements necessary for the radical healing process, collectively identified as CARMA: culture, agency, relationships, meaning, and achievement. For Black youth, a healthy *cultural* identity is connected to a racial identity that is "historically grounded and contemporarily relevant" (Ginwright, 2015, p. 25). It is celebratory in that it honors the reality of being part of a global history of struggle and triumph. *Agency* encourages youth to "explore their personal power to transform problems into possibilities" through a recognition of their individual and collective ability to act (particularly, through social activism) (p. 25). Healthy, caring *relationships* prepare youth to personally situate themselves within a community by facilitating a meaningful ability to "create, sustain, and grow" connections with others (p. 25). A sense of *meaning* or belonging becomes critical in the empowerment of Black youth to

find their purpose in a collective fight against injustice by building an awareness of the "profound political explanations" of systemic racism/inequality for personal struggles (p. 26). Finally, *achievement* indicates a recognition of life's possibilities through explicit goals. In this element, traumatized Black youth understand their oppressive realities but, most critically, are not defined by it as they are encouraged to work towards "personal and collective advancement" (p. 26). According to Ginwright, when activists, teachers, and other caring adults engage Black youth using CARMA, it guides a meaningful confrontation with political roots of their problems through social activism, facilitating individual and collective healing.

Summary

In his initial theorizing of the RHM, Ginwright (2010) identifies the consequences of systemic inequality as a direct result of a historically embedded, enduring racism within the U.S. Furthermore, the youth who informed its development lived at the intersections of racial and economic inequality that created "toxic" environments of violence, crime, and limited economic opportunity, leading youth to have feelings of "depression, despair, hopelessness, fear, anger, and pain" (Ginwright, 2010, p. 16). As I apply the model alongside RIBT to analyze personal experiences with racialized trauma, I want to tread carefully by situating my own economic privilege which shielded me from much of the traumatic experiences youth in Ginwright's study were forced to navigate. To put it simply, it is because of such privilege that my initial, racialized trauma informing this study was a *secondary* experience during my time as an

undergraduate student rather than directly experiencing consequences of systemic inequality (i.e. socially toxic communities).

My economic privilege also significantly influenced my path to critical consciousness by facilitating access to spaces in which I was communally supported to pursue challenge injustice through a serious pursuit of social activism. For example, while social activism does not require such privilege for meaningful participation, I was able to make a financial commitment to traveling across the nation which allowed me to occupy spaces which further developed both my skills and community of activists who I could learn from. In turn, this access to various communities of Black youth with highly developed social activism skills mediated a meaningful development of radical healing model features after experiencing racialized trauma, guiding a rerouting back to a developing critical consciousness and progression to the final level of global awareness. It is through recognition of these benefits afforded as a result of economic privilege that I approach the analysis of my experiences with social activism as well as the implications for radical healing. Additionally, it is my identity with the collective struggle that racism inflicts upon Black communities in the U.S. that situates the trauma experienced as a result of institutional racism. For a visual representation of the conceptual relationship between reviewed topics and theoretical frameworks, see Figure 1.
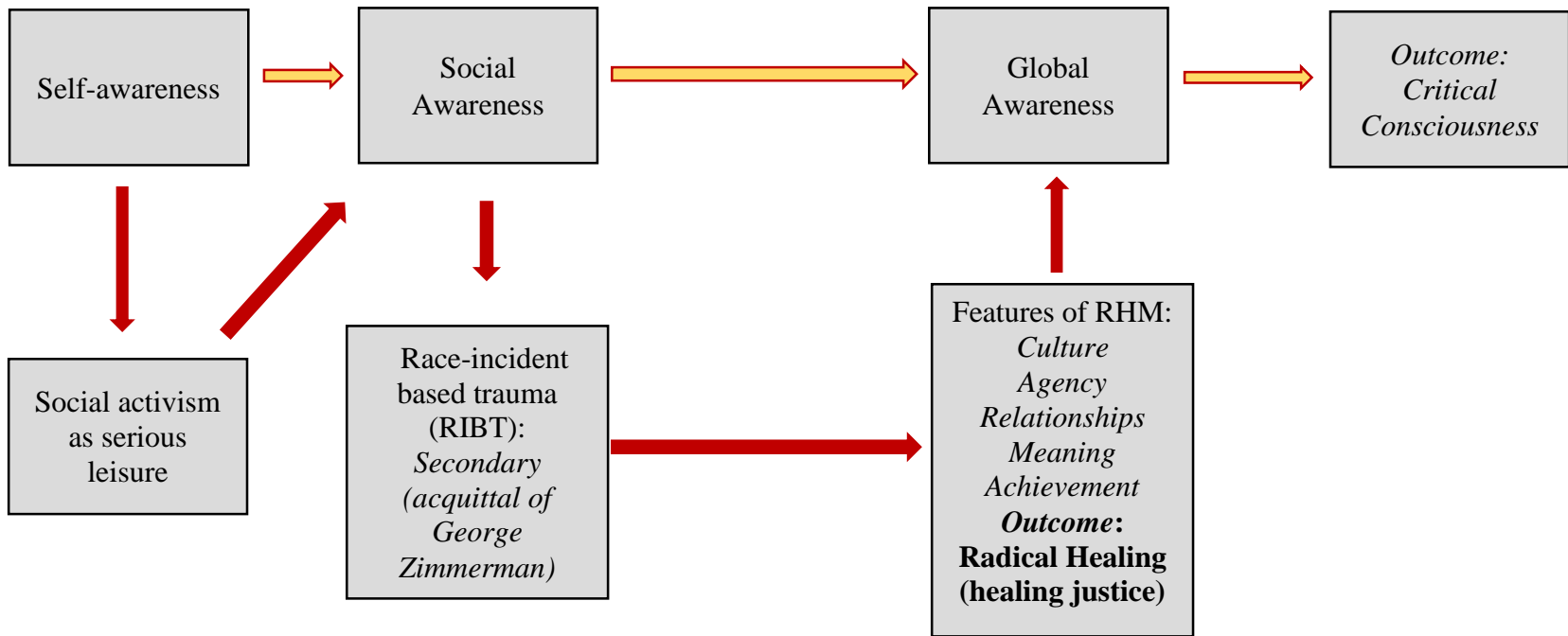
Figure 1. My Navigation of Racialized Trauma

CONCLUSION

      This chapter explored existing literature of topics which fundamentally shape my research and revealed areas of research whose filling can be acquired with my autoethnography study as a contribution. Specifically, my review of *institutional racism* revealed the schism between literature used to explain and theorize institutional racism in spaces of Black youth activism as well as formal academic spaces. In a combined effort, my review sought to examine the evolution of academic literature and its definition of institutional racism and arrived at a present conceptualization using the language provided by Feagin (2014) which is founded upon the work of Black authors. This provided a framework which situates Zimmerman's killing of Trayvon and subsequent not guilty verdict as an example of institutional racism. Then, I explored the literature on Black youth. Rather than examining a definition, this review revealed the ways in which research of Black youth has been dominated through deficit-analysis which ignores the consequences of navigating institutionalized oppression. Note that, in the context of my study, institutionalized oppression is in context of my definition of institutional racism and the total experience which impacts every aspect of the lived reality for Black youth. My review also uncovered literature which recognized the harm of overlooking such a dramatic aspect of Black experiences, leading to the development of SJYD as a framework which guides an approach to Black youth to allow for thorough research analyses. Next, my review examined the way in which racism as a traumatic experience has been described in research. Discovering limited, yet critical, research, this topic revealed ways in which symptoms of experiencing racism aligns with other

accepted forms of trauma, such as rape or domestic violence. In the fourth topic, social activism as was situated with the context of serious leisure which facilitates the exploration of my experiences in Chapters 4 and 5. Finally, the theories of RIBT and RHM were joined to provide a foundation for an analysis of my secondary experiences with institutional racism as traumatic and ways in which healing became possible through the five features of RHM.

In the following chapter, I provide an in-depth discussion of autoethnography as a methodology as well as a description of my research design, data collection, and ethical considerations. While chapter 1 and 2 describe *what* will be explored in my autoethnography, I spend time in chapter 3 describing *why* and *how* my study will unfold. Combined with the literature reviewed in the present chapter, describing my methodology will provide a detailed, strategical approach to my narrative and analysis in Chapters 4 and 5.

CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

"You write in order to change the world, knowing perfectly well that you probably can't, but also knowing that literature is indispensable to the world…the world changes according to the way people see it, and if you alter, even but a millimeter of the way people look at reality, then you can change it" (J. Baldwin, personal communication, September 23, 1979).

Three weeks before I began graduate school, Darren Wilson, a white police officer, killed Michael Brown, a Black teenager, in Ferguson, MO with six gunshots. Although, by this time, I had an evolved critical analysis which enabled me to understand the institutional violence Black communities must survive every day, my strategic organizing against institutional racism was still grounded in the killing of Trayvon. To be more specific, while I effectively understood the specific way in which police (as an institution) perpetrated racialized violence through their protection of aggressors, Trayvon remained the most public representation to the fight against institutional racism for me. However, as residents pulled out their cell phones to record Michael's body lying in the street for hours and expressed their devastation at what many of them witnessed, the national conversation of institutional violence shifted to ways in which police act as the *aggressors* of institutional racism. This additional dimension of an included video through cell phone recordings would dramatically shift the national conversation as Black communities circulated the footage across the nation as visual proof of institutional violence. In this shift, the activists who I'd learned from

responded with politically-focused strategizing which demanded an indictment of the officer for murder.

For me, while Michael's killing felt frighteningly similar to Trayvon's, I was operating out of a deeper, more critical analysis when Darren Wilson killed him. Essentially, I felt more prepared to confront this violence alongside the community of activists I'd developed in the years since Zimmerman killed Trayvon. However, while I awaited further instruction from activists within my community while they reached out to activists in Ferguson on ways to collectively strategize against the protection of Wilson by Ferguson police, I received news that my father was in the hospital after collapsing at the gym. At this time, I had to disengage with the events in Ferguson to handle my personal crisis. One week after beginning graduate school, on September 2, 2014, my father died, following his young brother who'd passed six months earlier. Within days, my family and I traveled to his home state of Alabama to bury him in the same graveyard as his younger brother and father. When I returned to Texas, I attempted to reengage with the social activism occurring in Ferguson but was too far behind in graduate school and had to prioritize catching up over traveling or organizing.

As I watched the protests from afar, I began to perceive my experience in graduate school as distinct from being a social activist because I felt that a choice had to be made between the two. This belief was exasperated when, before the end of my first semester, a grand jury decided against indicting Darren Wilson for the murder of Michael Brown. Again, those I'd formed a community with traveled to Ferguson in support of the community who was suffering this loss. For a second time, I was forced to

remain in my academic space which, by this time, I'd grown increasingly frustrated with for its limited discussion of a Black teenager's killing or critique of institutional racism. In this stage, I was unsure of how to reconcile graduate school with my desire for social justice in the face of institutional racism. Additionally, when I formed a community with other students of color, I began to understand the ways in which our navigation of our academic spaces reinforced our recognition that racism is grounded in every institution.

It is in this context that I chose autoethnography as a method for which to perform my thesis research. When I entered graduate school, I knew I would research the traumatic impact of racism on Back youth involved in antiracist social activism. Although I was unsure of which method I would choose, it was as a result of my experiences following the acquittal of George Zimmerman that I remained steadfast in my topic choice. However, I wanted to select a method which would best illuminate stories of Black youth confronting institutional racism. During preliminary reviews of various academic topics to better situate my research interests within existing literature, I discovered research gaps critical to the framing of theoretical and empirical approaches to Black youth and must be filled. In doing so, I wanted to center the lived experiences of Black youth and sought out models, theories, and research which guided that practice. This resulted in my discovery of SJYD and its three levels of awareness as well as the RHM and RIBT. As I became increasingly confident in the necessity of these models to shape my research, I decided to combine these frameworks to study youth activists to confront the frustration I was feeling in academia. However, as I tried to force myself into a preconception of what I believed academic work to be, I discovered a significant

gap in literature in which the voices of Black youth telling our own stories was elevated. In particular, as I discovered SJYD, RHM and RIBT, I became interested in the possibility of exploring these theories from my perspective through an autoethnography rather than forcing myself into the preconception of neutrality which I'd come to believe about academic work. In particular, I recognized that to contribute literature which centers racism as trauma to academia, I must begin with the basic level of understanding of how *I* was impacted by my trauma.

BACKGROUND OF AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

The use of a single case study should be considered as valuable of a scientific inquiry as other often-chosen methodologies. Yet, doing so presents a challenge to an ongoing qualitative-quantitative dichotomy in which the quantitative paradigm is dominant. Rejecting an either/or narrative, McCormick (1996) recognizes the real challenge of a case study is in the limited ability "of any one consumer of research to judge the merit" of a scientific inquiry without evaluation guidelines (p. 365). To reconcile this challenge, McCormick outlines four lessons to be learned from a single case study. These include its ability to ground "social process and structures in natural settings" allowing for the development of an empirical foundation for specific concepts (p. 367). Additionally, the single case study allows for a "holistic presentation," positioning ways in which "complex ties [social networks] may facilitate or hinder social action" while also developing a sense of time and history that examines an evolutionary change (p. 367). Finally, the single case study illuminates the "confirming" or "disconfirming" of theory through an examination of its application to lived experiences

(p. 367). While the responsibility to present research and methods is placed upon the author, McCormick (1996) also explains the responsibility of the audience who align with an "ethic of…increasing knowledge" is to allow the author to choose the rules of their own "game," or research design: "[o]nly with a knowledge of the rules of the game one can make an intelligent evaluation of how well the game was played" (p. 368).

One type of single case study is that of an autoethnography. In its early stage, autoethnography was utilized as an anthropologic research method as scholars were expanding research to include personal accounts (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Currently, as a result of development over time, autoethnography is interdisciplinary and operates with the acknowledgement and accommodation of "subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research rather than" the assumption that it is nonexistent in one's work (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 274). For the purpose of this study, an autoethnography is formally defined as "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experiences (ethno)" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 273). Autoethnographies can have various presentations that allow for diverse data collection. These can include interactive interviews, personal narratives, reflexive ethnographies and more (Ellis et al., 2011). The common thread is that each of these methods allow the reader to connect personal experience to the subject matter, centering the humanity of the research to increase its impact. In doing so, autoethnography "resists…the facade of objective research that decontextualizes subjects" in search of a universal theory (Spry, 2001, p.

710). Spry identifies this as transforming the "authorial 'I' to an existential 'we'" (p. 711).

Through this process, it is necessary that the reader participate in this reciprocal relationship by suspending the normative understanding of academic customs as irrefutable truth. This is most critical to determining *reliability, generalizability,* and *validity*. In order to best receive the story presented through autoethnography, one must alter their meanings of these terms in an effort to value narrative truth; centering the author's *credibility* for reliability, *authenticity* for validity, and author's *ability to illuminate* an unfamiliar, cultural experience for generalizability (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). For the author, autoethnography often serves as a transformative methodology because it "changes time, requires vulnerability, fosters empathy, embodies creativity and innovation, eliminates boundaries, honors subjectivity, and provides therapeutic benefits" (Custer, 2014, p. 1).

With this understanding of the methodological background, recall the four rules of a single case study and consider them in context of my autoethnography. Autoethnography is significantly appropriate to ground social processes as the method examines personal experiences in context of a theoretical approach. In particular, while the models which ground my research (RIBT and RHM) have limited representation in research, my autoethnography highlights both its process in real time as well as the implications of analysis for future research.

Black Feminist Autoethnography

   Feminists in academia have sought to illuminate the importance of elevating the experiences of women of color as well as "attending to the politics that underlie these voices" (Calafell & Moreman, 2009). Despite this, women of color generally continued to face barriers, often due to positionality politics. However, the emergence of autoethnography as an academic method offers opportunities for women of color to create the space for their underrepresented narratives inside academia. In particular, Black women that identify with Black Feminism (Collins, 2000) as a world view guiding their writing recognize autoethnography as a unique opportunity to unite theory and lived experiences with the methodology that is "positioned to embrace subjectivity, engage critical self-reflexivity, speak rather than being spoken for, interrogate power, and resist oppression" (Griffin, 2012, p. 143). In crafting an autoethnography, Black women are able to take control of their situated experiences, which often receive limited meaningful attention in academe. These experiences are often lost when there is not particular attention given to the voices navigating the reality in which mainstream feminism ignores the intersection of race and gender, efforts at racial justice are undercut by patriarchy, and class-status greatly impacts a Black woman's susceptibility to systemic injustice (Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 1981; Harris-Perry, 2011). By performing this elevation through Black feminist autoethnography, I am centering my own story of being a woman who must navigate the racialized trauma as a result of violence against Black people, boys and men in particular.

To further explain the personal significance of autoethnography, particularly as a Black woman, I reflect on Melissa Harris-Perry's (2011) reimagining of the "crooked room" (Witkins et. al, 1977). In this psychological study, researchers found that when participants were placed in a room with crooked angles and told to align themselves vertically, they often believed themselves to be upright although they were standing at a bended angle. Harris-Perry describes the concept's application to the lived experiences of Black women in saying that, "when they confront race and gender stereotypes, Black women are standing in a crooked room, and they have to figure out which way is up" (p. 29). In an effort to "bend and tilt themselves to fit the distortion," the struggle to stand upright can manifest itself into various behaviors, from "gyrating in a degrading hip hop video" to constructing academic work (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 29). Regardless of what the result may be, Black women across the U.S. must navigate our lived realities alongside a physically and psychologically hostile society and adjust accordingly. For Black women with academic privilege, Griffin (2012) suggests that it is our duty to use Black Feminist autoethnography "as a means to speak to, with, and at times for" Black women who do not have access to these privileged spaces (p. 143). In response, I commit to the elevation of Black women, Black youth, and all those navigating the trauma of systemic, racial injustices with limited access to healing. Reflecting on the crooked room described by Melissa Harris Perry (2011), my attempt to vertically align myself, in spite of the distortion of systemic injustice, is to join with Black women uplifting our stories in academia by centering an analysis of my experiences with social activism. In doing so, this body of work will also serve as the culmination of my

"commitment to truth telling…the first step in any process of self-recovery" (hooks, 1993).

