

Black Women and Girls & #MeToo: Rape, Cultural Betrayal, & Healing

Sex Roles

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Abstract

Created by U.S. Black female activist, Tarana Burke, the #MeToo movement gained popularity in 2017, shedding light on the pervasive sexual harassment and assault of women. Since long before Anita Hill and @RapedAtSpelman, racial trauma has complicated the post-sexual violence landscape for U.S. Black women and girls, which may inhibit their ability to say “me too.” It is within this context of racial trauma that cultural betrayal trauma theory (CBTT) was developed: a new framework for understanding how outcomes of interpersonal trauma, like rape, are impacted by both victim and perpetrator(s) being subjected to inequality. In the present article, racial trauma and its effects on Black Americans is discussed. Then, the collective sense of being in U.S. Black culture, along with the burden placed on Black females, is delineated. Next, CBTT is defined and its empirical support and implications are detailed. Finally, mechanisms to address the interwoven harm of racial trauma and cultural betrayal trauma within institutions (e.g., mental health care) and the community (e.g., in collaboration with the Black church) is elucidated to facilitate healing through #MeToo and beyond.

Keywords

Racial trauma Cultural betrayal Rape #MeToo Sexual assault Black women Black girls

In 2017, the #MeToo movement (<https://metoomvmt.org> (<https://metoomvmt.org>)) shed light on the pervasive sexual harassment and assault of women through invoking those who have been sexually abused to identify themselves on social media by typing “me too.” Created in 2006 by U.S. Black female activist, Tarana Burke, the #MeToo movement since 2017 has largely been characterized by the victimization of upper-class White women. Although women (and men, transgender individuals, gender queer/gender non-conforming individuals, and children) across races are subjected to sexual mistreatment (Zacharek et al. 2017), racial trauma has long complicated the post-sexual violence landscape for Black women and girls specifically (McGuire 2010; Wilson 2018), which may inhibit their ability to say “me too” (Hobbs 2018; Wilson 2018).

For instance, in 1991, Anita Hill’s testimony against U.S. Supreme Court Justice nominee, Clarence Thomas, regarding sexual harassment highlighted the unbalanced expectations placed on Black women: save a Black man (e.g., Clarence Thomas), protect a Black Supreme Court seat, and uplift the Black community through silence following victimization. Consequently, some Black people conceptualized Hill as a traitor for exposing the mistreatment she sustained from Thomas (Hill 1997). Over 20 years later in 2016, a U.S. Black female student from Spelman College used social media to detail a gang rape she says she experienced by four Black men from Morehouse College (Gómez 2016). Although campus sexual violence had gained national and governmental attention (White House Task Force To Protect Students From Sexual Assault 2014), this student, @RapedAtSpelman, exposed Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and thus Black people, as additionally culpable.

Gómez (2016, para. 2) reflected on the complexity of her reaction as a Black woman when she read the story:

I was flooded with pain for all the Black women who are raped. What I did not expect to feel was intense, debilitating fear. What if They get a hold of this story? What if They paint all Black men as rapists? Maybe we, as Black women, should just stay silent when these things happen to us. For the good of the Black community. To save ourselves from Them.

In that reaction, this story of alleged gang rapes evolves into a story of within-group violence—an all-too-familiar narrative of “Black-on-Black crime” that, because of racial trauma, has implications for disclosing rape, engaging with the judicial system, and seeking mental health treatment when needed.

In the present article we introduce a new theoretical framework to better understand how racial trauma affects Black women and girls who have experienced sexual violence by Black males. We begin by first exploring racial trauma. Then, we discuss the collective sense of being in U.S. Black culture, along with the burden placed on Black females. Cultural betrayal trauma theory (CBTT; Gómez 2018c), which was developed to understand how outcomes of within-group violence can be impacted by both victim and perpetrator(s) being subjected to inequality, is then introduced and defined. Next, we review the evidence for CBTT and we outline its implications. Finally, mechanisms to address the interwoven harm of racial trauma and cultural betrayal trauma within institutions (e.g., mental health care) and the community (e.g., in collaboration with the Black church) are elucidated to facilitate healing within #MeToo and beyond.

