

- Rejoinder

Clarification and Purpose of the Race-Based Traumatic Stress Injury Model

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The author responds to the four reactions authored by Thompson-Miller and Feagin, Griffin, Speight, and Bryant-Davis in this issue. In responding, he clarifies the purpose of the model presented in his major contribution and adds information about the model's legal and forensic applications that he did not touch on with any detail. He also discusses the purpose of the use of "injury" to describe the harm of racism, the intersection of psychology and law, and how legal definitions are not useful in the effort to understand the mental health effects of racism. He further points out that both objective and subjective stressors are harmful since, where racism is concerned, there seems to be a tendency to discount subjective experience. Lastly, the author acknowledges points made by the reaction authors that extend and expand the model of race-based traumatic stress injury he presented.

I am pleased and honored to have the opportunity to respond to the thoughtful and insightful reactions authored by Thompson-Miller and Feagin (2007 [this issue]), Griffith (2007 [this issue]), Speight (2007 [this issue]), and Bryant-Davis (2007 [this issue]). I want to offer some clarifications, acknowledge omissions, and recognize expansions of the model I presented. One of the things I omitted is the set of experiences that led me to develop the model of race-based traumatic stress injury and to clarify the need for new definitions for racism.

My work as an expert witness, which has involved modification of school systems' racial desegregation plans; biracial custody; racial discrimination; and racial harassment (current legal meaning) in schools, the workplace, and as consumer racial profiling; as well as my scholarship and research on racial-cultural issues, has caused me to consider how mental health and legal professionals might deal with targets of race-based acts and help them seek relief.

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In addition, the Ira Glasser Racial Justice Fellowship, which was awarded to me during 2004-2005 by the national office of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), afforded me the opportunity to investigate the laws, legal definitions, and remedies associated with racial discrimination (disparate treatment and disparate impact) and to explore how they work, especially when legal claims involved emotional distress or psychological damages (e.g., Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act or violations of provisions of the 1866 Civil Rights Act usually known as 42 U.S.C. 1981). This fellowship also gave me the chance to integrate psychological models to develop an approach to address racism and racial injustice (Carter, 2007 [this issue]). The ACLU recognized that the social and legal gains made in the early part of the twentieth century have slowed, and even in some areas have failed to address the changing forms and practices of subtle modern-day racism. As such, the ACLU selected individuals to work with the national office to propose or explore new models or ideas that might be used to address contemporary racism and racial injustice. Griffith's (2007) observation that the model has forensic applications was in fact one of my primary objectives, although I did not state this explicitly as I was focused on mental health issues.

A victim or target of racism or race-based encounter(s) or experience(s) has three options for relief and redress: This individual can (a) seek legal counsel to file a lawsuit or file a complaint within his or her organization or through some other recognized body; (b) seek the services of a mental health professional for relief from the physical, emotional, or psychological effects of the encounter; or (c) live with the encounter and try to cope with any effects that may have arisen. If a lawyer is consulted, and if they take the case (many do not), the attorney may want a mental health professional to be involved if emotional and psychological harm is a part of the complaint. Thus, the avenues for relief and redress clearly involve mental health professionals.

RACE-BASED TRAUMATIC STRESS INJURY: CLARIFICATIONS

As I worked with the range of racial issues in a legal and mental health context, it became clear to me that mental health assessments and diagnostic categories offered no guidance in assessing and recognizing race-based incidents as sources of emotional and psychological harm. Targets or victims did not have a way to delineate or describe the encounter other than to name it as racism or discrimination. In addition, they were less able to report its emotional and psychological effects other than to say they were upset, angry, or depressed. In this regard, Bryant-Davis's (2007)

position that recognition on the part of both targets and professionals must come before assessment is exactly right. No information was available for targets of racism or mental health professionals in their efforts to assess race-based experiences and mental health effects. Also, as Bryant-Davis (this issue) notes, other diagnostic categories have and are used including depression, anxiety, and acute stress reactions. However, these diagnostic categories are not specific to race and racism. While a target may well have these reactions as part of their psychological distress, the current systems of assessment do not help people or mental health professionals recognize the role and effects of racism. Mental health professionals and targets of racism need to understand the unique aspects of racial experiences, and they need to know how to manage the emotional and psychological effects they may have and how these effects may be manifested.