RESEARCH DESIGN

For the purpose of this study, my experiences are used as the primary source of data. In particular, my involvement in social activism will be recounted through multiple sources. These include *private journals* that were intermittently kept throughout the analyzed periods of time, *social media posts* in which I crafted my responses to trending topics of racial violence at the time, *audio recordings* that initially began as a result of writing this thesis in an attempt to reconcile my past trauma with my present reality, *video recordings* of several social activism events in which I attended, *transcripts* from various interviews given throughout the past three years, and *memory*. To give particular attention to *memory* as a data source, it is important to generally understand the way in which I designed study. After collecting retrievable data sources, I constructed a narrative which followed experiences from the beginning of my study's time frame to the end. After its completion, I thematically analyzed my narrative to examine the lived experience of suffering from racialized trauma. The importance of my memory in this reconstruction was two-fold in that 1) I was able to connect the "dots" of my story as I remembered the experiences which occurred between captured data and 2) my memory served to reveal vulnerable emotions and experiences which were not on public display.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study's journey begins in 2012, proceeds through the summer after completing my undergraduate degree in 2014, and concludes as my narrative weaves

into present-day. Specifically, I explore individual stages over the past three years, beginning with my March 2012 discovery of Trayvon Martin's death on February 26, 2012. To effectively analyze the data collected throughout these years, I began with outlining *general* thematic descriptors, or holistic codes (Saldaña, 2013), which guided further analysis. In doing so, these time periods were separated into three holistic codes along a chronological timeline, *enthusiasm, awakening* and *truth.* The titles for each holistic code appeared as I conducted a brief scan for each time period of collected data and discovered themes in the language used. Respectively, the first period of time began March 14, 2012 (the day I discovered Trayvon Martin's story) through April 11, 2012 (the day that George Zimmerman was arrested and charged with second-degree murder). These twenty-nine days served as an introduction to the idea of social activism as I was challenged to extend my analysis of Martin's killing beyond individual actions to include consequences of institutional racism. This stage is identified as *enthusiasm* because it indicates my excitement to expand my knowledge to construct a deeper analysis as I was introduced to the second stage of critical consciousness, social awareness. This made room for the second stage of exploration through the following fifteen months, *awakening*. Prior to the reading of Zimmerman's 'not guilty' verdict, I'd comfortably settled into my developing identity as an activist within my campus community following what, I considered, a successful campaign for Trayvon Martin's justice. During this time, I began a serious pursuit of social activism through a scientific inquiry. This stage is identified as *awakening*. However, the feeling of certainty that we were successful in achieving our goals was reduced to traumatic shock on July 13, 2013.

48

This moment provides a painful arrival to social awareness and is the height of my transformative and traumatic assault. Ushering in the final stage, *truth,* my story arrives at the central body of this work which deconstructs my complex responses following the experienced trauma of George Zimmerman's not guilty verdict.

According to Ellis (2004), narratives are the ways in which writers "organize their experiences into temporally meaningful episodes" and, as a mode of representation, look for connections between events utilizing literary characteristics (p. 195). To perform a narrative analysis, the researcher "seeks to understand individual and unique human action" with a particular, analytical focus on prosaic, poetic, and dramatic features (Saldaña, 2013). This thematic analysis treats the narrative as data and "arrives at themes to illuminate the content and hold within or across stories" (p. 196). For the purpose of my analysis, narratives are coded to examine both *characterization*, i.e. changes/transformations and revealed *themes*, i.e. significant insights or healing. An initial, holistic coding primarily develops "preparatory groundwork for more detailed coding of the data" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 142). *Enthusiasm, awakening,* and *truth* fulfill this preliminary role but further analysis became critical to resolving my research questions. To code almost four years of data, I separated the collected data into its time of occurrence, or its holistic codes, to further analyze for themes in individual periods. This is pivotal to the research discussion because, as I write this autoethnography, I am living the results of the sum of collected data. For a valid analysis, I must recognize that each time period reflects diverse experiences and responses solely established upon my knowledge (or lack thereof) at that time. To reconcile this difficult positioning, it is

critical that I allow myself the opportunity to individually reflect upon each period of time.

Summary

While the purpose of this study is to center racism as trauma and explore its greater implications, it is not my desire to *prove* that racism is a traumatic experience. Instead, this study *approaches* the discussion of my experience with institutional racism with the understanding that it *is* trauma and examines it through the framework of RIBT. To do so creates the space to examine the additional dimension of this study, social activism, as both serious leisure and radically healing. In a two-part narrative, Part I examines my evolution from self- to social awareness through three themes, *submersion, community* and *resistance* as well as the impact of my serious pursuit of social activism. To briefly clarify, *resistance* is often used in academic literature to describe ways in individuals, or communities, fight against factors of oppression. However, my theme of *resistance* speaks more to the literal definition: "the refusal to accept something new or different" (resistance, n.d.). Part II uses the language of the RHM's five features (culture, agency, relationships, meaning, and achievement) to analyze the presence of radical healing within my experiences of social activism. For example, if a particular instance of activism reflected the relationship feature and occurred during *truth*, it was coded as TR-RSHP. While these narratives may not be chronologically represented, this method of coding enabled a thorough analysis of the potential impact of RHM features.

In addition to chronological and thematic presentation, narratives will be using both flashbacks and interludes which serve complementary roles for my story. Also

known as a layered account (Ronai, 2005), non-italicized paragraphs act as the mediator between the stage and audience to explain the way in which themes are present in the narrative while flashbacks are written in present-tense but discuss a memory or event in the past. The purpose of this presentation is to invite the reader into the vulnerability of my experiences through a recreated narrative. One can also consider the non-italicized paragraphs as a host to the reader, guiding individuals through experiences with additional context, clarifications, or descriptions.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study follows my journey in response to racialized trauma through involvement in social activism. To ensure consideration for the potential of personal psychological impact, I completed the approval process required for research on human subjects as mandated by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This process concluded prior to the collection of archived data with an approval to move forward. Although not included in the IRB process as they are not primary subjects of research, additional ethical considerations must also be given to individuals whose support makes their inclusion in this autoethnography critical to narrative progression. To provide such consideration, pseudonyms will be used when referring to these individuals.

LIMITATIONS

Constructing a vulnerable recount of my activism following Trayvon Martin's killing requires that I become intimately aware of my lived reality and emotions during that time. Unfortunately, I was unable to recover data from the website that would possibly best reveal my evolution during this period. My account, @energeticpeace, on

the popular social media website, Twitter, was instrumental in connecting me to like-minded activists across the nation, learning of cyber trainings that guided my educational development, and creating a cyber community that gave me hope in an otherwise confusing time. However, I deleted my twitter account, as well as its thousands of tweets, the summer after I graduated college to prioritize self-care shortly before entering graduate school. Although the importance of my twitter account's transcript would have been deeply felt throughout this autoethnographic journey, I understand and affirm the importance of removing myself from critical, public conversations on social justice to prioritize and craft space for meditation, reflection, and analysis following my undergraduate years. Nevertheless, my experiences, emotions, and responses were well-documented through other mediums, such as additional social media outlets, journals, interviews, and recordings.

Although it is not required for analysis, it is possible to create space for external perceptions of one's journey by including interviews with various individuals about the subject into data collection. However, I have made an intentional decision to focus this reflection on the way that I navigate racism-induced trauma as well as its impact on my emotions, actions, and mental-health. In doing so, I believe it necessary to center my own narrative without formal, external interviews. While some may view this narrow inclusion of data as a limitation, I would implore the reader to identify it as a strength. There are limited spaces in which Black women are able to *completely* control our narrative, particularly when discussing the impact of living in a patriarchal, racially unjust world. I have chosen and crafted my thesis work to be such a submission.

However, I do believe it critical to recognize that my choice to resist the enduring trauma I experience by exploring, elevating, and valuing my own voice is a powerful testament to the strength that I have received from those in my community.

Despite the aforementioned limitations, I am confident in the diverse collection of data to present a comprehensive analysis. In particular, source triangulation allows for an account that explains "more fully the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 195). In addition, to ensure that my reflections of 2012-2015 are a truthful representation of their occurrence, I amend the traditional interview approach through connecting with individuals who were present during these recounted experiences in order to consult about my data interpretations. These individuals include my thesis committee, mother, partner, closest friends, and fellow activists. While these informal conversations will not be transcribed and included in the data, it is important that I (as the subject) have an opportunity to verify that the data, results, and discussion are an accurate reflection of my experiences.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I described my use of autoethnography as a method for this study. In doing so, I examined the method's background and value within research. Recall the use of a single case study has been determined to provide a study which highlights theoretical research in practice and real time. The context provided in my study is a lived experience of suffering racialized trauma which has limited representation in the already-limited academic conversation within literature. Additionally, with my personal

experience with racialized trauma, autoethnography allows space to reject the dominant

research approach of neutrality and acknowledges ways in which my trauma has shaped

my research interests. Additionally, this chapter presented the research design for data

collection and approach to its analysis. As I move to the following chapters which

perform the work of this study, the present (and previous) chapter are critical to

understanding my described narratives and analyses.

CHAPTER IV PART I: BEFORE

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, my shift from *self-* to *social* awareness is explored in-depth as I follow my discovery of Trayvon Martin's killing. Of my three holistic codes described in Chapter 3 (p. 47), Part I focuses on *enthusiasm* and *awakening* which begins with my discovery of Trayvon's story in March 2012 and concludes moments before my traumatic experience in July 2013. Prior to March 2012, I found myself in search of a healthy African-American identity as well as occupying spaces of activism on my university campus which reflected the self-awareness level. However, a significant shift occurred when my participation in social activism specifically emphasized justice for Trayvon Martin, resulting in a confrontation with previously-unknown, systemic inequalities which questioned the protection of George Zimmerman from investigation and, ultimately, led to an increased awareness level and developing critical consciousness. In analyzing this evolution to social awareness, three themes were uncovered which both provide context to the process as well as operates as a reflection of it: *submersion, community,* and *resistance*.

FINDINGS

While providing a foundation that facilitates answers to my three research questions, Part I only addresses explicitly the way in which my social activism was developed into serious leisure. However, this chapter is critical to examining my other research questions as it reveals an evolutionary process which situates my experience

with racialized trauma and access to CARMA, the five features of RHM, in Part II. In my analytical approach to this narrative, it also became clear that *enthusiasm* and *awakening* actually make up one part of a two-part experience. As a result of this discovery, I chose to shape my autoethnography so Part I examines my experiences before Zimmerman was found not guilty while Part II focuses on after the verdict, pre-trauma and post-trauma respectively. In doing so, Part I allows for an unabridged representation of my evolution from self- to social awareness without an arbitrary separation as a result of a misguided, compartmentalized perception of the two codes.

In the development of my critical consciousness, three themes emerged which help to place this theoretical development into a lived, contextual reality. The first theme, *submersion*, describes the way in which I responded to learning Trayvon's story. In its initial stage, it is represented through my fixation on both discovering and sharing details of Trayvon's story. However, *submersion* evolves as my journey toward social awareness required advanced knowledge, particularly as I searched for answers to my questions regarding institutional oppression This theme is critical to understanding the remainder of my analysis as it demonstrates the way in which the evolutionary process through awareness levels shaped my perception of the world as well as my subsequent navigation of this newly discovered reality. In my advancing toward social awareness, my submersion focused as I sought out Black-thought, or the writings of Black activists and scholar-activists who explore the consequences of a systemically racist society. *Submersion* describes the process of entering a world previously unknown to me in

which Black communities are dramatically impacted by U.S. institutional racism in ways extending beyond individual-level experiences.

Almost simultaneous to the introduction of *submersion* is the inclusion of *community* as a theme. While a submersion into an understanding of oppression through institutional racism incited stressful feelings of isolation, this was soon combated by a developing *community* in which others guided my journey in a supportive environment. Here I also found the shift to social awareness to have impacted my sense of *community* from an individual-level of friends who were physically accessible to including strangers simply because they were also Black, such as those I met while protesting in Sanford, FL. In turn, this increased my confidence as a member of a larger Black community which facilitated the progression to social awareness, which requires an analysis of power in context of community (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002, p. 89). Finally, as *submersion* and *community* facilitate my questioning of institutions, *resistance* emerges as a theme. This theme examines my mental *resistance* to fully embracing a social awareness, which would require I accept the institution as fundamentally racist and dangerous. As *submersion* evolved, *resistance* attempted to do so as well but was mediated, and continuously overcome, by *community*. As the ideological dominance of institutional racism sought to protect its deception and evolved to match my advanced level of *submersion*, my definition of *community* expanded and provided an increased means of support which actively battled against *resistance*. Finally, Part I examines the way in which I participated in social activism as serious leisure. In doing so, *privilege* and *ulterior motive* emerged as critical themes which shape an understanding of an

57

additional dimension to my social activism, outside the communal lens of critical consciousness.

NARRATIVE

During the Spring Break vacation of my sophomore year of college, I joined my mother on an eight-hour road trip to visit my grandmother in our hometown, El Paso, TX. Thirteen years earlier, my mother packed up my brother and me, moving us to the Dallas-Fort Worth area (DFW) in search of better employment opportunities and, after finding a financially-stable position, enrolled in a local college to earn an Associate's degree. In pursuit of a long-ago, abandoned dream of becoming a nurse, she graduated and acquired years of experience by March 2012. Additionally, my brother and I also settled into our new resident city, developing friendships that would last through the years and aligning ourselves as part of the community fabric. When my grandfather passed in 2003, my mom began making annual trips to check on her only-living, aging parents. After starting high school in 2006, I joined her on these trips, evolving them into a mother-daughter experience. However, graduation and beginning college in a different city made it difficult for us to plan around timing conflicts. In fact, two years had passed since the last time I was able to join her when my mom suggested we use some of the days I would have off for Spring Break to make the drive. I was excited because, after three years of licensed driving, it was the first hours-long trip that my mom would allow me take the wheel.

In between the silent pauses from the background noise of the hotel room

television, I can hear the slow, heavy breathing that accompanies deep sleep. After

arriving in the city and having lunch with my Oma, my mother and I took a couple hours

so we could check in at the hotel and nap. I look away from my phone to the right and

see my mother curled up and fast asleep on the second bed, exhausted from stubbornly

driving most of our early morning road trip. Too interested in the comments by those I

was following on Twitter to fall asleep, I continue to scroll down my timeline until

pausing to read one tweet's request to sign an electronic petition. I open the link and

read a story. A teenager is dead after being shot when walking home from the

convenience store. His parents are writing these words, petitioning me in desperation to

call for the Sanford Police Department's investigation and arrest of his killer. Their

son's name was Trayvon Martin. As I finish reading, I close my eyes to imagine various

pieces of the story but nothing about this makes sense to me. Trayvon Martin was 17

years old. And he was shot by a stranger? Who hasn't been arrested? I cannot make

this…make sense. I read the petition again. And again.

Submersion

Discovering the story of Trayvon Martin initiated a process of shifting from self-to social awareness. In this process, *submersion* emerged as the first analytical theme encompassing the experiences initially following my discovery of Trayvon's story. In its beginning stage, my submersion is seen through a fixation to learn details of Trayvon's story which resulted in prioritizing my search over daily obligations, such as class. It is critical to note that, while this theme revealed itself almost simultaneous to learning

59

Trayvon's name, it is an ever-present theme which responds to the evolution in awareness level by submersing myself in advanced levels of knowledge. In context of my narrative, the challenge to think beyond individual experiences with racism and explore the consequences of a systemically racist society necessitated an extension from my primary focus on details of Trayvon Martin to include the way in which his killing is a piece of the larger puzzle of institutional racism. Additionally, in this submersion, a subtheme appeared, *desire for Black-thought*, describing my need to read literature by Black writers as I lost trust in mainstream, intellectual canons and sought to better understand the consequences of an institutionally racist society from the perspective of the oppressed.

Almost immediately, I can see that hundreds of people have already signed the petition. After reading its plea several more times, I wade through the flood of pain expressed in the comments written by Trayvon's high school classmates, family members, and community members. I've lost track of time when a "low battery" warning flashes on my phone, reminding me that my scroll through Twitter was not intended to replace my nap. I hurriedly entered my information to sign then shared it on my own Twitter page. Deciding to charge my phone while I sleep, I drop it and roll over to search for the charger around my haphazardly-emptied suitcase. With my hand free, I feel a slow throbbing. I hadn't realized that I was squeezing onto my phone for the past half-hour of exploring the petition. Remembering a recently adopted routine, I close my eyes and explicitly check in on myself. Noticing my breath is shallow and heart is

beating fast, I realize that I am anxious but I don't know why. I clicked 'share' and

signed the petition. Is that not enough to take my mind somewhere else? But, I know that

it isn't. I need more…to learn more about Trayvon Martin. Who was he? What happened

between him and George Zimmerman? Forgetting what I was doing, I become lost again

until a distant voice reaches in, "It's almost 3 o'clock. Let's take your Oma

[grandmother] *to the grocery store and grab something to eat before it gets too late." I*

welcome the interruption.

For the remaining two days of our visit to El Paso, my phone and I were inseparable. By the end of the trip, my search bar would auto-fill with "Trayvon Martin," reflecting my constant search for articles, news reports, and tweets providing details of his story. With each new detail, I shared it to my Twitter page hoping that the right person would see the details of Trayvon's killing, which were now keeping me awake at night, and move toward an investigation. In this journey to learn more about his final moments, I was also developing a community of Twitter users who were becoming aware of his story and using their social media platforms to discuss its details and questions. Using the #JusticeforTrayvon hashtag, we often began following each other's posts and shared whatever pieces of the story that we could contribute to the conversation. Because there was only a brief investigation by Sanford police, there were several questions that we sought answers to, particularly why the shooting of an unarmed teenager by an aggressor was ruled justified.

As additional thoughts and analyses from people across the U.S. were included to my timeline of tweets, participation in local, college-specific conversations as the original purpose of my account was eroded when discussions of Trayvon took precedence. Almost immediately, I began to disregard tweets from those in my college community who were discussing topics other than Trayvon while also becoming increasingly frustrated with those who were not using their platforms to craft messages in support of #JusticeforTrayvon. As though to supplement my perception of its limited attention, I devoted every waking hour to posting about Trayvon on Twitter, resulting in hundreds of tweets per day.