Racial Trauma

As a type of societal trauma, racial trauma is defined as experiencing or witnessing real or perceived racial discrimination that involves danger, threats of harm and injury, humiliation, or shaming (Comas-Díaz 2016). Racial trauma can be interpersonal or systemic. Interpersonal racial trauma involves exchanges between two or more people where racist attitudes are explicitly or implicitly communicated and/or acted out. Systemic racial trauma occurs when prejudicial beliefs translate into formal or informal racially oppressive laws, policies, and practices that disenfranchise non-dominant groups (Huber and Solorzano 2015). Police brutality (e.g., Philando Castile; Chan 2016; Taylor 2016), racially-motivated killings (e.g., Trayvon Martin; see Fasching-Varner et al. 2014), and mass incarceration (Alexander 2012) are examples of systemic racial trauma.

Racial trauma impacts the spirit and psyche of Black people (Hardy 2013). Specifically, Hardy (2013) identifies some of the effects of racial trauma: internalized devaluation—deification of Whiteness and demonization of non-Whiteness; assaulted sense of self—barrier to the development of a healthy sense of self because of repeated exposure to negative race-related messages; internalized voicelessness—difficulty advocating for oneself in the face of negative race-related messages about the self; and rage—a complex emotional response to the onslaught of negative race-related messages characterized by anger, explosiveness, sadness, and depression. The constructs of racist incident-based trauma (Bryant-Davis and Ocampo 2005) and race-based traumatic stress (Carter 2007) have identified the specific impact of prolonged exposure to racism on mental health. Unsurprisingly, racial trauma, including specific types such as awareness of racialized police brutality, negatively impacts U.S. Blacks' mental health (Bor et al. 2018; Kessler et al. 1999; Pascoe and Smart Richman 2009; Pieterse et al. 2012), potentially contributing to mental health disparities (see Gómez 2015b, for a review).

Collective Sense of Being

A collective sense of being is inherent in Black culture (Nobles 1972). Because kinship, communalism, and unity were integral in West African culture, slaves of West African descent transmitted collectivistic values that are embraced today by many Black Americans (Komarraju and Cokley 2008; Nobles 1972). Specifically, within an Afrocentric worldview, the well-being of the group is most important, and social goals are valued above individualistic goals (Belgrave and Allison 2018; Komarraju and Cokley 2008).

Individuals with an Afrocentric worldview are interdependent. Consequently, they understand and define themselves in relationship to other members of their cultural group, and they consider the impact of individual actions on the cultural group (Belgrave and Allison 2018; Komarraju and Cokley 2008). Inherent in this collective sense of being within U.S. Black culture is a sense of collective responsibility where individuals forgo individual benefit for the good of the entire Black community (Belgrave and Allison 2018; Nobles 1972). With a higher sense of collectivism compared to White European descendants (Oyserman et al. 2002), people of African descent may draw upon collectivistic ways of thinking and being to protect against the negative effects of racism on the health and well-being of community members.

A collectivistic orientation may create culture-specific barriers to disclosure among Black women and girls in the aftermath of intra-racial sexual assault (Tillman et al. 2010). Specifically, when Black females are sexually violated by Black males, they are faced with a formidable dilemma: (a) disclose the abuse and risk turning a Black man over to a law enforcement system that has historically mistreated Black men or (b) remain silent about the abuse and sacrifice their own mental well-being for the good of the cultural group. Essentially, traumatized Black women and girls can simultaneously experience an external locus of control and an internal locus of responsibility regarding their cultural group. Black females may believe that forces outside of themselves (e.g., sexual violation perpetrated by a member of their cultural group) are controlling their mental health and well-being. However, many factors may make Black women and girls hesitant to take any action that could potentially harm the Black man as a valued member of their cultural group: racial loyalty, personal experiences of racism and oppression, a perception that racism is more threatening to the cultural group's well-being than sexism, and prior negative experiences with the legal system (Bent-Goodley 2001; Wyatt 1990).