Some scholars and researchers will be critical of the effort to add racism to the growing list of human interactions that can produce trauma; arguing that the list might be too long or that the experiences associated with racism are too vague or too subjective to support the claim that such experiences can produce trauma. Another problem is that dispositional assessments tend to blame or pathologize the victim and do not include race-based environmental stressors. Bryant-Davis (2007) thinks the use of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) would not lead to victim pathology and that the use of injury will not be useful in helping mental health professionals recognize and treat race-based traumatic stress, which is a view shared by Griffith (2007).

Bryant-Davis (2007) contends that other classifications of trauma have been developed, such as rape trauma syndrome, and therefore the same process could be applied to race-based traumatic stress (p. 137). While it is true, as Griffith (2007) notes, that some mental health professionals use and consider nonphysical threats to life when applying the PTSD diagnosis, I am not sure how common this is as the criteria is very specific. Moreover, Bryant-Davis's example of rape trauma is a useful comparison with one major limitation. Rape involves physical threat to life, which suggests distinct differences between the emotional pain of race-based traumatic stress and the rape trauma syndrome.

I think that the use of traditional assessment approaches leads to a focus on the target and his or her personality and personal history. A dispositional focus may be important and relevant, as Griffith (2007) argues, but it should not be the exclusive emphasis. What happens now is that a person who may be affected by racism is diagnosed with a psychological disorder and may be determined to be mentally ill or to have suffered by exhibiting diagnosable symptoms such as depression. This is a situation that many would not welcome because it could compromise any claim for redress and make healing difficult. In assisting targets of racism, it is more important that the

target understand how his or her experience may have caused emotional and psychological harm. The nonpathological assessment category I propose requires consideration of the target's personality and personal history. At the same time, this category treats consideration of the power of racism to produce stress and trauma as critical. Its use changes the way a person's experience is communicated to him or her and, in turn, how it is understood by all parties. The use of the nonpathological assessment category of race-based traumatic stress injury means that one may conclude that the person suffers from an emotional and psychological injury caused by a racial experience(s) that has produced impairment. The injury designation communicates that the person's rights were violated unfairly and that they have the option to seek redress. This is a situation that would make it easier for the person harmed to accept the impairment and to work toward healing, and it may even help her or him establish a claim for legal or administrative redress.

Accurate assessment and recognition of race-based traumatic stress injury can be used to seek relief and remedy the emotional, psychological, and physical pain, which, as Thompson-Miller and Feagin (2007) note, has been endured by many in both silence and fear. This has perhaps occurred because many encounters with racism are subtle, indirect, and difficult to identify and address, yet are nevertheless extremely painful. The research evidence shows that ambiguous, subtle, and unintended experiences of racism can produce stress and that when coping fails, stress can produce trauma (Carter, 2007).

In addition, I think the absence of a specific race-based assessment approach leads to the use of practices that pathologize the target, which may obscure what happened to him or her. Broad generic and socially based definitions of racism do not provide the target with concrete ways to describe the types of events that took place. With the use of more specific classes of racism, I contend it will be easier for targets to make direct links to emotional and psychological reactions. As such, it will be possible to assess and document race-based psychological and emotional injury when complaints are lodged in courts or organizations.

PSYCHOLOGY AND THE LAW: THE NEED TO DECONSTRUCT RACISM

The erosion of legal remedies makes the need for ways to think differently about racism and racial legal justice more imperative (Green, 2003; Wang, 2006). For example, today it is extremely difficult, and perhaps psychologically damaging, for a person to establish a claim of racial discrimination (disparate treatment or disparate impact) in the courts or as a

complaint in an organization or institution. The model that I present (Carter, 2007) is offered as a way to break the stalled and blocked avenues of redress and relief for contemporary forms of racism (i.e., subtle, indirect) and racial injustice.