It's 2:00am. It's officially Monday and, in six hours, I need to wake up for the first day of class after Spring Break. Although a college student well-trained to function on little sleep, I am unusually drained from the past seven days of traveling across Texas, particularly considering the little sleep I'd gotten since learning Trayvon's name. In fact, when we'd returned from El Paso yesterday, I decided to wait one day, until Sunday, to complete the final trip to my college town. When I left early Sunday morning, I replayed the story of Trayvon's killing, one that I'd now memorized from reading it so many times, over and over again on the three-hour drive home. How many days has it been since Trayvon was killed? Finally arriving at my apartment, I checked the calendar in my cell phone to count each day before exiting the car. Twenty-one. Three weeks and his parents were still pleading for an investigation. By the twenty-first day after his death, and the fourth day since my discovery, I am convinced that Trayvon Martin was

murdered because he was a Black boy. I haven't explicitly described this but, for George Zimmerman, Trayvon's hoodie was an indication of the dangerous unfamiliarity that follows Blackness and his implicit racism guided his trigger-pulling. When I accepted this, I reflected on the dozens of times in which my older brother walked to the convenience store in a hoodie. He is also a Black boy. We've never discussed it but I wonder whether he was ever stopped for looking threatening? As my blood turned cold, I contemplated: when I come home for summer break, will he have survived to enjoy it with me? Or will I mourn his murder as a result of someone else's racism? As though a formal declaration of my commitment to Trayvon, I signed onto my rarely-used Facebook page to update my status: "It's been 21 days since the murder of Trayvon Martin and the admitted killer, George Zimmerman, has still not been arrested."*

Now, it's 2:00am and I cannot sleep for fear that I will miss incredibly important details about Trayvon. Signed onto Twitter, the space where I feel most comfortable in finding information, because it is where I first learned his name, I begin sharing thoughts that have clouded the past four days. This is important to me as I am just learning to express the fear that is emerging for Black youth, especially Black boys. I end each tweet with my new signature, #JusticeforTrayvon. In the middle of my stream of consciousness, I see someone post a tweet that questions my tweeting about Trayvon at such a late hour. Something along the lines of "seriously? It's 2 in the morning. Can we get a break!?"

There are very few people awake and tweeting, allowing me to see the tweet instantly. I am not being directly addressed as my account name isn't in it but know that the tweet is for me. I hadn't thought of it during the past four days but I now realize the frustration that my college friends must be feeling. Particularly, those who follow my account and have had to read hundreds of unsolicited tweets about Trayvon from me. It is likely that this barrage has clogged their accounts' timelines of tweets, filling it up with the killing of a 17-year-old boy. I recognize this. But, I cannot stop because these tweets are too important. If I keep tweeting, then the right person in power who knows someone…that knows someone…who follows my tweets will be shown something that I said and move for justice in Trayvon's murder. I see another tweet but this one cuts deeper as the tweeter shares her feelings that nothing will ever change, "there is no point in talking about it anyway." I'm hurt because I believed her to be on my side, on Trayvon's side, because she is the president of a local chapter on campus of a national organization that advocates for individual, civil liberties, particularly for communities who have been historically discriminated against.

"Then why are you the president of an org[anization] that fights for civil rights? Seems like a wasted position," I reply. I know that such a personal and public retort will likely end our flimsy friendship but I don't care. I've just decided that I am not accepting pushback because this will work and anyone who disagrees doesn't know what they are talking about. I'm so angry that I'm shaking but I also recognize that, in my obsession with Trayvon Martin, I may have lost a little control. Or did his murder reveal that I

never really was in control? I put my phone down and tears begin falling. Furiously

wiping my face, I know they have nothing to do with a burned bridge and everything to

do with Trayvon Martin.

        Firmly planted within self-awareness, my introduction to Trayvon Martin's story

began the evolution which shapes both my experience with racialized trauma and the

response of social activism as radically healing. At this beginning stage, my fixation on

raising awareness for Trayvon created feelings of isolation and fear which challenged

my sense of control. Although similar emotions will appear later, as I describe the

moments following my racialized trauma, this stage is not controlled by an

overwhelming fear. While a different narrative and experience could center these

emotions as enduring characteristics of *submersion,* my story is dramatically impacted

by the next discussed theme, *community,* which offers alternative feelings of hope and

excitement to learn more. In the next section, I describe the way in which *community* is

introduced and serves as a buffer to the feelings of isolation and fear by instilling a sense

of hope and desire to more extensively learn more about institutional racism. Here one

should consider the isolation and fear to be a rational result from my learning of the

violence that ended Trayvon's life and to simply reflect the circumstances which led to

the process. Additionally, as my awareness level begins to shift so that I am more

cognizant of the way in which individuals and systems work in tandem to create

oppressive realities for Black people through a political focus on Trayvon's story, the

way in which I interact with others, consume knowledge, and respond through social activism are altered in response.

Community

Despite pockets of backlash against my excessive tweeting, most people expressed their support for my unwavering commitment to raise awareness for Trayvon's story. I connected with other students who were similarly gripped and also unable to focus on much else. In particular, Harriet and James provided support as they critically challenged me to consider institutional systems shaping the conditions for both Trayvon's killing *and* Zimmerman's protection. Prior to learning Trayvon's story, Harriet, a recent transfer to our university, and I were friendly but not close. However, when I first met her, I was immediately in awe of her artistic confrontation with institutional racism, such as her Ancient Egyptian tattoos and their meanings of Black liberation. In her staple jewelry pieces from African countries, refusal to wear bras, and brightly-dyed afro, I saw the epitome of Black womanhood and strove to be my own version of her. A part of me was even thrilled, despite the circumstances, to be connected to her as we bonded over our shared tweeting about Trayvon. In contrast, I met James during my freshman year. He was a well-known member of a popular African-American fraternity whose quiet brilliance, perfectly-timed humor, and the crush I'd developed made me want to be around him any chance I could. However, while he was always nice, he was older and rarely opened himself outside of his developed circle of friends. For this reason, I was surprised when he privately reached out, encouraging me to disregard any backlash I received and focus on support coming

from our community. Additionally, he emphasized his support for my advocacy and offered guidance. As we connected, his encouragement guided a balance between my fear for Black youth, particularly boys, and desire to act. When I discovered both Harriet and James were navigating an advanced level of awareness, I clung to their analyses to guide my own understanding and deconstruction of Trayvon's killing.

In addition to Harriet and James, Twitter also became a shared space in which we joined a collective mission to raise awareness for Trayvon. Communal in that we navigated a similar undertaking for Trayvon, this was a new experience for me in feeling connected to those outside of who I could physically access, one which I would not begin to embrace until a few weeks later. However, in the very initial stages of understanding this space to be an extension of a community, James, Harriet and I discovered people across the nation who were planning marches, vigils, and rallies in Trayvon's name. When we learned that a rally in Sanford would be occurring on the one-month anniversary of his death and attended by his parents, we decided to embrace the way in which this space was altering our response and have a meeting so we could organize our own supporting campus demonstration. While I had garnered the reputation of a campus activist, prior to the killing of Trayvon, my self-awareness level emphasized the development of a healthy, African-American identity which shaped my social activism. For example, during the same week that Trayvon was killed, others and I planned to protest against a scheduled campus speaker who was famous for speeches supporting racist ideology. However, the meeting with Harriet and James acted as a critical introduction to a social awareness-level analysis which significantly impacted

my social activism from demonstrations against individual behaviors to challenging ways in which institutions impact inequalities. Prior to connecting with them, I rarely considered the reasons why Zimmerman remained free from investigation or arrest but was soon challenged to reach beyond my self-awareness level and identify the ways larger communities are impacted similarly to Trayvon's killing. In turn, this introduced dramatic changes to my utilization of social action in that 1) I included a political agenda which extended beyond the development of individual identity and 2) a shift occurred which would introduce my understanding of social activism as a science which would later facilitate serious pursuit. This relationship highlights the ways in which my critical consciousness and social activism pursuit operate in tandem.

As Harriet and I pull up to James' house, I am reminded of the last time I was here. It was for a house party DJ'd by his roommates and, while it feels so long ago, I remember it was just two weeks ago. But, the memories I have of that night's carefree dancing, the bass of hip hop music, and laughing until my stomach hurt are all in stark contrast to today's visit. Today, five days after I learned his name, Harriet, James and I are meeting to plan a campus demonstration in support of justice for Trayvon. It is the first time that we will be able to sit in the same room and talk without the restriction of tweets and their character limits. Parking the car, Harriet and I pass the front door and walk to the garage where James has told us to freely walk in. Harriet greets James with a cool, "hey brotha," he and I quickly embrace and we are led through the house and upstairs to his attic-bedroom.

We take turns expressing our thoughts about Trayvon and his killing as we informally arrange ourselves in the room. James is on his bed and fiddling with his computer to play one of his many hip hop mixtapes. When refusing his offer to sit in a chair, Harriet comfortably sits on the floor and crosses her legs. Elated at being in the same room with Harriet and James, I awkwardly stand until they tell me to sit because I am making them nervous. Listening to them describe their feelings, from being kept awake at night to unshakeable sadness, I experience a strange sense of comfort in knowing that I am not alone. However, I also recognize a difference between my feelings and the expressions of everyone else. Particularly, while my anger is directed at Zimmerman (even refusing to say his name aloud), they are describing something else…anger towards Sanford police and their role in not arresting Zimmerman. Only considering that it was Zimmerman who pulled the trigger, I hadn't given much attention to the police but the unanimous anger towards them causes me to wonder about this. As I am doing so, the conversation turns to our plans for campus demonstrations. The confusion that had begun to cloud my thoughts clears away as I remember the visual demonstration idea that I was excited to share with the group.

"Skittles! What if we put Skittles on the feet of that statue in the middle of campus, the guy who was in the Ku Klux Klan, every day…until Zimmerman is arrested? It would be a daily, visual reminder and, with each day that Zimmerman isn't arrested, would keep growing." Without hesitation, the group express their support in both the

aesthetic of Skittles, the snack carried by Trayvon when he was killed, to highlight that Trayvon was unarmed as well as the irony of raising social justice awareness using the celebratory space of a former Klan member.

Knowing this demonstration can begin soon, we decide to think through additional ideas for a satellite rally on campus. Centering our Skittles demonstration as the location to elicit a powerful visual, we decide to also host the rally in front of the same Klan statue. With valuable experience in graphic design, James volunteers to create a flyer to advertise the event. Thinking through the design, he asks what our title should be.

I confidently reply, "Rally for Trayvon" and dart my eyes from face to face, searching for signs of approval. Almost immediately, I see the hesitation shape Harriet's face.

"You don't like it?" I know that my desire for validation is showing but I can't help asking.

"It's not that I don't like it…it's just I think that the injustice as a result of Trayvon Martin's murder represents more than one man killing one boy. I don't want our rally to sensationalize Trayvon like he is the only one."

Appearing to speak this same unknown language, James thoughtfully nodes his head in agreement. I'm trying to quickly conduct an inventory of what I know to be true. Trayvon Martin was murdered. Trayvon Martin was murdered because he was Black. George Zimmerman is a racist and used his white privilege to get away with killing a Black boy. What am I missing? They can see that this search is challenging and my face is shaped in confusion. Harriet intervenes.

*"*I think we should call it 'Shoot me, I'm Black.' It is only because Trayvon was Black that he was killed. It's only because he is Black that his murderer is not being arrested. Think about it, Aja. It's been three weeks since he was killed. When have you ever heard of police officers refusing to arrest a killer when the victim was white…to even investigate?! It's just a consequence of this country being built off the backs of slaves…of our ancestors. Trayvon, Ramarley Graham, Aiyana Jones, Amadou Diallo, Oscar Grant. It's all the same. It's a system. Something is wrong with the institutions. They couldn't stand that we got free so they protect our killers who shoot us in the streets…in our neighborhoods…Aja, they'll even shoot us in our homes while we sleep."

*She continues, "*I think the Skittles demonstration should be focused on Trayvon because his murder has started a lot of needed conversations. And that baby deserves justice. But, we should also be careful because focusing on Trayvon and Zimmerman and their moment in time makes it seem like the problem doesn't go beyond them. I bet

when this story really does hit mainstream media, they talk about it as "remote." But, what about the police officers who looked at Trayvon's lifeless body then told his parents that he was the one who started the aggression? What about Sanford's Chief of Police who hasn't ordered an investigation? This is definitely about more than an interaction between two people. Trayvon was a victim of historical oppression and its consequences…and the police, the institution of Sanford police, they are protecting his killer. This is an attack by institutional racism, Aja."

So much of what Harriet is explaining is familiar to me. I'm the Director of Education for BAC. In this position, I've created multiple programs discussing and describing the residual impact of racism on the lives of Black people. I know what institutional racism is…I think. But, I also know there is a connection they have made that I am missing. I believe institutional racism has residual effects on the way in which systems operate. But, they are talking about it as though its effects are more than residual…as though they are by intentional design. This implies a level of responsibility for Sanford police that I am not quite ready to grasp so I ask the question that I can't shake, "don't you think that title is controversial…" I'm worried about the reaction of our predominately-white campus.

Otherwise silent since he initially posed the question, James replies. Under the warm patience in his voice, I hear a hint of rage.

"What is more controversial? The title of a rally or its truth, that Black people are gunned down and their killers are institutionally protected?"

Wow. Institutionally protected. This juxtaposition sparks a fragile connection for me between institutional racism and the lived realities of Black communities. With his reply, I become aware of the questions underlining my confusion. Hoping they may be able to provide some answers, I dump my response into the conversation.

"Okay, honestly. I understand why Zimmerman is a racist. Honestly, I do. But, help me understand a few things. I have no idea who Aiyana, Ramarley, Oscar, and Amadou are. I think I probably should know but I don't., I'm sorry, I thought I knew more about this stuff than I do, apparently."

Harriet's smile puts me at ease as she replies, "Don't apologize, sis. It's not your fault that you don't know any of this. What institution would teach you when they are all under the control of racism? Nah girl, the only way is to know someone who introduces you to all of this other information, stuff that explains it all. Like, how violent slavery was. How violent the Jim Crow era was? And, how violent it still is today. Any truth that you want to know about Black folks in America can be found in our history in this country, with our oppressors. Anything. Anyways, those names I mentioned are others…youth who were killed by police in the past few years. Youth whose killers were never brought to justice. I say their names to show you that it's not just Trayvon who

lost his life. It's widespread because racism never stopped, it just changed. Does that make sense?"

"Wow, you just threw a lot at me. I trust you but it's obvious that I need to do a lot more reading. I'm also going to look up the stories of those other people. But, I do understand what you're saying…so, if this is a problem that keeps happening, maybe we should do multiple events? Something in protest and something to memorialize? I saw that there were vigils happening also. Maybe we can host a…Black Youth Vigil? In remembrance of those who were murdered by the institution? We can highlight those stories, Harriet." It's interesting to see my activism adapt to the situation. Previously, I hadn't recognized it to be a skill but I am beginning to see it differently. As everyone nods their head in agreement, I turn to James to learn more about "institutional protection."

Before this meeting, my discussion of Trayvon emphasized the tragic, individual act of aggression by George Zimmerman. Additionally, I understood the reason Zimmerman avoided arrest to be the result of individual officers sharing his racist ideology. When I thought of Sanford police, I imagined officers similar to those who worked in the small towns in the South with reputations of having an active Ku Klux Klan. Operating through a self-awareness level, I recognized their behavior as problematic but, similar to these scattered southern towns, anomalies to the larger society. When Harriet suggested 'Shoot me, I'm Black' as a rally title, she sparked the

beginning of my transition from self- to social awareness level as she challenged me to expand my analysis beyond individual actions. Here, allow me to construct a metaphorical situation to better understand this journey as a train ride. Conceptualizing it in this way, with each awareness level in critical consciousness acting as a potential destination on the route, it was not a journey I'd wanted to go on but was forced to ride when I was in search of a healthy African-American identity after being called a "nigger" by a white friend's mother at 16 years-old. That moment served to "drop me off" at the train station where I am to navigate the many routes, or responses to racism, which have been shaped by historical and institutional racism. The path to critical consciousness, as described by Ginwright and Cammarota (2002) in SJYD, through the three awareness levels is a potential route one can take in the station when encouraged to do so, particularly when seen as a feature of positive development for Black youth. For just over two years, I metaphorically wandered aimlessly around this train station, unprepared to having been left there and unsure of which routes were options. However, beginning college, developing a community with other Black students, and getting involved in BAC ushered me onto the train to critical consciousness as well as to the first stop of self-awareness. Here is where I found myself when I discovered the story of Trayvon Martin.

Summary

Until March 2012, I was resting comfortably at the self-awareness train station, believing my journey to have ended. However, as I read the petition from Trayvon's parents, the locomotive steam began hissing and the horn screeched as the train

seemingly prepared to leave our comfortable station and proceed along to an unknown destination. The deeper I submersed myself into learning his story and analyzing it through the available awareness level, the louder the train became as it whined to start moving. It was not until this meeting with Harriet and James that I was challenged to consider institutional responsibility for racism and ways in which Black communities across the U.S. are impacted. It is at this point that the train chugs out of the station, on its way to my next stop of social awareness. Additionally, while this meeting facilitated the progression toward social-awareness, it would not be until the not guilty verdict in July 2013 that I would begin to understand the implications of navigating such a violent system and actually arrive at the next stop. While it is a crude reimagining of the complex evolutionary journey we take as Black youth to develop a critical consciousness in spite of the institutionalization of our oppression, it serves its purpose to consider how various steps must occur before one can actually *arrive* at the next station, or awareness level.

The following sections detail these various steps after my train pulled out of the station toward social awareness. In doing so, this narrative reflects the way in which my definition of *community* evolved in response to the development of my critical consciousness, particularly after Harriet and James provided a supporting environment to challenge my acceptance of institutional innocence and sparked my questioning of its role in shaping both the killing of Trayvon and ongoing freedom of George Zimmerman. Additionally, through a combined evolution of *community* and *submersion,* I was increasingly fulfilled in my social activism participation. Finally, the theme of *resistance*

serves to oppose the train ride's progression through awareness levels. Consider it to be a metaphorical storm whose violent weather conditions, or rejection of my journey to a critical consciousness, is attempting to knock the train off-course. Subtle yet powerful, this theme potentially slows the journey as it attempts to undercut my developing knowledge. In our meeting, this was demonstrated through my discomfort with choosing 'Shoot me, I'm Black' as a rally title as I placed full responsibility on George Zimmerman for Trayvon's injustice. However, our conversation exploring beyond Zimmerman presented a challenge of understanding systemic responsibility which I was not ready to fully embrace but provided support so that I could begin to learn.