This culture of silence as a coping strategy has roots in chattel slavery (Hine 1989); through silence, Black women and girls could distance themselves from the emotional and psychological burden of victimization (Hine 1989; West 2006). Nevertheless, the sacrificial act of not disclosing abuse in an effort to protect Black male offenders is ultimately harmful to the Black women and girls who, in addition to suffering the mental health consequences of sexual assault, may be negatively impacted by stereotypical images of Black women (Bent-Goodley 2001; Tillman et al. 2010; Washington 2001).

Cultural Betrayal Trauma Theory

Racial trauma (Comas-Díaz 2016), cultural collective sense of being (Nobles 1972), and the burden on Black women and girls to protect their community at the expense of themselves (Wyatt 1990) means that interpersonal violence within the U.S. Black community is more than just interpersonal. Specifically, U.S. Black women and girls' experiences of intra-racial sexual assault (with documented

prevalence or rates of .003%–30%; Bryant-Davis et al. 2009) are impacted by racial trauma that is present throughout the ecological system (e.g., dominant cultural norms regarding racism, sexism and classism; police violence; mass incarceration). Cultural betrayal trauma theory (CBTT; Gómez 2012, 2015a, c, 2016, 2017a, b, 2018a, c, d, e, in press[a]) provides a framework for examining intra-racial violence in minority communities within the broader context of inequality.

CBTT expands the literature on trauma psychology. Traditional models presuppose that the component of fear across disparate traumas (e.g., hurricane exposure; incest) causes distress, with only a subset of individuals being adversely affected (see DePrince and Freyd 2002 for a discussion). Betrayal trauma theory (e.g., Freyd 1996) distinguishes interpersonal traumas, such as child sexual abuse, from others (e.g., car accidents) by the trust and dependency within interpersonal relationships. For instance, a caregiver who sexual abuses a child violates the trust and dependency that the child has on the caregiver. Individuals are vulnerable to this violation, thus making interpersonal betrayal a dimension of traumatic harm that contributes to costly outcomes (e.g., Gómez and Freyd in press).

In CBTT, societal trauma, including racial trauma, is conceptualized as a stressor that contributes to diverse negative outcomes of within-group trauma in minority populations. Akin to the trust and dependence within a family, some minorities develop (intra)cultural trust with each other to buffer against the harm of societal trauma. With this (intra)cultural trust comes vulnerability; when violence occurs within-group, it is a violation of this (intra)cultural trust, which is known as a cultural betrayal. According to CBTT, cultural betrayal in trauma contributes to diverse outcomes related to: mental and physical health, identity, internalized prejudice, disclosure, help-seeking behaviors, and posttraumatic growth. The framework of CBTT includes: societal trauma (e.g., racial trauma), cultural values, (intra)cultural trust, within-group trauma—termed cultural betrayal trauma, (intra)cultural pressure, abuse outcomes (e.g., PTSD, dissociation), and cultural outcomes (e.g., internalized prejudice). We explain (intra)cultural trust, cultural betrayal, cultural betrayal trauma, and (intra)cultural pressure in more detail in the following.

(Intra)Cultural Trust

In addition to racial trauma, (intra)cultural trust is at the crux of CBTT. It is a blend of cultural collective sense of being (Nobles 1972) and racial loyalty (Bent-Goodley 2001; Tillman et al. 2010), and it is defined as connection, attachment, dependency, love, loyalty, and responsibility (Gómez 2015a) to other minorities and the minority group as a whole. Found across various contexts (Cabral and Smith 2011; Goode-Cross and Grim 2016), (intra)cultural trust is engendered by needs for psychological protection from societal trauma, including racial trauma, perpetrated by individuals, institutions, systems, and policies of the dominant culture. The concept of (intra)cultural trust additionally incorporates an understanding of the needs for attachment and dependency between perceived oppressed in-group others generally (Gómez 2016). Without labeling it as such, hooks (1994, p. 67) described what could be known as (intra)cultural trust in the U.S. Black community as “. . . the collective sense of sweet solidarity in blackness.”