In the United States, three constitutional amendments and seven civil rights acts have been enacted to address race and racism. Yet today, more progress has been made with respect to sexual discrimination and harassment than with racial harassment and discrimination, even though racially hostile environments were first recognized by the courts in 1972, whereas sexually hostile environments were not recognized until 1982 (Buff, 1995). The progress with respect to sexual discrimination and harassment is evidenced by the large amount of and widely distributed information and research about what constitutes sexual harassment and the fact that explicit procedures exist in most organizations for how to file complaints. Furthermore, sexual discrimination and sexual harassment are treated in the law and in organizations as distinct events, and sexual harassment claims can be established without evidence that the defendant intended to harass or discriminate.

In contrast, according to legal statutes, racial harassment is a component of racial discrimination and is not treated as a distinct event. (I propose that they should be distinguished from one another.) Because racial harassment and racial discrimination are combined when a complaint is filed, the plaintiff must show that the defendant intended to discriminate or harass specifically on the basis of race. The plaintiff must also show that the defendant acted with racial animus as well as the intentional motive to discriminate (Wang, 2006). It is even more difficult to establish that one was psychologically harmed or experienced emotional distress in racial discrimination cases. Furthermore, the emotional or psychological harm that results is less often recognized by the courts or by mental health professionals. These difficulties are exemplified by the fact that in 2005, of the 26,740 claims of racial discrimination filed, 68% were dismissed by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2006) because an investigation found that these claims did not meet the requirements necessary to seek legal remedy.

Few organizations have explicit policies and procedures for filing complaints of racial harassment or racial discrimination as distinct events. More important, claims and complaints regarding the impact and effects of racism as currently structured in our laws and administrative organizational procedures do not consider the systematic or structural impacts or outcomes of racism (Green, 2003).

The purpose for deconstructing racism warrants restatement because the reactants, in particular Griffith (2007) and Speight (2007), take issue with the need for and value of new ways to define racism. I know that many scholars and researchers (Carter, 2007) have presented and described

racism and oppression, as well as their impact on people, yet these models describe macro (large system) effects and impacts (Speight, 2007). I seek to identify micro (individual) effects and impacts, which is to say how people are harmed emotionally and psychologically by specific types of racism (avoidance, hostility, aversive hostility). These events can be interpersonal or systemic, but it is essential that scholars and researchers begin to connect the events with the effect they have on people in specific and not in general ways. The approach I propose will have benefit for targets of racism as well as for those who seek to help them find relief and redress.

I believe that the use of generic terms of racism does not aid targets in specifying the nature of the particular event(s) that contribute to one's psychological and emotional reaction(s) or possible injury. When racism is used to refer to a broad set of circumstances (macro), although the set of circumstances may actually describe various forms of oppression, it is not possible to link that oppression to a particular person's mental health status or potential harm (micro). This is not to say that systemic and structural forms of racism do not produce trauma, I believe they do. However, it will be necessary to identify which particular aspects of structural racism are responsible for psychological and emotional harm and for which people. The micro approach helps targets of racism distinguish types or classes of acts that can be connected to their specific psychological and emotional reactions. With such terms, people will be able to clearly identify what happens to them and will be able to recognize the encounter not simply as racism in the form of discrimination as generally used and defined. Rather, the more specific language will make it easier to label race-based encounter(s) as *avoidance* (racial discrimination) when they were told no job openings exist or that the apartment was rented, as *hostility* (racial harassment) when they were followed in the store or repeatedly stopped by police, or as *aversive hostility* (discriminatory harassment) after gaining entry and access to educational opportunities, for instance, and are then subjected to being suspended or expelled from school.