Resistance

Prior to my initial encounter with individual racism at 16 years-old, I was ignorant to the depth of historical and institutional racism which I was navigating. In fact, if asked about my opinion regarding race in the U.S., I would have answered that we were no longer subjected to the violence of racism that kidnapped and tortured our ancestors. As I reflect, I probably would have used the word "overcome" somewhere in between my admiration of President Lincoln for "generously" signing the Emancipation Proclamation and praise of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for his commitment to *peaceful* demonstration. When my initial encounter with racism dropped me off at this metaphorical train station of racism with innumerable routes to navigate my experience, I went unwillingly. However, isolation that follows learning one is the subject of oppression was too much to bear and, having access to it through my university, went in search of a Black community. This guided me toward the train to critical consciousness

and into my self-awareness level. Although I felt relatively comfortable with my embracing of a healthy African-American identity, I was definitely not prepared for the next leg of this train ride which revealed a violent history as well as the ongoing consequences which targets Black communities across the nation.

After my meeting with James and Harriet, I reached out to Ella and Toni, leaders in BAC who had become invaluable mentors during my initial stage of developing a critical consciousness. Ella served as Chair of BAC during my freshman year and was a pre-law student from the south Dallas, TX-area (South Dallas) who never apologized for her identity as a Black woman or being from a low-income area. In fact, my admiration of Ella stemmed from the attribution of her love and advocacy for Black communities to being raised in the predominately-Black South Dallas. Toni, the current Chair of BAC, was also from Dallas and held an unshakeable love for Black people. In awe, I watched as she audited graduate African-American literature courses and prepared to graduate one year early. Between Ella and Toni, there were no two people I trusted more to suggest readings which explore the realities and consequences of institutional racism.

I sent Ella and Toni a text message requesting book suggestions and, before I finished the ten-minute drive to my apartment, received dozens of titles. Unfamiliar with most of their suggestions I was relieved to see Angela Davis' name from both Ella and Toni. Having recently had read her autobiography (1983), I decided that I would reread it with the killing of Trayvon as context. While Davis' autobiography was one of several that I would choose to read in my journey towards embracing social awareness, it serves as a critical representation of the way in which my consumption of knowledge responded

78

to an increased critical consciousness. Representative of both the development of critical consciousness as well as the specific evolutionary process occurring between SJYD awareness levels, my rereading of Davis' autobiography shifted my response to released details in Trayvon's case. Reflecting the *submersion* theme, this section specifically explores the sub-theme of *desire for Black-thought*, the mental evolution of an advanced awareness level, and its impact on my progression toward social awareness. Additionally, my submersion into Black-thought was met with *resistance* as I rationalized Davis' narrative as a distant reality which was to be used as an informative guide for Black activists to learn our history. However, when this *resistance* was met with a released 9-1-1 call capturing the final moments of Trayvon's life, I made explicit efforts to choose knowledge of institutional racism and its present realities over the denial which accompanies resistance. In turn, my social activism response was adjusted as I made the decision to travel to extend my activism from Twitter and my university town to Sanford, FL in protest.

It feels as though so much has happened in the six days that I've known Trayvon's name. Harriet, James, and I planned a vigil, campus rally, and visual protest. Even though I hated doing so because I know his name would go unmentioned, I begrudgingly attended every class. Or maybe I've missed a class or two. Honestly, the past few days have run together as I have been in this almost-manic search for more information, more knowledge. Well, it may seem *manic but it doesn't feel that way, at least it's beginning not to feel that way. Yesterday, after the meeting with James and Harriet, I took Ella and*

Toni's suggestion to read Angela Davis and stayed awake through the night to finish her

autobiography. Although I knew I should have gotten more sleep, especially considering

the little sleep I've had since learning Trayvon's name, I was too excited to stop reading.

Immediately, I was struck by the ways in which Davis describes racism as a "force":

> "I felt that such a book might end up obscuring the most essential fact: the forces that have made my life what it is are the very same forces that have shaped and misshaped the lives of millions of my people" (Davis, 1988, p. xv).

In my first reading, I hadn't noticed the powerful language she used to describe racism.

In fact, I'd mostly considered it an interesting story without reflecting upon the

individual and institutional levels of violent racism Davis survived. But, last night, I

couldn't sleep because I wanted to learn more about various pieces of her work. When

she introduced a new person in the story, I stopped to research their history. When she

described an event, particularly the San Quentin Six and her trial, I spent an hour online

looking up details. Stunned, I'd finished her autobiography fifteen hours later in

disbelief at the way this country used to be. Already missing my morning class, I decide

to take a quick nap and get ready for my class later in the day.

My reading of Davis' autobiography represents both themes of *submersion* and

resistance. Generally, my fixation on learning more about institutional racism coupled

with my *desire for Black-thought* reflect the way in which an evolution in awareness

impacted my perception and consumption of knowledge. When reading Davis while

situated in self-awareness, I consumed her narrative largely as a fictional, yet interesting,

account. In fact, when rereading, I realized how little I'd retained of her narrative as it

seemed as though I'd never read it before. While my second reading of Davis'

autobiography resulted in a dramatic shift which placed her narrative in context of

Trayvon's killing, I found my *resistance* endured as I rationalized her experiences as

truthful, yet distant memories of the past. This is critical as it reveals that *resistance* does

not have to be a verbal battle, such as my explicit questioning of 'Shoot me, I'm Black'

as a rally title. Instead, and perhaps more powerful in its shaping of my route towards

critical consciousness, it can be as simple as my refusal to fully embrace the primary,

and ongoing, role of institutions in shaping, often violently, our realities in the U.S.

However, as the saying goes, my train to social awareness had "already left the station".

I was entrenched in both peeling the layers of institutional racism as well as embedded

into a community in which I was learning to value Black lives over institutional excuses

for reasons their killings were justified.

After spending my afternoon fighting sleep in class, I am finally on my way home.

To pass time on the bus ride, I begin the habitual routine of opening Twitter to catch up

on any news concerning Trayvon. After spending the past day focusing on Angela Davis

and her story, I realize that I've neglected my fixation on Trayvon and am worried to see

what I may have missed. Immediately, I can see that something has been released and

has caused a lot of pain for my followers. It's a 9-1-1 call capturing the fatal gunshot.

My stomach flips as I scroll through my timeline to find a link or description. Right as I

*opened a link to the audio recording, a text message flashes on my phone, "*my God, did

you listen? Did you hear his screams?"

The *resistance* I found myself holding onto after rereading Angela Davis'

autobiography was challenged as I listened to the 9-1-1 call. A resident of the

neighborhood where Zimmerman killed Trayvon had made an emergency call as her

family heard screams for help. Although this would later be contested during

Zimmerman's trial, I had no doubt that those screams were from Trayvon as he realized

the danger he was in. Listening to a 17-year-old boy scream for help and the abrupt end

as a gunshot permeates the air, I found myself wondering how the police department

could hear this call and refuse to arrest George Zimmerman, or even further investigate.

Reflecting on the Davis' recount of her trial, clearly shaped by the control of institutional

racism, I began to connect her experience with that of Sanford police.

I'd only been home from class for about an hour when my mother called. Early

in the morning after our meeting, James sent us the created flyer for 'Shoot me, I'm

Black' and, after I took a moment to gather myself after hearing the 9-1-1 call, I joined

the others in posting it to our social media accounts. Within minutes, my mother saw the

flyer on Facebook and called to discuss its details. Since my discovery of Trayvon's

story on our trip to El Paso, my mom has been supportive of my fight to raise awareness

for Trayvon, often demonstrated through sporadic, encouraging text messages. When

she calls, I'm tired and I don't really want to talk about class or how my day was or

whatever other routine conversations a mother wants to have with her only daughter

who lives three hours away. However, I know that I can't become so fixated on Trayvon

that I both skip class and *ignore phone calls from my mother. I pick up the phone*

prepared to give a brief explanation of school.

"Aja, tell me more about this 'Shoot me, I'm Black' rally. How did you all

decide to do this?"

"Well, there is a rally happening in Sanford on the one-month anniversary of

Trayvon's murder. And, there are a bunch of rallies happening across the country so, my

friends and I decided to host our own rally on campus. People seemed really interested

in that as a possibility and would randomly ask if anyone was planning something so we

just figured…why not us?"

"Wait, there is a rally in Sanford? How do you know that?"

"Twitter, I get to talk to a lot of people who live in Florida, some even live in

Sanford, and they have been sharing the information. In fact, and this was almost funny,

they were sending me the information so that I could attend. Ha! Isn't that funny?

Twitter was so good at connecting us, they didn't even realize that I was in Texas."

"Hmm…"

I feel as though I need to explain my developing consciousness through my
rereading of Angela Davis. Too excited to discuss all that I'd learned from the
autobiography, I change the subject. "Mom, have you heard of Angela Davis? She was a
political revolutionary. Is. She still is. She wrote an autobiography and I just reread it. It
is so relevant! The entire time, I'm thinking of Trayvon and how everything she says still
applies. She even tells a story about a Black boy who was killed by police officers and
how they didn't do anything about his killer. It was just so eye-opening."

"Yes, I know who she is. You're my little Angela Davis, you just don't know it
yet," *she affectionately tells me.*

"Because I tweet and post on Facebook a lot? Ha, Angela is a revolutionary. I
just have a big mouth."

"No, because you have a heart for justice and have always fought for that. The
way you fight grows when your knowledge grows. Can I give you some knowledge
now?"*

"Always!"

"Angela Davis would go to Florida."

Summary

While the planning of 'Shoot me, I'm Black' challenged me to think beyond individual experiences of injustice, the released 9-1-1 call violently refocused my attention to the final moments of Trayvon Martin. With its release, I was reminded that my search to discover the realities of institutional racism was more than a side-project, it was important to our survival as I wanted to ensure my place in the fight against it. After being convinced by my mother to travel to Florida for the rally, which included a partial financial commitment to the trip, I realized it was only days away. Considering that I was a college student working part-time as tutor at an elementary school, I was not confident in my financial ability to travel to Florida on such short notice. Additionally, although my mother offered to cover part of the costs, I was sure that I would not be able to afford making the trip alone. However, when I began discussing my interest both online and in-person, Toni and Harriet immediately committed to joining me. Toni also offered her car as transportation, saving us the cost of renting a vehicle. Again, as my *resistance* grew weaker, my *community* stepped in to guide and support my evolution to social awareness.

Community, Evolved

Although going to the rally in Sanford meant Harriet and I would have to miss the 'Shoot me, I'm Black' planning committee, James encouraged us to drive to Florida while assuring us that he would work with Ella to ensure a successful rally. Too excited that a last-minute plan was coming to fruition, I shared our travel plans on Twitter. In doing so, we connected with an additional traveling partner, Josephine. I was happy to

have her join us as she had shown considerable support for my outspoken, unending tweets as well as reached out daily to discuss details of the case. In preparation for the long drive and attempt to save money, we made sandwiches, fried pieces of catfish, and purchased additional, miscellaneous snacks. At 6 am on March 25, 2012, Josephine, Harriet, Toni and I began our road trip to Sanford, FL. This section describes an evolved theme of *community* as I embarked with others to Sanford. In the beginning stage of my critical consciousness, this theme was present in my connection to those with whom I'd already had formed a relationship with. However, in the process toward social awareness, my sense of community would be dramatically expanded as I traveled to Sanford, FL to join protestors for Trayvon Martin.

After a twenty-hour road trip, with one overnight stop in Tuscaloosa, AL, we have arrived in Sanford, FL. Since I learned Trayvon's name, two weeks ago, I've envisioned this place…trying to imagine where Trayvon lived. What does a city look like when a Black boy is murdered and there is no justice? I never was never quite able to formulate a visual but that did not stop my surprise when we drove into Sanford. It's so…normal. These streets look similar to the streets I was raised on in DFW. People are filling up their cars with gas and others are going into the store to purchase groceries. I don't understand. On the other hand, I couldn't remember turning in an assignment in the past two weeks that my professors weren't disappointed in. My world stopped when I learned of Trayvon's murder, allowing me to focus on little else. Why hasn't theirs?

However, because we are running very late to the rally, we don't have any additional time to explore Sanford other than our drive through the town to the rally's location. In an attempt to be safe by splitting the road trip into two, my cousin allowed us to stay our first night of the trip in her Tuscaloosa, AL home. Although we woke up at 4 am to complete the second half of our trip, we didn't account for the time zone change and were running an hour late. For the last half hour, I was driving between 90 and 100 mph to guarantee that we would make it, at least, close to the beginning of the rally. Although dangerous, I was successful and we are now pulling up to the rally location. My hands are sweating and heart is racing. During the road trip, Harriet and Toni educated Josephine and I on the relationship between injustices against Black people and systemic realities. Feeling like a twenty-hour crash course in institutional racism, I leave the car more confident to participate in the rally.

We walk past dozens of cars, all of which are full of Black people who are going to the same rally. In the distance, I can hear resounding chants of "Justice for Trayvon! Justice for Trayvon!" I cannot believe that I am here. After two weeks of sleepless nights, ignoring class work, and countless conversations with other students on campus, I am in the same city with people who knew and loved Trayvon. People who have been profoundly impacted in ways I can only imagine. And, all of these people look so familiar. The way that vendors who are selling JUSTICE FOR TRAYVON t shirts say to us "hey sis, how are you doing," the deep bass of hip hop music coming from cars pulling up to the rally, and the warm smiles given when we briefly make eye contact

while walking…I am reminded of walking out of my high school, through the parking lot of Black youth hanging out at various cars while loudly playing music with their friends before going home for the day. In the snippets of overheard conversation, I recall the anger in which we recognized the different treatment between white and Black students and the passion in our voices when we defiantly told our teachers of this discrimination. This feels like home.

Harriet is very comfortable here and it reflects as she is the first one to drift away, stopping to speak with as many people as she can. Although this space feels familiar, I am not quite as bold as Harriet and remain off to myself for quite some time, observing the crowd (See Figure 2).
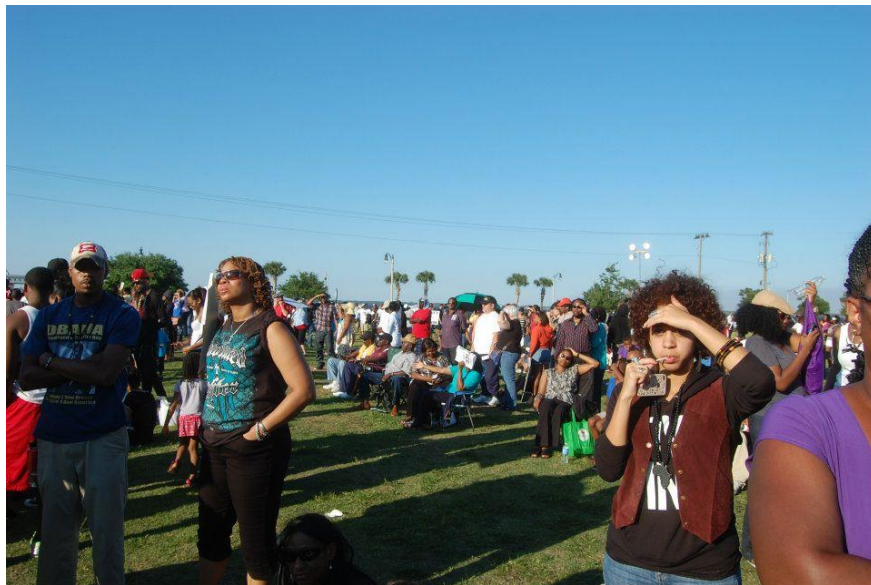

Figure 2. Sanford Rally

There were various individuals giving speeches when we arrived, including renowned leaders in the National Association for Advancement of Colored People and

students who had become leaders in raising awareness for Trayvon at their universities. In particular, I am in awe at the conviction in the student speeches. They don't appear to be much older than me, maybe juniors and seniors, but their speeches are so radically different than what I could ever imagine myself giving. Confidently attributing the bulk of this injustice to the Sanford police, they are making no apologies in their disgust for Zimmerman still being free. As I listen, I'm feeling conflicted because I'm both inspired and unnerved by their public tirade against the police, exasperated by the fact that police officers are here. Sanford police cars are everywhere and, while I've been to protests before where there is a police presence, today feels different. Today it feels as though the police aren't here to protect us. How could they be when the very reason we are here is because they refuse to arrest someone who brazenly killed one of us? In this conflict, I can feel my shoulders dropping, reflecting my decreasing confidence in being here. However, I remember the screams on that 9-1-1 call, which I can never unhear, and listen more intently to the student speeches. They are describing the failure of Florida's Stand Your Ground law, the same law which police officers used to rule Trayvon's murder as justified. Of the people whose killings have been justified under this law, most have been Black. Wow, what a terrifying statistic. This is a great example of the "institutional protection" that James and Harriet were explaining to me. I'll have to remember to tell James next time I see him. Before I allow myself to think of reasons, or excuses, for this inequality, Toni finds me. Wanting me to have conversations with people at the rally, she pulls me into a discussion with Harriet who is speaking with two girls, no older than 9 or 10 years-old, about how they feel about Trayvon. As I turn away

from the speeches, the students are raising their fists in conclusion and yelling "Black

power!"

Hours later, the formal rally had ended but most people remained in the large park

and talked with each other. But, now it's getting dark, our cell phones have died, and

Toni's friend, who offered their place for us to stay the night, lives a couple of hours

away. We need to get on the road but each of us has a transformative experience here. In

fact, "transformative" was the word Harriet used when we sat down on the grass and

reflected on the long day that we'd had. We didn't want to leave but knew we had to. As

I stand up and survey our surroundings, I see three older men with shirts on identifying

them as members of Omega Psi Phi. I'm really excited to see them because, in my

introduction to my campus Black community, I learned about the importance of African

American Greek life. In particular, a very good friend is an Omega and I want to let him

know that his fraternity brothers were protesting. Only intending to ask them for a

picture so I can send it to my friend, I walk up to them and strike up a conversation.