Cultural Betrayal and Cultural Betrayal Trauma

(Intra)cultural trust is central to understanding cultural betrayal. Cultural betrayal is “the violation of (intra)cultural trust in the form of trauma, abuse, violation, or other harmful interactions perpetrated by presumed in-group members of . . . minorities” (Gómez 2015a, p. 41). Within-group traumas in minority populations are cultural betrayal traumas due to the violation of the (intra)cultural trust. Importantly, the ultimate cause of cultural betrayal in trauma is racial trauma and/or other forms of societal trauma.

Cultural betrayal trauma is defined as interpersonal trauma—physical, sexual, and/or psychological abuse—where the victim and perpetrator share at least one minority identity. For instance, according to CBTT, @RapedAtSpelman described a cultural betrayal trauma because she and the alleged perpetrators of the gang rape were all Black in the U.S. (Gómez 2016). Given the contextualization of trauma in CBTT, the proposed outcomes are diverse, including abuse outcomes (e.g., PTSD) and cultural outcomes (e.g., internalized prejudice).

(Intra)Cultural Pressure

The burden on Black women and girls can be brought to bear through (intra)cultural pressure. (Intra)cultural pressure is a transformation of (intra)cultural trust that occurs to protect the minority group at large to the detriment of the well-being of individual minority members. For example, “The same loyalty to innocent Black men who are abused by discriminatory police and judicial systems can also transfer to rapists: Black women are charged with protecting their attackers at the expense of themselves” (Gómez 2015c, p. 12). Such perceived responsibility to protect Black men (Bell and Mattis 2000) can contribute to Black women and girls’ reluctance to disclose intra-racial trauma (Neville and Pugh 1997; Tillman et al. 2010; Ullman and Filipas 2001; Washington 2001). In this way, coercion for secrecy by either the perpetrator(s) and/or the non-offending members of the minority group dictate that the needs of one in-group member (the victim) is trumped by the needs of the entire minority group. Stemming from societal trauma, including racial trauma, (intra)cultural pressure can manifest in various ways, including covert or overt demands for silence, suggesting the trauma may affect the reputation of the entire minority group, and punishing individuals who disclose cultural betrayal trauma.

Cultural Betrayal Trauma Theory in Action

A vignette can help explain how CBTT may operate in real life. Gómez (2015a, p. 41):

A Black American woman attends a party hosted by a Black American fraternity that has been a source of emotional support for her at the predominantly White university she attends. At this party, she is raped by a presumed Black American male party-goer. Following the cultural betrayal trauma, this woman experiences symptoms of PTSD—hypervigilance around Black American men of the same build and complexion as the perpetrator. This heightened fear also contributes to internalized racism, as she thinks, “Maybe Black people really are violent and criminal.”

Implied in this vignette is: (a) the presence of racial trauma at this student’s predominantly White university, (b) (intra)cultural trust with other Black students, and (c) a collective sense of being that engenders community connection.

This example also shows the progression of diverse outcomes of cultural betrayal trauma. In addition to PTSD, this situation demonstrates how internalized prejudice can be linked with cultural betrayal trauma. Therefore, this simple vignette explains CBTT by incorporating racial trauma, (intra)cultural trust, cultural betrayal trauma, abuse outcomes, and cultural outcomes into the conceptualization of rape.

Intra-Racial Versus Interracial Trauma

Both within-group (intra-racial) and between-group (interracial) trauma occur within the societal context of racial trauma. Therefore, both inter- and intra-racial trauma are likely affected by this context in different ways. Interracial trauma with White perpetrators and Victims of Color may be re-instantiations of colonialism, cultural genocide, and current inequality. However, according to CBTT (Gómez 2018c), intra-racial trauma (known as cultural betrayal trauma) is distinct because its harm is a direct reaction to this aforementioned oppression: Interpersonal trauma in this context is a violation of the needed sanctuary from historic and present inequality.