As Griffith (2007) notes, in the forensic context, when the issues of complaints and legal claims enter the adversarial realm of the law, mental health and legal professionals need to be able to show the impact of the event on the person(s), given the person's history and background. Just as Green (2003) proposed a new approach to discrimination theories (structural disparate impact and structural disparate treatment), I offer new terms to classify particular types and classes of racism to facilitate connecting the types of racism (i.e., racial discrimination, racial harassment [quid pro quo racial harassment], and discriminatory harassment) to specific mental health effects and reactions.

The evidence I presented (Carter, 2007) shows that racism and discrimination can be physically, psychologically, and emotionally harmful to their

targets both as stress and as trauma. Yet it is also true that the research evidence is less clear about how specific events affect particular people. The specific types or classes of racism can also be used by researchers who can investigate the utility of the macro and micro approaches for documenting the psychological and emotional impact of racism on individuals and groups.

For instance, Thompson-Miller and Feagin (2007) point out that intergenerational experiences with racism or structural forms of racism have a psychological and emotional impact and thus need to be considered as a source of possible stress and trauma. I agree that many structural and systemic aspects of racism have lasted from one generation to another. At the same time, it is not possible to know who carries the pain of these experiences or how it may have affected him or her. It is also difficult to know the avenue of redress and remedy for the suffering of systemic and structural racism experienced by current and past generations. Many individuals have begun to seek reparations for past acts of structural racism, and this path may yet bear fruit (Robinson, 2000). I would hope that the classes or types of racism that I described could be used to aid in the reparation efforts.

IS PERCEPTION REAL?

Another matter raised by Griffith (2007) is the issue of who decides the facts of a situation. This is a focus in the forensic situation when one makes a legal claim or complaint. Griffith refers to the case that I used as an illustration of how PTSD might be inadequate for assessing race-based traumatic stress (Carter, 2007). He notes that it is possible that reasons other than race could have been at play in the case. Perhaps so, the reality is that facts are a matter of perception and perspective. All too often, people of Color's perceptions and perspectives have been rendered irrelevant and dismissed (because they lack social or political power), regardless of their generations and years of experience. The "facts" of history and life experiences are often ceremoniously dismissed by pronouncements that one is not "racist" or did not intend to discriminate or by suggesting that the claimant is being oversensitive or is reading too much into a situation.

Regarding perceptions, several important empirical research findings taken from the evidence I presented (Carter, 2007) have implications for race-based experiences and thus warrant emphasis. Researchers have shown that stress affects health and mental health both when the stressor(s), which includes racism, is "objective" (i.e., sudden death of a loved one) or "subjective" (i.e., perception of harm). Thus, perceptions are equally valid as verifiable events when the effect of stress or trauma is a consideration.

This finding is more compelling when it is combined with multicultural sources of stress (Carter, 2007) and trauma reactions. Thus, the tendency to relegate Black and other people of Color's experiences with racism, in all its forms, to subjective forms of perception may actually reflect subtle racism. Mental health professionals and counseling psychologists should work to affirm the person's possible harm or injury, and claims of racism should be treated as valid and potentially harmful experiences that warrant redress.

It is my hope that people will recognize that one's perception regarding race and racism is the same as general life perceptions of stressor events. Clark, Anderson, Clark, and Williams (1999) have stated that

to discount perceptions of racism as stressful is inconsistent with the stress literature, which highlights the importance of the appraisal process . . . the perception of demands as stressful is more important in initiating stress responses. . . . With this in mind, the initiation of psychological stress responses as a result of perceiving . . . racism would qualify [such] stimuli as stressors. (p. 810)

EXPANSION OF THE MODEL: RECOGNIZING REACTANTS' CONTRIBUTIONS

I would like to now turn to specific points raised by each of the reactants. The notion of severity and timing of racial experiences noted by Thompson-Miller and Feagin (2007) is an important issue, particularly in the way they present it. To illustrate this experience, they quote an interview with a Black professor who talked about Whites' denial of racism, its frequency, and its psychological and emotional impact (Thompson-Miller & Feagin, 2007, p. 107)