They are older, somewhere in their thirties, and overwhelmingly nice. I am surprised

that they want to continue having a conversation but feel a familial connection with them

so I indulge their questions. Harriet, Toni and Josephine are ready to go but I can see

they are happy that I did not have to be led into this conversation and started it on my

own. Almost immediately, the conversation shifts to us being from Texas and committing

to a day's drive to attend the rally. Ten minutes later, we have had an amazing

conversation! His questions and responses were shaped by powerful words like

"liberation," "freedom," "Black kings and Queens" and "community." He thanked us for driving hours to stand on the right side of justice and committing ourselves to learning a radical love for Black people. I've never felt so inspired to imagine a world where Black folks won't have to learn Trayvon's name because George Zimmerman wouldn't have murdered him. And where the U.S. stands with Black people against perpetually in opposition. Just in ten minutes! But, the girls have been patient enough and is it time for us to leave so we can be rested enough to make the return drive early tomorrow morning.

"Thank you so much for having this conversation with me. Really, you don't know what it means. But, I have to end the conversation or else my friends will kill me. We're driving back to Texas in the morning and the first driver is going to need a lot of sleep after today's drive."

"Wow, so all the way from Texas, huh? Roundtrip in just a couple of days. That's crazy. You and your friends must be so tired! Where are you staying tonight?"

Traveling as a young woman, I definitely know better than to give him that information. "It's actually far so we need to be leaving now." I'm disappointed because his asking that question makes me question his intentions…makes me see him as dangerous. Was he wanting to hurt us? Or even hitting on us is enough to frustrate me.

Regardless, I felt a sense of danger that I needed to respect and was reflected in my terse response.

"Yeah, absolutely. I figured you all probably hadn't had a real meal all day so I thought we could get you something to eat. Hold on, at least let us pay for you to grab something on your way. And some money for gas. I can't imagine how you college students were able to afford to drive here. Ha! You probably couldn't. Honestly, that makes me want to do this even more. Hold on."

He steps aside with his friends and they are rummaging in their pockets and wallets. I'm frozen in place, trying to figure out if this was really happening. I was wrong, I think. I can trust him? Are they going to give us money? Should we accept it? I don't have time to think or consult the girls because they are already walking back over. I'm going to accept it because we desperately need it. We're all dangerously close to running out of money in our accounts and could use the money for exactly what he said we would need it for, food and gas. Walking back, he hands me a wad of cash. My eyes bulge open; this is too much! I thought he would bring back $30 or $40. This has to be a couple hundred dollars!

"It's about $200. A little more, hopefully. It's not a big deal, we're grown men with full time jobs. Don't worry about the money. Just make sure you all drive safe and keep the fight alive in Texas. You're our sister, don't forget it."

As my eyes water, I give him a firm hug and thank him for being so kind. Bewildered, I walk back to the girls so we can search for our car. I tell him that the man I was talking to just gave us some money but I'll wait to show them in car. The entire walk, I grip the cash in my hoodie pocket to protect it. Is my mouth still open in shock? It feels like it. When we finally get to the car, I carefully count the bills and share that he gave us $207. This was just enough to get us back to Texas and help pay for meals along the way! Two hours later, I'm still replaying this generosity in my mind when we finally arrive at Toni's friend's home. Walking in, we see that his grace also extended further than what we were already so grateful for, simply letting us crash at his place. He is in culinary school and, thinking of how tired we would be from our day, had an amazing dinner waiting on us. I've never felt such a sense of community with strangers in my life! How is this possible? Although I'm trying to stay awake to participate in the recap of the day's events, I'd done the bulk of the last driving leg and am exhausted. As soon as I finish eating and make myself comfortable on the couch, I fall asleep within seconds.

The next morning, we woke up early to get started on our drive but got distracted as soon as we left the house to pack up the car. Because we'd come in late in the night, we'd missed the gorgeous view of Toni's friend's beachfront home. Although we knew that we should be leaving as soon as possible to arrive back in Texas at a fairly reasonable time, we couldn't pass up the chance to walk through the Atlantic Ocean at sunrise. Almost jumping up and down in excitement, we crossed the street, took off our

shoes and walked along the shore to let the water catch us when it hit. In the beginning, we talked and laughed, excited to be in this gorgeous setting. But, soon the energy shifted as we began to process *why* we were in Florida enjoying such a beautiful view. Processing the rally, we drifted into silence and I began to realize how emotional of an experience this was for me. During the rally, I listened to Trayvon's parents given an impassioned, but devastated, speech about fighting for his justice. I couldn't imagine their pain but it permeated the air and I felt the communal loss of Trayvon. It wasn't long before I started crying and, out of the corner of my eye, saw Josephine was as well. I grabbed her hand, letting her know that we were in this fight together. Smiling, she grabbed a larger shell, stooped where we were, and began writing in the sand. After a moment of confusion, I recognized what she was trying to do and grabbed my own sea shell to help her finish writing "RIP TRAYVON MARTIN 1995-2012" (See Figure 3).
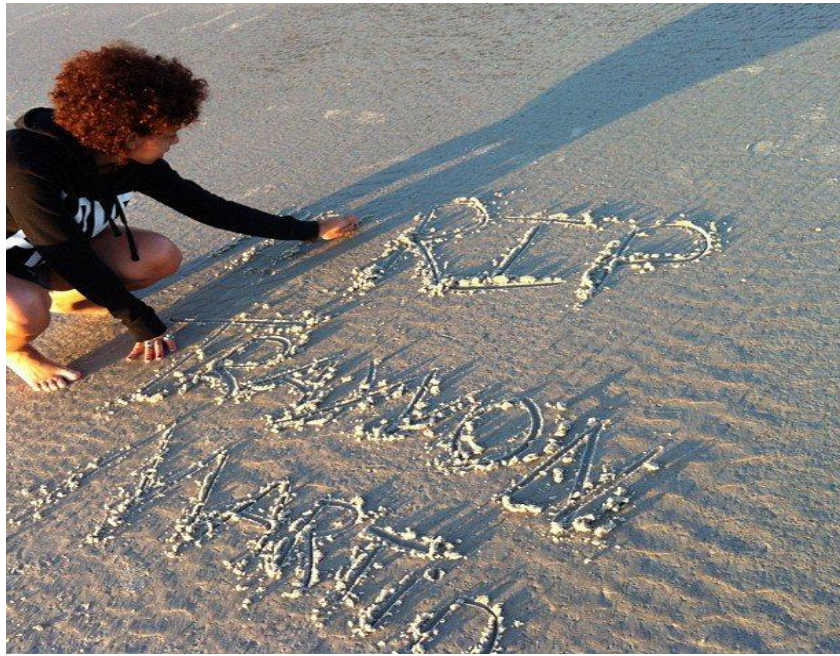
Figure 3. Rest in Peace, Trayvon Martin

During the two weeks prior to traveling to Sanford, FL, I participated in conversations challenging my level of self-awareness both on Twitter and within the Black community on my college campus. In centering the killing of Trayvon, I learned it was necessary to look beyond situational circumstances and question ways in which George Zimmerman's systemic protection reflected a pattern of institutional racism within the U.S. Traveling to Sanford, FL with Harriet, Toni, and Josephine acted as a defining, formal introduction into the embracing of a social awareness level. In a publication of this elevated level of awareness, I posted to my Facebook, "[b]eing 50 ft [sic] away from parents as they sob for their murdered child has made me extremely impatient to ignorance. Just a warning" (Aja Holston, March 27, 2012). In the process of this journey to social awareness, my understanding of community was impacted as I was

placed in spaces which welcomed me as a member of their community or, as the man in Sanford called me, "sister."

Summary

Two weeks later, on April 11, 2012, George Zimmerman was arrested and charged with second-degree murder for the killing of Trayvon Martin. Before that day, I had never felt such accomplishment. There was no doubt that our communal efforts as activists who fought to raise national awareness for Trayvon were successful. Additionally, I recognized that, while the charges brought forth addressed the killing of Trayvon, the systemic protection by Sanford PD, which allowed George Zimmerman to remain free for forty-five days, was effectively overlooked. Beyond the firing of the Sanford Chief of Police, Bill Lee (Rutland, 2012), there was little acknowledgement of ways in which institutional changes would be made that would prevent future institutional protection of suspects at the cost of justice for the victim, particularly when that victim is Black.

ONE YEAR LATER, A REFLECTION OF MY ACTIVISM AS SERIOUS LEISURE

In this section, I describe the underlying feature of my social activism as serious leisure which dramatically shaped my access to advanced levels of knowledge and facilitated a sharpening of my submersion into social awareness. The serious pursuit extends deep into my narrative which requires I shift to this section as I describe my social activism after Zimmerman was arrested. Here it is important to make the critical observation that, although I was in the *process* to social awareness, I had not yet *arrived* which indicates I was operating out of an evolving level of self-awareness. In this

context, it elevated events such as protests, speaking at panels and committing my social media to discussions around race to be examples of activism. This distinction is critical to understanding the evolution of my experience with activism.

Through my narrative analysis, two themes were revealed which describe the additional dimension of serious leisure to my experience, *privilege* and *ulterior motives.* Briefly described in my discussion of theoretical frameworks (pp. 39-40), *privilege* refers to my economic privilege. Although it was not a characteristic I recognized in the midst of my participation of social activism, its elements frequently appeared throughout my narrative, necessitating a thematic identification. Often, *privilege* was represented in my financial ability to travel to various activism events across the country but was also shown through additional dimensions, such as benefits of attaining a college-level education and subsequent access to critical, theoretical thought (panels and conferences). The second theme, *ulterior motives,* describes underlying reasons of fulfillment which encouraged a serious pursuit. Together, these are themes which describe reasons my social activism as serious leisure endured throughout Part I. Beginning with my initial discovery of Trayvon's killing, I responded by posting hundreds of tweets per day to my Twitter account and experienced a sense of elation as I gained over two thousand followers who were vocal in their admiration for my developing analysis of institutional responsibility. Additionally, after Zimmerman was arrested, both my Twitter followers and fellow students in my campus community praised my involvement in a successful fight for social justice and celebrated my skills by inviting me to sit on workshop panels

and speak at organizational programs. It is this celebration that begins the seduction of social activism which ushers me into participation as serious leisure.

In the serious leisure perspective, the amateur form of the science category is labeled as observers with apprentices, journeymen, and masters as their three stages of pursuit (Stebbins & Elkington, 2014). After Zimmerman was arrested and our three-month summer break arrived, I decided to spend the vacation at my mother's home instead of staying in my college town as was custom in the Black student community. However, I desperately wanted the space to process Trayvon's killing, our fight for awareness, and Zimmerman's arrest. During this stage of processing, my apprenticeship in social activism began as I hoped to learn enough about activism as a discipline of study, "its research procedures, and its instrumentation" to advance in skill level, or to the next stage of journeymen (Stebbins & Elkington, 2014, p. 63). My limited experience in activism, particularly as it was impacted by my evolving self-awareness level, shaped my definition of these features. Primarily, my summer break consisted of scientific inquiry through exploring the developing canon of Black activist literature that I was developing access to. This included works such as *The New Jim Crow Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (Alexander, 2012) and *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon, 1967). In this process, I considered Twitter as a space for application of my study, shifting the understanding of my role to that of a teacher. Additionally, as scientific inquiry advanced my level of knowledge about institutional racism, my awareness level continued in its evolution and repeatedly challenged me to expand my analyses further. Again, this impacted the celebration of my insight (mostly presented

through Twitter) which facilitated a deep sense of fulfilment for me, motivating my continued study.

One year after Zimmerman was arrested, as I advanced to the journeyman stage which indicates a knowledgeable and reliable ability to practice the learned skill, I'd gained a following both on Twitter and on my university campus of supporters who considered me to be a valuable social activist. This connected me to a scholar-activist who approached me about attending a convening that was to occur in July 2013 for Black youth activists. Its purpose was to bring one hundred young, Black activists together from across the U.S. to strategize ways in which to engage Black youth beyond electoral politics. One of its organizers forwarded along the application with a suggestion that I complete it and make myself available to attend. Although I was quite proud of the work that I accomplished on campus as an activist, particularly through my position as Chair of BAC, I was unsure as to my qualifications to attend a national convening of activists. Nevertheless, I followed the suggestion and applied, emphasizing my interest in child advocacy and racial justice. Sure that I would not be accepted among the group of professionals guaranteed to attend, I quickly forgot about the application and continued on at my university. However, in May 2013, I unexpectedly received an email from the organizers of the convening informing me that I'd been accepted to attend. In my acceptance, I felt affirmed that my social activism since the killing of Trayvon was critical to the movement for social justice.

Rummaging through my suitcase, I push past colorful, printed clothes, my wooden necklace in the shape of the African continent, and several books to find what I am looking for. Finally grabbing the familiar pages, I pull out my Malcolm X autobiography and sit in the bed to begin reading. I arrived to Chicago only an hour ago and, after arriving at the convening location, learned my hotel roommate would be arriving minutes after I got settled in. I was intimidated as hell to be here and wanted to make a good impression on the person I would be staying with until Sunday. And, I couldn't think of a better way to do so than being walked in on reading the autobiography of the revolutionary Malcolm X. Although, to be honest, I'd been trying to read it for a little over a year and hadn't been able to get into it in the same way Angela Davis had captured my attention. But, that didn't matter because I knew I wouldn't be able to focus much on just passing time as I waited on my roommate to arrive. About a half hour passed before she walked in. As soon as I hear the hotel key inserted into the door and the knob turn, my heart races as I quickly scan my appearance. Is my hair big enough? But will she be able to see the red, black and green Africa earrings or are they hidden? Damnit, I should have sat on the chair so she could see the title of the book! Now, she'll only be able to see the back cover.

My preparation to attend the convening and intentional shaping of my initial encounter with a fellow participant is profoundly revealing of the way in which I conceptualized social activism, allowing for my pursuit of it as serious leisure. Situating it within a culture with aesthetic requirements (such as having natural hair or bright,

printed clothes) and knowledge standards (such as Malcolm X's autobiography as basic, required reading), I structured the elements of a social world for social activism. However, I had yet to be in the presence of was the professional counterpart to my amateur role of social activism. What I quickly realized in the first session of the convening, a dedicated time to discuss topics such as reproductive justice, mass incarceration, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) issues, is that there was a fundamental difference between my approach to social activism and that of several other participants and convening organizers which was grounded in the awareness level through which we operated.

After the first session, I realize there is so much I just don't know. I heard words and phrases that I would have never put together on my own! Preferred gender pronoun. Reproductive and economic justice. And everyone is so brilliant! They are connecting facets of life together and have given me so many answers to questions that I didn't know I had! Now, I just want to talk to everyone. As I think this, three of the participants invite me into their conversation. They are all from Chicago and are describing the work they do and how they can do it together for a greater impact. When I'm invited in, they ask me what the work is that I do. Wait, what do I do? Almost every Black organization has asked me to sit on panels for their programs. I gained thousands of Twitter followers. And, hello! I went to Florida to protest! Even though I want to say all of that but, for some reason, it doesn't seem right.

In the way that I was introduced to it on this first day of the convening, social justice *organizers* are this professional counterpart who have accessed awareness and education (formal and/or informal) levels which far surpassed my limiting self-awareness. To be a social justice organizer is to have a skill set that one develops with knowledge and experience. It is not the person attending a demonstration but the one (or group) who developed that action as part of long-term strategic planning. This connection to professional organizers began a redefining of social activism as I was surrounded by people who did not participate for personal fulfilment but because the violence of institutional racism required it for the survival of Black communities. Additionally, my self-awareness level activism was challenged as I was pushed to think about ways I was impacting and organizing within my *own* community, rather than in the privileged niche of my college campus and social media.

CONCLUSION

The first day of the convening profoundly changed my life. There is no other way to describe it. Every conversation I observed and participated in, from our first chats over lunch to dialogues over drinks lasting until the late night hours (and everything in between) challenged me to grow deeper in my understanding of the inextricable relationship between institutional racism and lived realities of all Black people. I had never, in my life, had to think so critically about features of this society when concerning Black people. On several occasions throughout the day, I found myself in bewilderment, asking "where else can I devote the topic of every conversation to Black people and our realities, struggles, and victories? Even back home, my devouring of knowledge

102

concerning Black communities and racial justice would have to be paused when I attended my majority-white, undergraduate courses which solely discussed history through the lens of white actors. Or, when I clocked into my job as a waitress as one of the only Black girls to have worked there, ever. Not until this experience with other activists did I realize how very lonely I was. In particular, how lonely it is to have limited spaces in which to engage others with undivided attention given to the consequences of U.S. institutional. Being at this convening crafted a vision for community that inspired me in ways I'd never imagined. However, before I could process this inspiration and include it into my own worldview to take home as a tangible reality, the death of Trayvon Martin as a result of institutional racism and its consequences came crashing down on us.

When my alarm sounded at 6:00am this morning, I begrudgingly woke up, confident I could sleep well past noon. I was exhausted. Mentally, I felt as though I'd ran a marathon with very little training and had to get right back up to do it again. Realizing this came as a result of the levels to which I critically pushed my analyses, I was almost embarrassed until my hotel roommate expressed the same exhaustion when we walked down to breakfast. And, we weren't alone in this feeling. Over a hushed breakfast, many of us chatted about the physical and mental toll of yesterday's activities while also acknowledging our continued excitement for today's full schedule of workshops and strategic planning. Despite my actual muted participation, I was committed to engaging the other attendees, learning as much as possible from them. Additionally, I knew there

would be a chance to recharge where we could emphasize lighthearted fun as several of us made plans to enjoy a night out in downtown Chicago after the conference activities wrapped for the day.