Interracial Trauma

Victims’ and perpetrators’ races have been found to impact interpretations of sexual harassment and assault (George and Martínez 2002). Specifically, unwanted sexual attention is more likely to be labeled as sexual harassment or assault, with attributions of blame being stronger, when the perpetrator is from a different race than the person who is victimized (George and Martínez 2002). Moreover, interracial sexual harassment and assault may impact reported emotional and mental well-being more strongly than intra-racial assaults (Shelton and Chavous 1999; Woods et al. 2009).

Woods et al. (2009) found that sexual harassment perpetrated by White American men in the workplace had more negative outcomes for Black American women compared to intra-racial sexual harassment. Compared to sexual harassment that was intra-racial, interracial sexual harassment was more likely to include both racism and sexism; additionally, White perpetrators were more likely to be of higher status (Woods et al. 2009). Therefore, societal inequality (e.g., racism) was incorporated into interracial sexual harassment in a way that was dissimilar to experiences of intra-racial sexual harassment.

Theorists have attributed differential appraisals of sexual harassment across racial lines to the historical legacy of the sexual mistreatment of Black women and girls by White men during slavery (Adams 1997), the absence of laws to protect Black women and girls from gendered violence during slavery (White 1999), and differences in social power and status between Black American victims and perpetrators within employment organizations and society (Langhout et al. 2005; Woods et al. 2009). Taken together, the findings suggest that part of the harm of interracial trauma may be its mirroring of the legacy of racial trauma.

Intra-Racial Trauma

Researchers have found evidence for the specific impact of intra-racial harm across ethnic minority groups. Such harm includes internal discrimination (Sanchez and Espinosa 2016), which is racial prejudice that occurs within a minority group. For instance, compared with interracial discrimination, internal discrimination was conceptualized by Latinos as problematic in the Latino community, with Black Latinos being most at risk for such discrimination (Lavariega Monforti and Sanchez 2010). Moreover, internal discrimination through the accusation of Acting White (Fordham and Ogbu 1986) is linked with more psychosocial and mental health problems in Black youth and emerging adults (Durkee and Williams 2015; Murray et al. 2012; Ogbu 2004). These findings are consistent with CBTT because they identify prejudice that happens within minority groups as being uniquely harmful.

Additionally, there is burgeoning research within trauma psychology that provides evidence that intra-racial trauma as a cultural betrayal trauma is more predictive of diverse negative outcomes than interracial trauma (Gómez 2017a, b, 2018c, d, e), including PTSD (Gómez 2017a) and internalized prejudice (Gómez 2018c). This work provides support for CBTT through indicating that the harm of intra-racial trauma is distinct from that of interracial trauma. Specifically, these findings suggest that cultural betrayal is a dimension of harm that stems from the impact of racial trauma.

Interpretation of the Findings

Despite the aforementioned evidence, comparisons between intra-racial and interracial trauma should be interpreted with care because no known research suggests that interracial trauma is harmless. Moreover, insofar as White-perpetrated interracial trauma can be reenactments of oppression, the impact of racial trauma is likely more direct in these cases. Thus, racial trauma likely affects inter- and intra-racial trauma in different ways. Therefore, CBTT should be conceptualized as a single guiding framework for engendering work on how racial trauma impacts intra-racial trauma specifically, while not diminishing racial trauma's impact on interracial trauma.

CBTT Evidence

Because CBTT is a relatively new construct, evidence in support of this framework is in its infancy. Nevertheless, the empirical base thus far is promising. As we previously mentioned, research across ethnic minority groups already exists that isolates the harm of intra-racial trauma as potentially a cultural betrayal (Gómez 2017a, b, 2018c, d, e). However, alternative explanations may explain those findings.

Perceived Similarity?

Research suggests that intra-racial trauma is a harmful cultural betrayal trauma (Gómez 2017a, b, 2018c, d, e; in press[a]). However, it is possible that the harm of intra-racial trauma stems from perceived similarity due to the trauma being perpetrated within-group. If that were the case, the role of racial trauma would be negligible because the outcomes of trauma would not vary between minority and majority populations.