I concur that there is denial about the daily encounters with racism that people of Color endure and that cause them distress. The professor quoted by Thompson-Miller and Feagin (2007) highlights the point that I made concerning the way in which events have significance to a person of Color because of the racial-cultural historical meaning associated with various acts, words, and symbols (Carter, 2007). Regarding the intergenerational transmission of trauma, the review of the discrimination and race-related stress research demonstrates that when people of Color, especially Blacks, inventory their experiences over a lifetime, or even a year, most find them stressful and psychologically harmful. Yet, as I noted previously, this information reflects macro-level impact. Thompson-Miller and Feagin refer to how coping with racism is passed from one generation to another. Black and other people of Color would not have been able to survive without such teachings. Scholars and researchers need to attend to how coping interacts

with psychological and emotional reactions to investigate how some types of racism may have less impact than others. Thompson-Miller and Feagin observed that I did not talk explicitly about "White discriminators" (p. 112). I agree that both Whites and people of Color who are perpetrators of discrimination and racism may also be affected psychologically and emotionally, and that "White racism" is central to the maintenance of racism in our society. However, it is imperative that it be understood that people of Color also discriminate. This reality is often experienced by many people of Color and is reflected both in internalized racism (Speight, 2007) and captured in racial identity status research and theory.

Related to this point about people of Color acting as oppressors, Griffith (2007) questions within-racial-group ethnic and skin-color differences as they relate to the intragroup discrimination. Racism and racial oppression should be understood through the lens of racial identity statuses as well as the costs and benefits of adhering to dominant racial group preferences, expectations, and values. There are benefits for people of Color: If they follow dominant-group practices, they gain access and opportunity. Skin-color differences work the same way, in that those who are more like the White dominant racial group in appearance and behavior are treated with more favor. As Speight (2007) observes, people have internalized racism, so it is not surprising that people of Color implement systems of oppression based on skin-color and ethnic group membership.

Speight (2007) argues that the structural and systemic aspects of racism need to be considered as well as the interpersonal elements. She describes internalized racism as a damaging psychological injury that results from the power of the structural and systemic forces of racism. The exact nature of the injury she accurately describes is not clear, nevertheless I concur that the process of internalized racism warrants further investigation. I suspect racial stereotypes are but one component of internalized racism as her description suggests. I was encouraged by Speight's report of the development of her scale and the studies of Black women that show how acceptance of racial stereotypes affects self-esteem and psychological symptoms. More research that is aimed at empirically establishing how and in what ways racism directly affects people is needed.

Bryant-Davis (2007) calls for international applications of race-based trauma. International applications may be of value, and at the same time I wonder if researchers have enough information about the phenomenon of race-based trauma and stress to explain how such trauma may occur in other countries and cultures. More specific research is needed, accompanied by counseling process and outcome studies, that can be used to guide counseling and therapy interventions and methods.

Griffith (2007), as noted previously, raises a central issue about the mental health effects of racism. He asks whether race-based experiences can or do produce pathology in some Blacks and not in others. He thinks it is important to study how preexisting personality organization is related to the development of some forms of pathological reactions and not to others. Griffith believes that I want to avoid this issue because it may lead to victim blame. He contends that his reasoning does not intend to blame the victim, but rather the role of preexisting personality factors and whether racism does in fact produce pathology in some people are critically important psychological and psychiatric questions that should not be over looked or ignored.

Griffith (2007) points out that I avoid the question of individual dispositional attributes. I do say that individual dispositional characteristics are important in how one responds to racial experiences. What does concern me is the overall focus that is used to consider the mental health effects of racism. Heretofore, the primary focus was the person's dispositional state, and less attention was given to the relation between the power of racism to cause psychological and emotional injury.

It is my hope that the ideas and information contained in my Major Contribution, the reactions, and rejoinder stimulate people and professionals to place more emphasis on the experiences of race-based traumatic stress in efforts to heal, seek redress, and understand the emotional and psychological effects of racism. I ask that this issue be given more attention in mental health and legal practice, theory, education, training, and research.

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