Walking out of the conference room after an energized closing, I'm thinking about which of my three packed dresses will I wear out tonight. I notice small crowds forming around various televisions mounted throughout the hallways. But, other than taking note, I don't explore further to see what is drawing so many people away from their conversations. Sitting down on a comfortable chair, I open Twitter to see what is being discussed by my friends from home. Almost instantly, my stomach flips as I read, "the jury has reached a verdict for George Zimmerman." Within seconds, several others were posting similar tweets, reading less like an announcement and more like warnings. How can they have reached a verdict? I'm sure that it's too soon. They just began deliberating yesterday! My panic-stricken face shoots up in search of the nearest television. Sure enough, the news channel is on and the reports are showing images of George Zimmerman. His face…I've never loathed someone's face so much. I can't stand to look for more than a second so I focus elsewhere. I know that I need to get somewhere, anywhere, to watch the verdict. Just as I'm thinking about running to my hotel room for the privacy, I hear the message passed along from the convening organizers, "We're going to show the verdict in the conference room. We want everyone together during this time. Come on, let's hold each other up right now."

Some participants are almost running into the conference room so they don't miss a moment of its coverage. I am one of the others who are walking very slow, deliberate. Regardless, all of us have fear etched onto our faces. Swept into its flood, I realize that I've never felt the terror that follows racism before. I've known it to be true, discovered various intricacies of its institutional impact, but never have I felt *it in this way. Flashing before my eyes, I remember defining events of the past fifteen months. Learning Trayvon's name while visiting my grandmother in El Paso, TX. Sanford, FL. The various programs that BAC hosted inspired by systemic injustice and Trayvon. The countless conversations I had trying to deconstruct how these circumstances could have occurred. Over a year ago, my world changed in a way I never wanted and it all seemed to be crashing in on me at once.*

The message to watch the verdict together was received by most of the hundred participants. As we filed in, each person's hand was grabbed so as to be included in the developing circle. Several people are both calling and texting my phone so, before I join the circle, I put it in a corner to ensure my undivided attention to the verdict. My eyes feel as though they are burning and I realize, through blurry vision, that I am holding back tears. Joining the circle, there is something that won't let me cry, not yet. The projector is brought down and connected to a live streaming of the verdict. Without sound I can only look at the faces in the courtroom. I realize I am searching for Trayvon's parents. If they are not crying, I won't either. But…where are Trayvon's parents? I scan the courtroom again. My God, they aren't there. I start shaking as a

terror forms a lump in my throat that I cannot swallow away. Someone turns up the

projector volume.

Concluding moments before my moment of racialized trauma, this chapter

situated a critical, preparatory stage which, while not brief, provides necessary context

for Part II. Covering a time period of almost a year and a half, Part I explored my

journey to critical consciousness following the discovery of Trayvon Martin in March

2012 as well as my responses through until July 2013. In the process, three themes were

revealed which illuminate critical features of the evolutionary process between

awareness levels. *Submersion* refers to the complete immersion into the analysis of an

advanced awareness level, particularly appearing in my fixation on studying (and

returning to) subject matter using the newly available critical analysis. *Community*

supported my submersion into social awareness by facilitating access to previously-

unknown knowledge and, most importantly, critically challenging me to extend my

analyses beyond individual components of Trayvon's killing to consider institutional

features and patterns. In the final theme of my evolution to social awareness, *resistance*

was shown to be in thematic opposition to *submersion* as the ideological dominance of

racism fiercely sought to protect the deception it thrives on which allows a continued

shaping of U.S. institutions that subjugate and oppress Black communities. In addition to

working in opposition, *submersion* and *resistance* were mediated by *community* as they

refocused my denial of the realities of institutional racism and challenged me to critically

consider its impact. In the next chapter, Part II, covers a much shorter time period and

examines my experience with racialized trauma as I arrive at social awareness through

my trauma and navigate both the symptoms, lingering effects of social activism as

leisure, and radical healing.

CHAPTER V PART II: AFTER

INTRODUCTION

In Part II, I follow my narrative describing both my experience with RIBT and subsequent responses, particularly examining the way in which social activism facilitated radical healing from trauma through an analysis of the five features of RHM as well as an examination of residual influences of my serious pursuit of activism. Recall these five features of RHM to be culture, agency, relationships, meaning, and achievement (CARMA) and my involvement in social activism to be shaped through a serious, scientific pursuit. In the analysis of the second part to my narrative, an in-depth perspective was gained of the lived experience of navigating racialized trauma. While themes in Part I may seem similar to those described in this chapter, particularly that of community, it is important to recognize my racialized trauma was a transformative event occurring while in the process of a broader journey to critical consciousness described in Part I. While it is possible to analyze the presence of CARMA in the examination of my experiences in Part I, it is important to distinct this model as a response to *trauma* resulting from racism. Prior to the not guilty verdict, I navigated a journey to critical consciousness which, while uncomfortable, was not shaped by experiencing trauma. However, Part II begins just moments after the conclusion of Part I, exploring the lived experience of suffering from racialized trauma and implications of social activism as serious leisure and radical healing.

FINDINGS

Centering my two remaining research questions, Part II examines the way in which *race-incident based trauma* impacted my journey to critical consciousness through an exploration of the second half of my narrative, or *truth.* To understand this relationship, recall my metaphorical train ride described in the previous chapter. Part I concludes with my arrival to the second destination, or social awareness. In particular, my first day at the convening facilitated this arrival as I submerged myself into the knowledge of this new community, which was significantly further advanced than mine. However, as my critical consciousness train pulled into the social awareness station, the foundation of my ideological resistance remained. This resistance was founded upon the fundamental notion that, while unfortunate circumstances may befall particular communities, I navigated an institution which strove for justice and equality. My resistance to fully accepting the U.S. as an institutionally oppressive society was fighting its final battle against my submersion into social awareness when we came together to hear the reading of the verdict.

Although I wanted the verdict to honor our fight for justice in finding Zimmerman guilty of murdering Trayvon Martin, I feared the jury would follow the country's pattern of racialized violence, an understanding which developed as I learned about institutional racism. However, as the jury read their not guilty verdict for Zimmerman, the foundation which built my trust in U.S. institutions crumbled as I fully accepted the violence of institutional racism. It is in this moment that my experience with racialized trauma occurs and, as a result, violently pushes my train off course.

Instead of awaiting an appropriate-level challenge to my social awareness which would usher in the journey to the final stage of critical consciousness, global awareness, my racialized trauma paralyzed the evolution. However, because I'd created meaningful spaces of activism through my serious pursuit of the activity, I found myself surrounded by the community of young, Black people who inspired the development of the radical healing model which significantly impacted my healing from racialized trauma. Through an analysis of my narrative, the significant impact of CARMA was revealed. See Table 2 for a comprehensive overview of ways in which CARMA manifested radical healing through my experiences. While my narrative will only highlight particular examples, see the table for additional instances revealed through my analysis.

Radical Healing Model Features	Example in experience
Culture	Chants learned from convening participants, slogan of "unapologetically Black," performative demonstrations/declarations of the value Blackness, graduation (raising a fist representing Black power as I walked across the stage)
Agency	Developed programs through BAC platform which addressed the violence of institutional racism
Relationships	Connected to organizers (professional activists) in meaningful, intimate spaces of activism (Chicago, New York, D.C.)
Meaning	Organized campus discussions to determine strategic response to not guilty verdict, was assigned tasks (such as writing press releases, blog posts, and articles), developing presentations as youth activists in scholarly spaces, choice to attend graduate school to study racism as trauma,
Achievement	Appearing on nationally syndicated talk show, successful campus discussions (townhalls) which listed goals to accomplish by year's end, completing those goals

Table 2. Elements of Radical Healing Model in My Experience

NARRATIVE

Just moments after the verdict, the conference room felt like a nightmare. People were falling to the ground, either in stunned silence or desperate screams, while others stared at the projector screen in disbelief. Underlining the soundtrack to our pain was an endless buzzing of cell phones as calls from concerned parents, friends, and partners went ignored. Though I don't remember who, someone knelt down and wrapped me in their arms while rocking me back and forth. The only other time I have been comforted in this way was at my grandfather's funeral when I was 10 years-old. A decorated military veteran born in 1938, Poppy was my favorite person in the world. My most treasured memories include climbing onto him while he sat in his recliner and listening to him answer all my questions about the detective shows in black-and-white he would watch. Or him tossing me onto his shoulders as we took walks so I could "feel big in this world." But, soon after my mother, brother and I moved to El Paso, TX, his infamous deep-belly laughs and firm handshakes grew weak. When he could hardly bear the pain anymore, his doctor confirmed our greatest fear. Cancer was viciously destroying his body and leaving him with only a few months to live. Just under six months later, we were at his wake and someone was trying to convince me that the emaciated, stiff body in the casket was my Poppy who used to laughingly throw me up on his shoulders. Forced to accept his ugly death, I wept as my mother rocked me back and forth.

Eventually, my voice fails and I can't cry out loud anymore. Pulling myself up, I leave the room to find somewhere else to be. Anywhere else to get away from what just

112

happened, from the jury justifying George Zimmerman killing an unarmed boy because of a perceived threat. It feels as though the waves that have been building over the past fifteen months are crashing down on me and I'm drowning. Somehow, I make it to the hallway, trying find my way back to my hotel room. I want nothing more than to curl into the bed and sleep until it is time to catch my flight tomorrow. Dazed, I replay the verdict in my head. Not guilty. Not guilty. How could the jury have listened to the testimonies of Trayvon's parents or Rachel, the last person to speak to Trayvon as he was confronted by Zimmerman, and not see the treasure that was lost? I'd only been able to watch parts of the trial before I could no longer stomach the defense of Zimmerman but, from the limited time I did watch, the tragedy he was responsible for was obvious. I watched as Trayvon's mom was forced to listen to the 9-1-1 call capturing the fatal gunshot and identify the desperate screams as belonging to her son. I can't imagine how the jury could have heard that testimony and decide against legal justice. But, I'd also seen the defense attorneys go unchecked by the prosecution as they dehumanized every Black person who testified, from smugly asking Trayvon's mom if she was employed or characterizing Rachel as an unintelligible, ghetto Black girl. The jury's alignment with Zimmerman's racist defense was painfully obvious. Does that mean that anyone can do this? Anybody can just…shoot us? And our families, partners, and friends are left to pick up the pieces after a failed conviction? Why did we even fight for an arrest if he was just going to be found not guilty after a six-week trial? Honestly, just thinking about it…I can't walk anymore. I fall against a wall and slide down.

Within moments, one of the convening's organizers reaches me, sits down and grabs my hand. It takes me a minute to build the courage to look her in the eye but, when I do, I see that she is crying too. For some reason, this surprises me. She is a well-established scholar-activist whose down-to-earth brilliance creates a spirit of commanding wisdom. Recognizing her name on the convening invitation from one of the books I'd read in the past year, I was really intimidated to be around her but she has this friendly personality and fierce protection for Black lives that rejects that energy. But, in my awe of her intelligence and activism, I forgot that she also has to feel this pain of knowing she is in just as much danger for being Black as Trayvon was. I'm embarrassed that I was surprised she is crying as though I am the only one to suffer this loss. The screams in harmony with mine after the verdict should have also told me that. But, it is her puffy, tired eyes and aggravated cheeks that show me the reflection of how terribly sad I must look. We are both devastated. Jarring my thoughts, she begins to help me up and returns with me to the conference room. I must have given some indication of being ready to move. I'm not. It hurts everywhere.

Ten years after reconciling the death of my cancer-stricken Poppy, I suffered from RIBT as I watched the killer of Trayvon be found not guilty. While Poppy's death and Zimmerman's not guilty verdict were both traumatic experiences, Trayvon's story was unchartered territory requiring my recognition of U.S. racial violence and the institutions defending it. Although the RHM describes my healing process after RIBT, it was not until graduate school that I began to recognize social activism as a healing

space. Instead, this retrospective analysis has revealed the features which facilitated a slow and steady healing process. However, while in the moment of my trauma, I was forced to accept the subjugation over Black communities through institutional, racial violence as a fixed reality and could not foresee possible ways to recover. As a child, I navigated a well-understood healing process that follows the death of a loved one. This included excused absences from elementary school, available resources allowing me to express my emotions, and a sense of empathy from both those who had and hadn't experienced a similar loss.

When Poppy passed, I felt powerless in knowing I would never again hear his voice or be annoyed at his too-long conversations with strangers. As I grew older and learned the inevitability of death as well as the power in living life to its full potential, the pain of losing Poppy hurt less. On the contrary, the not guilty verdict facilitated a sense of loss that was exacerbated by a realization that Black people must navigate the U.S. as potential victims of justified homicide. As the jury looked beyond Zimmerman's disobedience of emergency dispatch instructions against confronting Trayvon and subsequent gunshot to his 17-year-old heart, I could no longer overlook the institutional protection of racism. In the days following this trauma, I suffered symptoms that rendered me unable to get out of bed. When I was compelled to return to the world, which had not stopped to mourn Trayvon, I incorporated the mourning process into my daily routine.

Reimagining Social Activism Outside of Serious Leisure

When we were dismissed from the conference room after an emotional time of expression, I resumed my attempt to seclude myself in my hotel room. This trip was interrupted when a few participants swept me into their embraces. I tried to slip away as we made our way to the bar but couldn't gather the energy to plan an escape. Instead, I found myself at the hotel bar with a margarita in front of me and surrounded by activists I'd come to greatly admire during the convening. In the midst of trying to adjust my taste buds to the extra shot of tequila I'd ordered, plans were being made around me to join protests in downtown Chicago. I hadn't wanted to go but I also couldn't muster a convincing refusal so I went through the motions of finishing my drink, putting on warmer clothes, and navigating the public transit familiar to city-dwellers. Of the activists I joined, Angie silently, but undoubtedly, accepted the responsibility for taking care of me through the night. For this, I was grateful as Angie exuded a familiar spirit which reminded me of home. In her unapologetic queerness, updated 90s fashion and thoughtful analyses interjected to probe a problematic strategy, there was no one I would have rather been supported by in the aftermath of the verdict.

Shuffling through the transit station, I remained silent for the better part of the trip and listened as the Chicago-based activists discussed their critical analyses of institutional racism. Controlled by my trauma, I contributed very little to the conversation, even falling asleep on Angie's shoulder on the train ride. However, I broke my silence when we arrived at the protest in downtown and they began discussing the relationship between Zimmerman's verdict along with their experiences of institutional

inequality while living on the south side of Chicago. Previously, I'd only known Chicago through the mainstream narrative depicting the city as a murder capitol whose Black residents were at fault. In fact, before flying to the conference, my friends and I had jokingly prayed for my safety during my stay in "Chiraq" (a slang term original to Chicago which soon turned to an externally-used slur reflecting the higher numbers of deaths in Chicago than in Iraq). However, in this discussion, I would learn an additional dimension of institutional racism as well as observe the culture of social activism which facilitates my serious pursuit.

*"...*hell yeah, even though I should know better, I was still hoping the jury would do the right thing, you feel me? I mean, we got nothing outta this case but an arrest which is patronizing as fuck."

We've finally arrived at the protest in downtown. About 100 people are here and they are chanting "Justice for Trayvon!" Mostly, people are standing in groups and having really emotional conversations. Because of the chant, I'd missed what Angie was responding to but, as I caught the end of her comment, I decided to listen in on the conversation. Well, I'm sure I could join if I wanted to but I just can't. While I'm grateful to be with these organizers for social justice in the midst of responding to the verdict, I feel like an outsider in Chicago and want to return home as soon as possible. So, while I know that I'm included in this group and could participate in the conversation, I refrain and just listen.

117

"Honestly though, what did we expect from a police force who drops off children in gangs to rival territory."

"Wait, what? What do you mean by that?" Angie's comment had completely shocked me and, before I knew it, I was asking questions.

"Welcome back sis. Yeah, cops down here are so corrupt. People talk about our city like the worst thing about it are the poor Black folk but we not doing nothing but responding to fucked up structural oppression. So, for example, we got a lot of gangs in Chicago. And, I'm from the Southside so I've grown up my whole around it. And, gangs started as a whole other response to structural racism but I won't get into that right now because I can see how tired you are. Basically, cops will pick up people who are in gangs, ask them for something they want to know and, if they don't get the answer they want, will drop that person off in rival gang territory. So, you either look like you just snitched to the cop or you're outta luck for just being in that rival territory."

Although my metaphorical train ride may have been knocked off course in the aftermath of my trauma, I had still arrived at social awareness. In the way Trayvon's killing began to reveal parts of a world unknown, this conversation with Angie helped shape my perspective of the world through social awareness by acting as an introduction to community consequences of institutional racism, "gangs started as a whole other

response to structural racism." Additionally, and most critical to the introduction of radical healing, this conversation guided a reimagining of social activism outside of serious leisure. Prior to both the weekend's convening and the conversation indicting Chicago police officers as active and willing perpetrators of institutional, racialized violence, I'd only aligned my social activism with that which could personally satisfy or fulfill me. Primarily after Zimmerman was arrested, I didn't relate it as something that I *had* to. Instead, I enjoyed my participation, and the advanced skill levels I achieved, because of the way social activism personally benefitted me. However, Angie's comments revealed that social activism was not a choice for her. Rather, it was a means of *survival.* This reimagining ushered in the benefits of radical healing as my selfish motivations took a backseat to the needs of the violent oppression Black communities face. In doing so, radical healing rebuilt my route and carried me to global awareness. However, while this interaction served as a critical introduction to the world through a social-awareness lens, I was too deep into my trauma to begin processing this new information. Instead, it would be part of my reflection during the initial stage of my recovery.

It's been three days since I finally made it to my apartment from Chicago. I only know this because I was scheduled to work at my job as a waitress the day after I returned and was to work again in four days. Originally, I was supposed to work the entire weekend after my trip to make up for the money I'd lost this past weekend. However, my favorite person to work with, one of the only other Black girls at my job,

reached out to take some of my shifts so I could try to recover before coming back. When

I got her text message, I started crying as I remembered how difficult it was for me to

work the day after I returned. I'd had to step into the bathroom several times to recover

from uncontrollable moments of sobbing. Because of my unapologetic advocacy for

Trayvon in the past, my coworkers were well-aware of the reasons for my sadness but

the white managers were unfazed by the verdict, even carelessly showing triggering

news coverage on the restaurant televisions. When I started crying for the third time in

under an hour, they were left with no choice but to send me home as soon as the flow of

customers was slow enough to allow it. Thinking about it, Monday was both the last time

I'd left the house or talked to anyone. I hadn't meant to disappear but I'd been sleeping

most of the days and felt too tired to really engage people in their off-target attempts to

comfort me. So, it's been three days since I've been home and two days of isolation when

I hear a loud banging on my front door. I decide to ignore it when I hear, "Aja! Girl,

open the damn door or I will break it down! I swear I will."