Gómez and Freyd (2018) probed this question in a diverse sample, which was 4% Black/African American. In this study, 179 college students who self-identified as ethnic minority, sexual minority, foreign national, and/or Muslim were compared with 189 majority members who denied the aforementioned identities/group memberships. The results revealed there was an interaction between within-group sexual assault and minority status that affected mental health outcomes, including total trauma symptoms, depression, sexual abuse sequelae, sleep disturbances, and sexual problems. Specifically, the links between within-group trauma and mental health outcomes were stronger for minorities. These findings indicate that minorities were more vulnerable to mental health outcomes of within-group sexual assault compared with their majority counterparts. This study provides evidence against perceived similarity as an explanation for increased harm in within-group trauma. Rather, the findings are consistent with our speculation that within-group trauma may disproportionately harm minorities because of cultural betrayal in the trauma. According to CBTT, this cultural betrayal exists because of societal trauma, including racial trauma.

Close Relationship with the Perpetrator?

Decades of research have demonstrated that being abused by a trusted or depended upon person(s) is associated with deleterious outcome (DePrince et al. 2012; Gómez 2018b; Gómez and Freyd 2017; Gómez et al. 2014a, b). Because a majority of violence is perpetrated by someone close (Freyd 1996), it is possible that the relationship, as opposed to cultural betrayal, is impacting outcomes. In a sample of 296 diverse ethnic minority young adults, Gómez (2018d) found that while controlling for ethnicity, interracial trauma, and high betrayal trauma (perpetrator: close other), intra-racial trauma predicted dissociation and hallucinations. This finding further isolates the impact of the within-group nature of trauma, thus lending additional support for the deleterious effects of intra-racial trauma as a cultural betrayal trauma (Gómez 2012).

Community of Interest: Black Americans

The aforementioned work provides an introductory empirical base for CBTT. However, given that CBTT was created from a U.S. Black feminist understanding of oppression, perhaps the most compelling evidence will come from examining CBTT within U.S. Black populations. At this point, one known study have been employed with Black Americans.

Using a small subsample from a larger study of CBTT, Gómez (in press[a]) explored the impact of cultural betrayal trauma and (intra)cultural pressure on mental health outcomes in 43 Black college students attending a predominantly White university. Over 50% of the sample reported experiencing cultural betrayal trauma. Furthermore, over 66% of people who experienced cultural betrayal trauma endorsed having experienced (intra)cultural pressure, such as suggesting your experience might affect the reputation of your ethnic group (item modified from the Institutional Betrayal Questionnaire by Smith and Freyd 2013). Additionally, cultural betrayal trauma predicted PTSD, whereas (intra)cultural pressure predicted dissociation. These findings suggest that the outcomes of trauma may be further complicated by group dynamics affected by racial trauma. Although it has been found in diverse U.S. ethnic minorities (Gómez 2018c, e), future work in larger Black samples would be able to test this question specifically: Is (intra)cultural pressure a mediator for outcomes of cultural betrayal trauma for Black women and girls?

CBTT Implications

Theoretical Implications

Theory-driven empirical research is valued as a means for systematically investigating complex psychological phenomena (e.g., Snowden and Yamada 2005). CBTT does not provide proscriptive, deterministic answers for healing in the U.S. Black community. Instead, it offers a theory-driven, empirically-informed starting place to probe the complex questions of how all aspects of intra-racial trauma in the Black community are impacted by historical and current racial trauma. This includes systematically investigating how racial trauma, (intra)cultural trust, and (intra)cultural pressure impact Black women and girls specifically. Therefore, the primary contributions of this work to multicultural psychology will include privileging the sociocultural contexts of underrepresented groups (Hall et al. 2016) through incorporating racial trauma into naming experiences of intra-racial trauma, studying such trauma as cultural betrayal trauma, and designing culturally congruent interventions based on the findings.