Immediately recognizing the voice of my one my best friends, I do not want to be

bothered by Gloria. But, I also know that she came over because it's been a few days

and my friends haven't heard from me. I can't ignore her, plus she did make it clear she

wouldn't go away, so I get out of my bed answer the door. Silently, I open the door and

walk back to my bed to return to my commitment of lying down until my next shift for

work in a couple of days. For a couple of minutes, Gloria awkwardly sits on the floor

beside my bed, asking me questions about how I'm doing until it seems like she can't

take it anymore. My bluntest, but most caring friend, I can see the outburst coming and mentally prepare myself to understand it is coming from a loving place.

"Wow, friend, you look like shit. My God, have you done anything to yourself since you've gotten back from Chicago?? Seriously, you can't lie here all day."

"Gloria, I'm trying. And right now, this is literally all I can do. Please don't push this."

"Hmm...fine. But, Aja, we don't get to be sad. You need to go through this process faster because you have responsibilities."

In my analysis of this conversation with Gloria, it was made plain the way in which a limited theorization of racism as trauma impacts the lived experiences of those who were victims of its violence, whether primary or secondary. Gloria, in her well-meaning attempt to cajole me out of bed, expressed the unique burden of Black people because, while we may suffer from racialized trauma, we also "have responsibilities" which are not conducive the healing process. Most importantly, I was expected to get up and continue in my obligations because "we don't get to be sad." I'd never considered it before but, when Gloria lovingly chastised me, I began thinking about ways that those who have suffered racialized trauma before me must have navigated that experience. Additionally, what about the dozens of convening participants who were employed in

full-time careers and did not have the luxury of lying in bed for days. And, what about the other students at my university who hadn't had the opportunity to be surrounded by professional activists with access to a well-developed, critical analysis from which to construct enlightenment. The interplay between my racialized trauma, developing critical consciousness as I'd entered the world of social awareness, and the privilege afforded to me through my serious pursuit of activism maintained a critical relationship here as I began to recognize ways in which my experience was different than that of others.

Radical Healing through Social Activism

In the shift which reimagined social activism outside of serious leisure, space was created which ushered in radical healing through CARMA. Although my social activism originally began as a result of a developing critical consciousness, the allure of the fulfillment which can accompany public accolades for seemingly-successful activism significantly impacted my social activism in Part I. However, after experiencing racialized trauma, in what can only be described as my most publicized and celebrated moment of activism, I began a critical shift out of my serious pursuit and toward a participation of social activism which facilitated the radical healing process. Prior to the not guilty verdict, Ella and I had scheduled a visit to New York, NY which took place almost two weeks after Gloria forced me to get out bed. Shortly before our trip, I reached out to convening participants who lived in the city and let me them know that I would be in town and would like to spend time with those who were available. Despite my emotions, I did want to meet with anyone who lived in the city as we would be there

for a couple of days. Before the end of the day, and in a whirlwind experience, one of the

convening's organizers called me to ask if I would appear on a nationally-syndicated talk

show hosted by Dr. Melissa Harris Perry. Both confused as to why I was chosen and

stunned as to its happening, I accepted. As I'd done with every other perceived

accomplishment, I posted the information to my Twitter page and relished the influx of

celebration from both known and unknown followers. But, this time was different. After

a weekend with activists and organizers whose analyses ran much deeper than mine, I

did not feel that I was an appropriate choice to represent our newly-newly formed union.

Instead of the boastful confidence with which I often approached social activism, my

reimagining of it as an experience for survival called into question whether I would be

able to rise to the challenge. And, although my appearance on the show received praise

from everyone I knew, I was more excited to get to a protest to the majority (and

historically) Black Harlem neighborhood. Rather than feeling fulfilled from being a

guest speaker I was empowered with a sense of hope as I connected with others in the

protest who believed change would come through strategic organizing.

Primarily, my experiences with social activism have reflected events external to

my college campus because, while it was influenced by my external activism, the bulk of

the impact came from activism off campus. However, in a reflection of the way in which

social activism facilitated a healing space, I think it is critical to examine two programs

which represent the way in which my experiences with social activism facilitated a

healing space, *Fruitvale Station* and *Black Girls Rock.* Just weeks after Zimmerman was

found not guilty of killing Trayvon, during the trip Ella and I took to New York, we

went to a local movie theatre to watch the newly-released *Fruitvale Station*. This film recreates the final hours of Oscar Grant's life, a Black man whose name gained national publicity after a white police officer shot and killed him in Oakland, CA on the New Year holiday. Fresh in our own racialized trauma, Ella and I reacted to the final moments of the film similarly to our individual reactions to learning about the not guilty verdict. As his killing was recreated, I doubled over in pain. Sitting next to me, Ella grabbed my hand as she tried to control her wailing. For half an hour after the movie ended, we sat in our chairs and cried until our tears ran dry. After walking to the closest bar in silence, Ella and I processed our pain.

*"Why does this hurt so bad? Why can't we just **live**? I mean, how are we even supposed to do that? Ella, I can't stand being around all these white people right now. Look at them! They don't even know what this hell is like!"*

"Aja, what do we do? I really don't know anymore."

This brief excerpt from my conversation with Ella reveals critical themes found throughout my narrative of trauma, *powerlessness, pain,* and *confusion.* In the midst of our conversation, I decided I would use my leadership position in BAC to develop a program showing *Fruitvale Station* with a panel discussion to follow. Months later, the program came to fruition and I watched as a full audience reacted very similarly to my experience with Ella. Underscoring my motivation for this program was an intense desire for others to, at a minimum, recognize the pain that accompanies being Black. In

contrast, after experiences of radical healing described earlier, an alternate motivation was established which reflects a significant shift towards collective hope, a combined effort of "sharing experiences, radical imagination, and critical action" (Ginwright, 2015, pp. 22-23). As CARMA impacted my radical healing from racialized trauma, I began to imagine ways in which Black people actively fight back against our trauma. This combination is symbolically represented in my development of *Black Girls Rock,* a program which sought to empower Black women in the community by honoring organizers, educators, and students.

CARMA

As I begin this section, I am reminded of what is most difficult about constructing an autoethnography. As the primary source of data, I have access to every detail of my story in ways that no other researcher could. Because of my incredible access to data, I could spend a considerable time writing on the impact of individual features of radical healing for those suffering from traumatized racism, let alone the entire model. Centering emotional wellness and healing justice is critical any researcher, practitioner, or activist. I say this to situate my dismay at the limited space available to describe experiences which have had such a transformative impact on my healing by creating a sense of hope and joy when I did not imagine it possible after Zimmerman was found not guilty. Although I cannot share every healing experience, one story from my narrative stood out as a reflection of the impact of CARMA on my ability to act in "hope, joy and sense of possibility" (Ginwright, 2010, p. 85). In August 2013, a little over one month after Zimmerman was acquitted, dozens of the convening participants

125

were reunited as we traveled to Washington D.C. for the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights era March on Washington.

After a day full of activities, we are on our way to a relaxed BBQ with organizers from Florida, individuals who had been instrumental in raising awareness for Trayvon while connecting his killing to greater, structural inequality. As we exit our taxi, I reflect on all that has happened. Although we'd marched in a rally today, it was when we came together to strategize on ways to achieve a world without "structural racism." The ideas that came out of the session touched on youth involvement, economic justice, and criminal reform. Well, that last one turned to a debate about reform versus abolition but it was all so interesting! I'd never been asked what I think the world could look like without institutional racism. And, while it was hard as hell for me to think about it, I listened intently to the ideas of the other convening participants as I tried to absorb all their ideas.

Arriving at the BBQ was like a family reunion! Although I hadn't met any of these organizers in person, we'd connected through Twitter and our shared experiences with social activism. We were basically jumping off the walls, trying to meet, hug and speak with everyone. Only moments passed after folks were done eating before the chants began. Our group, those who had attended the Chicago convening, had a set of chants and those from Florida had their own. In what felt like an act of love, we create a mix of the chants.

I – I

I BELIEVE – I BELIEVE

I BELIEVE THAT – I BELIEVE THAT

I BELIEVE THAT WE – I BELIEVE THAT WE

I BELIEVE THAT WEEEE WILLLLL – I BELIEVE THAT WEEEE WILLL

We get silent, in anticipation of the last line.

I BELIEVE THAT WEEEEE WILLL WIN! –

I BELIEVE THAT WE WILL WIN! I BELIEVE THAT WE WILL WIN!

BECAUSE WE READY, WE COMING. WE READY, WE COMING!

CHANT DOWN, BABYLON. BLACK PEOPLE ARE THE BOMB!

WE READY, WE COMING. WE READY, WE COMING.

In my analysis of this narrative, I discovered words used throughout were *power(ful), love,* and *Black.* It was in this trip to D.C. that I began to feel as though there was another way to live that did not have to be grounded in a desperate, powerless fear of institutional racism. From marches, strategic meetings to organize, the family reunion-esque BBQ, and the chants, my entire experience in D.C. exposed me to a culture of hope and joy as we imagined life without violence of institutional racism. Our

chants acted as a reflection as we yelled and screamed as loud as we could "I BELIEVE THAT WE WILL WIN."

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, my experience with racialized trauma was explored as I recounted symptoms of fear, powerlessness, isolation, and sadness. Critical to my healing process and almost immediately after accepting the violence of institutional racism, I began to reimagine social activism outside of serious leisure and situated the way in which social activism became a tool of radical healing. Through a combined effort of grounding culture, facilitating a sense of achievement, significant and caring relationships, developing meaning in being a member of the Black community as a social activist, and an empowerment of my agency, I began an amended process towards radical healing. This analytical identification of *amended* is critical to understanding RHM and the way in which my economic-privilege dramatically shaped my experiences of navigating racialized trauma. Because my social activism placed me in spaces which inspired the development of the RHM, I was significantly impacted by the presence of radical healing elements (CARMA) and began a healing process.

As I approach the end of this autoethnography with only my Conclusion chapter remaining, I find it difficult to consider myself at an appropriate space to end my narrative. Although this study sought to explore experiences and responses specific to the killing Trayvon Martin and not guilty verdict for his killer, this one situation of institutional racism did not exist in a vacuum in which it was free from the many cases of institutional racism which dominated headlines throughout my process of healing.

Although I tried to maintain a steady focus on Trayvon and the impact of his story on my experiences, I regret that structural limits of my thesis prevented me from examining in-depth the way in which other shootings of young, Black people and white-controlled protection of their killers also had a dramatic effect on my navigation of racialized trauma and social activism. To reconcile pieces of this conflict, I attempted to honor those experiences in various places throughout my autoethnography by including their names. As James Baldwin stated, "literature is indispensable to the world" (1979) and I hope my inclusion honors these names for years to come as they are forever memorialized in the writing of my autoethnography.

CHAPTER VI CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

Five months after Zimmerman was found not guilty, as I was still navigating the trauma of the verdict, James (the man who had a significant impact on my journey to a developed critical consciousness from Chapter 3) and I started dating. Just over a month ago, while shopping for workout clothes, I wandered into the men's section to also bring him something as a surprise when I saw a red running jacket on sale. Without hesitation, I decided to purchase it because I'd seen James eyeing it when we were last at this store. Later that day, when I gave him the jacket, he was excited that he could wear it to stay warm during his morning runs. As I began falling in love with James and imagined spending my life with him, I found that these moments of unconditional gifts are my most cherished in our relationship. Particularly, in the past two years of our relationship, we sought to craft an intentional journey to discover a love which rejects the hegemony of institutional racism. In my attempt to reconstruct my path to critical consciousness after suffering from racialized trauma, James consistently provided a safe space in which I felt free to love and grow with him.

When the abnormally-hot Texas weather cooled to traditional winter temperatures, the red jacket became his favorite article of clothing and I loved to see him wear it. However, days after the New Year holiday and in the midst of writing this thesis, I read a local news story which provided details about a robbery occurring only blocks away from where I lived. As a woman who often walks into her home at night, I originally sought

more details about the crime because I was worried about the possibility of being targeted in one of my late-night walks into my own home. However, my worry quickly shifted to a paralyzing fear for James as I read the description of the suspect: "a black man in his early 20's, around 5'7 tall with a thin build and dreadlocks...possibly wearing a red hoody and loose fit jeans" (Falls, 2016). Although taller than the descriptor, James is a Black man in his mid-20s with dreadlocks, who often wears the red jacket I recently purchased for him. As I read the description, names of Black youth ran through my mind, particularly Black men and boys who had been discriminatorily killed by police. Mike Brown. Tamir Rice. Quintonio LeGrier. Eric Garner. Freddie Gray. Laquan McDonald. John Crawford. Ezell Ford. Tony Robinson. Walter Scott. And the list continues. I thought about my partner who has been so proud of his growing dreadlocks. I thought about his excitement to wear his red jacket when the Texas weather finally allowed for it. And I became terrified that my gift would be the reason a police officer would use to explain why he riddled the man I love with gunshots. Later, when James came home from work, I held our embrace longer than usual and listened anxiously as we exchanged the habitual pleasantries of asking how our days went. Before the conversation could shift to another topic, I solemnly explained the story I'd read earlier and recounted the suspect's description. He listened as I asked him to refrain from wearing the jacket I'd bought him and, most importantly, only go out at night when absolutely necessary. Near tears and shaking, I told him that I wanted him to survive this investigation and come home to me every day until we grow old. Embracing me in comfort, he promised to be safe as I became more distraught over the

131

thought of losing him to a mistaken identity. Just under two weeks later, he has yet to wear the jacket again.

SUMMARY OF STUDY

"*I Believe That We Will Win*" is a transdisciplinary project which combines a political and sociological history of race, leisure studies, and psychological and youth development theories. This project investigates the lived experience of suffering from racialized trauma as a result of experiences with institutional racism through an autoethnographic study which centers the killing of Trayvon Martin as an introduction to a developed critical consciousness and recounts my navigation through racialized trauma after Zimmerman was found not guilty. In a thematic, narrative analysis, my study revealed the impact of my participation of social activism as serious leisure before suffering from racialized trauma as well as implications for radical healing through social activism.

As Black youth activists across the United States initiate a national conversation with the tagline #BlackLivesMatter, it has become increasingly important for historically white-controlled institutions to recognize ways in which it has silenced or marginalized communities of color, particular Black people. My autoethnography contributes to the dialogue within academia by illuminating the lived reality of racism as trauma, a little-used conception in the field of psychology and mental health, and analyzing surrounding experiences through theories which recognizes institutional forces as significant to the development of critical consciousness.

Findings

Part I explored my journey to critical consciousness following the discovery of Trayvon Martin in March 2012 as well as my responses through until July 2013. In the process, three themes were revealed which illuminated critical features of the evolutionary process between awareness levels. *Submersion* refers to the complete immersion into the analysis of an advanced awareness level, particularly appearing in my fixation on studying (and returning to) subject matter using the newly available critical analysis. *Community* supported my submersion into social awareness by facilitating access to previously-unknown knowledge and, most importantly, critically challenging me to extend my analyses beyond individual components of Trayvon's killing to consider institutional features and patterns. In the final theme of my evolution to social awareness, *resistance* was shown to be in thematic opposition to *submersion* as the ideological dominance of racism fiercely sought to protect the deception it thrives on which allows a continued shaping of U.S. institutions that subjugate and oppress Black communities. In addition to working in opposition, *submersion* and *resistance* were mediated by *community* as it refocused my denial of the realities of institutional racism and challenged me to critically consider its impact. In the next chapter, Part II, a much shorter time period is covered and examined my experience with racialized trauma as I arrived at social awareness through my trauma to navigate the symptoms, lingering effects of social activism as leisure, and radical healing.

In Chapter 5, Part II, my experience with racialized trauma was explored as I recounted symptoms of fear, powerlessness, isolation, and sadness. Critical to my healing

process and almost immediately after accepting the violence of institutional racism, I began to reimagine social activism outside of serious leisure and situate the way in which social activism became a tool of radical healing. Through a combined effort of grounding culture, facilitating a sense of achievement, significant and caring relationships, developing meaning in being a member of the Black community as a social activist, and an empowerment of my agency, I began an amended process towards radical healing. This analytical identification of *amended* is critical to the RHM and the way in which my economic-privilege dramatically shaped my experiences of navigating racialized trauma. Because my social activism placed me in spaces which inspired the development of the RHM, I was significantly impacted by the presence of radical healing elements (CARMA) and began a healing process.

Implications

My autoethnography provides a valuable contribution to academic research, particularly within the fields of mental health, youth development, and leisure studies. The overall study bypasses the structural hurdles which prevent experiences with institutional racism from being identified as *traumatic,* allowing for a thorough investigation of the lived reality for a continuing-survivor. In doing so, I centered youth development theories which vehemently rejects a deficit, or positive, approach to Black youth and, instead, examines ways in which institutional forces shape access and surroundings. Finally, as the dialogue increases for leisure scholars who explore social activism as serious leisure, it would be wise to consider ways in which economic privileges and social support impact individual ability to participate.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY REFLECTIONS

In the final weeks of December 2015, during which time I secluded myself in my apartment to guarantee uninterrupted writing, the names of Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, Laquan McDonald, Quitonio LeGrier, and Bettie Jones dominated the conversations on social media. Although I was painfully familiar with the deaths of Sandra Bland and Tamir Rice, the latest information on non-indictments for the police officers responsible for their deaths was crushing news. Within the same time frame, Laquan, Quintonio, and Bettie each appeared in the news as names to add to the lists of unarmed Black people killed by police officers. Knowing that I was running out of time to complete my thesis project, I often found myself conflicted and in tears as I couldn't stop myself from reading the details describing police deception and responsibility. However, as my thesis deadline neared, I knew I needed to disengage from conversations specific to these names, stories, and fights for social justice so that I could focus on the way in which my story lends to the overall social justice movement.

As I mentioned in previous chapters, autoethnography is a method which requires vulnerability, a characteristic which has been difficult for me throughout my writing process. Although I stepped into this process as a researcher-in-training, I entered with biases about where the research would lead me. However, as I deconstructed my experiences with social activism, I was surprised to find the critical importance of detailing my evolution to social awareness after Zimmerman killed Trayvon. Additionally, as I'm sure is the case with researchers utilizing traditional methods, there were sections and

topics which posed significant difficulty for me, often preventing writing in the moments I could least afford it. In particular, social activism as serious leisure was the analysis that caused the greatest struggle. True to the level with which I struggled, it was not until the final moments (specifically, two days before my thesis deadline) that reasons for this difficulty were revealed. However, having arrived at my final analysis of serious leisure and social activism, I know it is important to share an overview of the process I took to do so because it resolves an underlying conflict of my research.

My analysis in Part I revealed the process of my serious pursuit of social activism. Because I entered graduate school with the intention of researching racism as trauma, my committee advisor suggested I center each project, paper, and reading around my research topic to develop a multi-disciplinary understanding of its presentation in real-time. In doing so, I often found myself critiquing literature, theories, and research for overlooking marginalized narratives. Although I'd forgotten, until recently, one of my first critiques in graduate school spoke to an eerie silence around ways serious leisure often requires levels of privilege, particularly economic. Here, it would be beneficial to briefly consider the study of history, an alternate, yet traditional, scientific activity of serious leisure, to better understand the ways in which economic privilege impacts individual access to serious leisure. While anyone can passively learn history, particularly through public school curriculum, this activity requires one to access limited spaces of knowledge. To do so, one must purchase books or own a computer and have *available leisure time* to pursue a complex journey of scientific inquiry. During our course discussion, my responses centered the way low-income communities are

effectively blocked from serious leisure through limited access to resources which support its required commitment. However, in the initial stage of my analysis, I did not apply this critique to my own experiences of social activism, which require a similar level of economic privilege. As I drew closer to my writing deadline, I recognized that a critical piece was missing which prevented a final, rounded presentation of my analyses. Although I'd discovered ways in which my activism theoretically aligned with features of serious leisure, I was overlooking intrinsic motivations which significantly valued the celebrity, fame, and accolades that accompanied my public fight for justice. Once I was able to be honest in, what I consider to be, my grave mistakes in the organized struggle against white supremacy and recognize it as a reflection of my privileged approach to activism, I was able to round out my analysis and complete a meaningful writing process.

Closing Thoughts

As my analysis of my experiences deepened, I couldn't spare the energy to discuss topics in-depth that did not relate to my thesis. Thankfully, I was surrounded by people through this process who cared to listen and applied my analyses, arguments, and observations to their experiences. In particular, one story stands out to illuminate the critical implications of my study for research and practice. After discussing my research with someone very close to me, they decided they should take advantage of therapy sessions to reconcile their own experiences with racialized trauma and the added stress of working in a predominately-white space. A service paid for by their job, my friend sought out a therapist who would guide their navigation of racism as a traumatic experience

through posing questions of their theoretical approach to race and racism. When my friend posed the question to the first counselor they were referred to, they received a hostile response when discussing qualifications for addressing racism, particularly in the workplace. According to my friend, when the counselor was asked a question concerning her qualifications to discuss racism, she "lost it" and proceeded to verbally attack this person for such questioning. Ending her tirade with a reminder that her degree is more valuable than the sum of their non-degreed inquiry, she ended the conversation. Eventually my friend was able to find a counselor but, in their first session, spent the entire time explaining pieces of their lived reality of suffering from racialized trauma to help that counselor better understand the simplest experiences with racism.

While anecdotal, witnessing the unfolding of this store reinforced the importance of this work: without a formal definition of racism as trauma, researchers and practitioners (particularly mental in the field of mental health) enter dialogue with survivors at a significant deficit. Although, at some point in all our lives, we will begin conversations at a deficit, it is important to recognize (as explained in my literature review) that academic research often guides policy and practice. So, while the deficit of one party may be commonplace in dialogue, it reinforces the racist subordination, subjugation, and oppression of Black communities when done by institutions, such as academic. In a combined effort with previous literature examining racism as trauma, I hope my autoethnography serves to highlight the exploration of traumatizing consequences of racism and sparks a significant shift to a formal definition of racism as trauma.

In the final moments of this writing process, I am overwhelmed with reflections of my immediate responses of social activism and the emotions of the moment. In particular, chants I learned from the convening participants have been engrained in my mind and are often a call I return to in the midst of feeling the weight of my trauma. In a closing, I conclude with a recitation of lyrics to a chant which were the original namesake of my autoethnography and have sustained me through this writing.

What side are you on, my people? What side are you on?

WE ON THE FREEDOM SIDE.

What side are you on, my people? What side are you on?

WE ON THE FREEDOM SIDE.

Black people are freedom fighters and they taught us how to fight!

OH YEAH!

And we're going to fight all day and night until we get it right!

REFERENCES

Action partnership on interventions for black children exposed to violence and

victimization. (2012). *The National Center for Victims of Crime.* Retrieved from

https://www.victimsofcrime.org/our-programs/other-projects/youth-

initiative/interventions-for-Black-children's-exposure-to-violence/black-children

exposed-to-violence

Alexander, M. (2012). *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of*

colorblindness. Jackson, TN: New Press.

Allen, I. (1996). PTSD among African Americans. In A. Marsella, M. Friedman, E.

Gerrity, & R. Scurfield (Eds.), *Ethnocultural aspects of posttraumatic stress*

disorder: Issues, research, and clinical application (pp. 209-238). Washington,

DC: American Psychological Association.

Anderson, E. (1990). *Streetwise: Race, class, and change in an urban community*.

Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Anderson, E. (1999). *Code of the streets: Decency, violence, and the moral life of the*

inner city. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.

Baldridge, B. J. (2014). Relocating the deficit: Reimagining black youth in neoliberal

times. *American Educational Research Journal*, *51*(3), 440-472.

Baranowsky, A. B., Young, M., Johnson-Douglas, S., Williams-Keeler, L., & McCarrey,

M. (1998). PTSD transmission: A review of secondary traumatization in Holocaust survivor families. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne*, *39*(4), 247-256.

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2006). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Brooks, R. (2009). *Racial justice in the age of Obama*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Bryan, H. (1977). Leisure value systems and recreational specialization: The case of trout fishermen. *Journal of Leisure Research, 9*, 174–187.

Bryan, H. (1979). *Conflict in the great outdoors*. Birmingham, AL: The Birmingham Publishing Co.

Bryan, H. (2000). Recreation specialization revisited. *Journal of Leisure Research, 31*, 18–21.

Bryant-Davis, T. (2007). Healing requires recognition: The case for race-based traumatic stress. *The Counseling Psychologist, 35*(1), 135-143.

Bryant-Davis, T., & Ocampo, C. (2005). Racist incident-based trauma. *The Counseling Psychologist*, *33*(4), 479-500.

Bryant-Davis, T. & Ocampo, C. (2005a). The trauma of racism: Implications for counseling, research, and education. *The Counseling Psychologist, 33*(4), 574-578.

Bryant-Davis, T., & Ocampo, C. (2006). A therapeutic approach to the treatment of

    racist incident-based trauma. *Journal of Emotional Abuse, 6*(4), 1-22.

Calafell, B. M., & Moreman, S. (2009). Envisioning an academic readership: Latina/o

    performativities per the form of publication. *Text and Performance Quarterly,*
29(2), 123–130.

Carter, R. T. (2007). Racism and psychological and emotional injury: Recognizing and

    assessing race-based traumatic stress. *The Counseling Psychologist*, *35*(1),
13-105. doi:10.1177/0011000006292033

Catalano, R. F., Hawkins, J. D., Berglund, M. L., Pollard, J. A., & Arthur, M. W. (2002).

    Prevention science and positive youth development: Competitive or cooperative
frameworks? *Journal of Adolescent Health, 31*, 230-239.

Clark, K. B. (1945). A Brown Girl in a Speckled World. *Journal of Social Issues*, *1*(2),

    10-14.

Clark, K. B., & Clark, M. K. (1940). Skin color as a factor in racial identification of

    negro preschool children. *Journal Of Social Psychology*, *11*(1), 159-169.

Clark, R., Anderson, N. B., Clark, V. R., & Williams, D. R. (1999). Racism as a stressor

    for African Americans: A biopsychosocial model. *American Psychologist*, *54*,
805-816.

Cohen, C. J. (2010). *Democracy remixed*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Cohen, C. (2011). Millennials & the myth of the post-racial society: Black youth, intra-

    generational divisions & the continuing racial divide in American politics. *MIT*
Press Journals, 140(2), 197-205.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education* (7th ed.).

New York, NY: Routledge.

Collins, P. (2000). *Black Feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Craven, J., & Reilley, R. (2015, August 21). Here's what Black lives matter activists want politicians to do about police violence. *Huffington Post.* Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/Black-lives-matter-policy-demands_55d7392ae4b0a40aa3aa9443

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: a black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum.* 139-167.

Cross, W. (1991). *Shades of black: Diversity in African-American identity*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Custer, D. (2014). Autoethnography as a transformative research method. *Qualitative Report, 19*(37), 1-13

Dahl, J. (2013, July 12). Trayvon Martin shooting: A timeline of events. *CBS News.* Retrieved from http://www.cbsnews.com/news/trayvon-martin-shooting-a-timeline-of-events/

Dance, L. (2002). *Tough fronts: The impact of street culture on schooling*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Daniel, J. H. (2000). The courage to hear: African American women's memories of racial trauma. *Psychotherapy with African American women: Innovations in*

143

psychodynamic perspective and practice (126-14). New York, NY: Guilford.

Davis, A. (1983). *Women, race, & class.* New York, NY: Random House.

Davis, A. (1988). *Angela Davis: An autobiography.* New York, NY: Random House.

Douglass, F. (1845). *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave*.
Boston, MA: Lushena Books, Inc.

Du Bois, W. E. B. (1903). *The souls of Black folk*. Chicago, IL: A.C. McClurg & Co.

Dawson, M. C., & Bobo, L. D. (2009). One year later and the myth of a post racial
society. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, *6*(2), 247-249.

Ellis, C. (2004). *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography.*
Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.

Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview.
Historical Social Research, 36(4), 273-290.

Ellis, C. & Bochner, A. P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity. In
Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative
research* (2nd ed., pp.733-768). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Falls, C. (2016, January 6). Bryan police investigate purse snatching. Retrieved from
http://www.kbtx.com/content/news/Bryan-Police-investigate-purse-snatching-
364521321.html

Feagin, J. (2014). *Racist America: Roots, current realities, and future reparations* (3rd
ed*).* New York, NY: Routledge.

Feagin, J. (1980). School desegregation: A political-economic perspective. In W. S.

Stepan and J. R. Feagin (Eds), *School desegregation: Past, present, and future*. New York, NY: Plenum.

Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum.

Gallup, (2012, April 6). Poll show racial divides on the Trayvon Martin case. Retrieved from http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/story/2012-04-05/trayvon-martinpoll/54047512/1

Gaertner, S. & Davidio, J. (1981). *Pluralism, racism, and public policy: The search for equality.* Boston, MA: G.K. Hall.

Ginwright, S. (2010). *Black youth rising: Activism and radical healing in urban America*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Ginwright, S. (2015). *Hope and healing in urban education: How urban activists and teachers are reclaiming matters of the heart.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Ginwright, S. and Cammarota, J. (2002). New terrain in youth development: The promise of a social justice approach. *Social Justice. 29*(4), 82–95.

Glasgow, D. G. (1980). *The Black underclass: poverty, unemployment, and entrapment of ghetto youth*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Harrell, J. (1999). *Manichean psychology: Racism and the minds of people of African descent.* Washington, DC: Howard University Press.

Harrell, S. (2000). A multidimensional conceptualization of racism-related stress: Implications for the well-being of people of color. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *70*(1), 42-57.

Harris, F. C., & Lieberman, R. C. (2015). Racial inequality after racism. *Foreign Affairs,*
94(2), 9-20.

Harris Perry, M. (2011). *Sister citizen: Shame, stereotypes, and Black women in*
America. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Hart Roger (1992). Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship. Florence,
LT: International Child Development Center, UNICEF.

hooks, b. (1981). *Ain't I a woman: Black women and feminism*. Boston, MA: South End
Press.

hooks, b. (1993). *Sisters of the yam: Black women and self-recovery.* Boston, MA: South
End Press.

Horwitz, S., & Helderman, R. (2012, March 28). Tracy Martin recounts police version of
son Trayvon's death. *Washington Post.* Retrieved from
https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/tracy-martin-recounts-police-version-
of-son-trayvons-death/2012/03/28/gIQA6MKhhS_story.html

Howitt, D., & Owusu-Bempah, J. (1990). The pragmatics of institutional racism:
Beyond words. *Human Relations*, *43*(9), 885-899.

Hussein, S., & Webber, T. (n.d.). Florida Stand Your Ground Law | Use of Deadly Force
in Self-Defense. Retrieved from http://www.husseinandwebber.com/case-
work/criminal-defense-articles/floridas-stand-ground-law/

Jernigan, M. M., & Daniel, J. H. (2011). Racial trauma in the lives of Black children and
adolescents: Challenges and clinical implications. *Journal of Child & Adolescent*
Trauma, *4*(2), 123-141. doi:10.1080/19361521.2011.574678

Kang, H., & Burton, D. L. (2014). Effects of racial discrimination, childhood trauma, and trauma symptoms on juvenile delinquency in African American incarcerated youth. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, *23*(10), 1109-1125. doi:10.1080/10926771.2014.968272

Kwate, N. A., & Goodman, M. S. (2015). Cross-sectional and longitudinal effects of racism on mental health among residents of Black neighborhoods in New York City. *American Journal of Public Health*, *105*(4), 711-718. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2014.302243

Lamond, I. R., & Spracklen, K.(2015). *Protests as events: Politics, activism and leisure*. London: Rowman & Littlefield International.

Lorde, A. (1978). *The black unicorn: poems*. New York, NY: Norton.

Martin, S. (2012, March 9). Boy killed by neighborhood watch: Shooter disobeyed 911. *The Christian Post.* Retrieved from http://www.christianpost.com/news/boy-killed-by-neighborhood-watch-shooter-disobeyed-911-71140/

Martin, T., & Fulton, S. (2012, March 8). Prosecute the killer of our son, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin. *Change.* Retrieved from https://www.change.org/p/prosecute-the-killer-of-our-son-17-year-old-trayvon-martin

Martinez, S. M., & Rury, J. L. (2012). From "culturally deprived" to "at risk": The politics of popular expression and educational inequality in the United States, 1960-1985. *Teachers College Record*, *114*(6). 1-31.

McCormick, B. P. (1996). N= 1: What can be learned from the single case?. *Leisure Sciences*, *18*(4), 365-369.

Pittman, K. J. (1991). Promoting youth development: Strengthening the role of youth-serving and community organizations. Report prepared for The U.S. Department of Agriculture Extension Services. Washington, DC: Center for Youth Development and Policy Research.

Prieto, B. & Nolin, R., O. S. (2012, March 17). Tensions still simmer in Trayvon Martin shooting case. *Orlando Sentinel*. Retrieved from http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/2012-03-17/news/os-trayvon-martin-shooting-tension-20120317_1_shooting-death-english-teacher-uncle

resistance. n.d. In *Merriam-Webster.com*. Retrieved from http://www.merriam webster.com/dictionary/resistance

Rutland, M. (2012, June 20). Sanford Police Chief Bill Lee fired in wake of Trayvon Martin case. Retrieved from http://www.miamiherald.com/latest-news/article1940734.html

Sabo Flores, K. (2007). *Youth participatory evaluation: Strategies for engaging young people*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Sanchez-Hucles, J. (1999). Racism: Emotional abusiveness and psychological trauma for ethnic minorities. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 1(2), 69-87.

Sanchez-Hucles, J., & Jones, N. (2005). Breaking the silence around race in training, practice, and research. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 33, 547-558.

Scott, D. (2012). Serious Leisure and Recreation Specialization: An Uneasy Marriage. *Leisure Sciences*, *34*(4), 366-371.

Shange, N. (1975). *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow was enuf.* New York, NY: Scribner

Smedley, B. D., Stith, A. Y., & Nelson, A. R. (2003). *Unequal treatment: confronting racial and ethnic disparities in health care*. Washington, D.C: National Academy Press.

Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *8*(1), 23.

Spanierman, L. B., & Poteat, V. P. (2005). Moving beyond complacency to commitment: Multicultural research in counseling psychology. *The Counseling Psychologist, 33*, 513-523.

Spry, T. (2001). Performing autoethnography: An embodied methodological praxis. *Qualitative Inquiry, 7*(6), 706-732.

Stebbins, R. (1992). *Amateurs, professionals, and serious leisure*. Montreal, QC, and Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Stebbins, R. A. (2012). Comment on Scott: Recreation Specialization and the CL-SL Continuum. *Leisure Sciences*, *34*(4), 372-374.

Stebbins, R. (1982). Serious leisure: A conceptual statement. *The Pacific Sociological Review*, *25*(2), 251–272.

Stebbins, R. (1996). Volunteering: a serious leisure perspective. *Nonprofit & Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *25*(2), 211.

Stebbins, R., & Elkington, S. (2014). *The serious leisure perspective: an introduction.* Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2014.

Smith, C., & Curry, C. (2012, July 6). George Zimmerman Out of Jail on $1 Million Bond. Retrieved from http://abcnews.go.com/US/george-zimmerman-released-florida-jail/story?id=16727196

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2001). Mental health: Culture, race, and ethnicity. A Supplement to Mental health: A report of the surgeon general. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services.

Wade, J. C. (2005). The issue of race in counseling psychology. *Counseling Psychologist, 33*(4), 538-546.

Wilson, W. J. (1987). *The truly disadvantaged: The inner city, the underclass, and public policy.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Witkins, H.A. et al. (1977). Field-dependent and field-independent cognitive styles and their educational implications." *Review of Education Research* 47(1): 1-64.

Wodtke, G. T., Harding, D. J., & Elwert, F. (2011). Neighborhood effects in temporal

perspective: The impact of long-term exposure to concentrated disadvantage

on high school graduation. *American Sociological Review*. *76*(5). 713-736.

Woodard, L. D. (2002). Racial oppression as a form of insidious trauma among

African Americans. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, *62*, 5400.

Wyatt, G. E. (1990). Sexual abuse of ethnic minority children: Identifying dimensions of

victimization. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 21*(5), 338-343.

doi:10.1037/0735-7028.21.5.338