Empirical Implications

Perhaps the foremost theoretical implication is a call to action for research on CBTT. The development and validation of the Cultural Betrayal Multidimensional Inventory (CBMI; Gómez and Johnson 2019) on diverse samples of Black emerging adults is currently underway. The CBMI will include subscales on (intra)cultural trust, (intra)cultural support, (intra)cultural pressure, cultural betrayal, cultural betrayal trauma, and posttraumatic growth. Once validated, the CBMI can facilitate work on U.S. Black populations by independent researchers.

Finally, CBTT provides more questions than answers at both the individual and societal levels. The crux of these questions centers around racial trauma: (a) How does racial trauma directly and indirectly impact outcomes of cultural betrayal trauma?, For whom?, and What role does sexism play for Black women and girls who are victimized?; (b) As a protective factor against racial trauma, how might (intra)cultural trust across genders also mitigate the harm of cultural betrayal trauma?; and (c) What are the mechanisms by which (intra)cultural trust transforms into (intra)cultural pressure?, and Would addressing racial trauma reduce the likelihood of such (intra)cultural pressure? How?

Clinical Implications

The applied implications of CBTT research are the information this work can provide for clinical interventions. Relational cultural therapy (RCT; Jordan 2010; Miller 1976; Miller and Stiver 1997; Walker 2011) was developed in reaction to White male conceptualizations of psychological health, such as autonomy as a primary goal of therapy (Miller and Stiver 1997). RCT frames relational interdependence as positive and necessary for psychological well-being and identifies the primary cause of distress as relational disconnections from the self and others (Miller and Stiver 1997). As such, RCT centers the therapeutic relationship as the mechanism of change, while incorporating the broader societal context into conceptualizations of psychological distress (Walker 2011). Therefore, RCT may be particularly useful for people who experience violence victimization (Banks 2006; Birrell and Freyd 2006; Gómez, in press [1]; Gómez et al. 2014a, b; Gómez et al. 2016), including U.S. Black women and girls who have endured cultural betrayal trauma. Within such trauma treatment, collaboration with the client (Cloitre 2015) and cultural competency (Brown 2008; Gómez et al. 2016; Hays 2008; Sue 1978) should be incorporated as a means of creating a culturally congruent, survivor-centered healing process.

As the evidence base for CBTT grows, evidence-informed trainings for clinicians to provide developmentally appropriate, culturally competent care in therapy for Black women and girls who have experienced cultural betrayal trauma can be developed. Such curricula could include training clinicians to attend to the existence and effects of racial trauma, (intra)cultural trust, and (intra)cultural pressure. Finally, such trainings could additionally incorporate specific education for White therapists about the importance of privileging Black female clients' perceptions of and reactions to racial trauma over the therapists' own perspectives and emotion, such as beliefs in a just world and distractions from White guilt (critical race theory: Calmore 1992; standpoint theory: Collins 1986, 1997).

Community Healing

When perpetrated by Black males against Black women and girls (see Gómez 2016, 2018a, 2019 for discussions), understanding sexual assault and harassment becomes more complicated as issues of internalized prejudice, racial trauma, and societal inequality emerge. Thinking of how to eradicate racial trauma—and all its destructive impact—means envisioning a world that is vastly different from anything that is currently known (Brown and Imarisha 2015). Given the pressure for Black women and girls to protect their families and communities (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2009), restorative justice approaches (Beck et al. 2010) combined with addressing racial trauma across genders could ameliorate outcomes for Black women and girls who experience cultural betrayal trauma. Doing so could mean healing in the Black community, as well as collaborative growth for a nation that remains divided across racial lines.

To make such change, certain questions should be asked: What would it be like to live in a society where a Black female who experiences cultural betrayal trauma would not have the complication of racial trauma in the meaning-making or aftermath? How would that impact this person's ability to disclose to trusted others? Engage in social justice movements like #MeToo without backlash? Report to the police? Attend mental health care treatment? Moreover, what would it take to eliminate (intra)cultural pressure that is fueled by racial trauma? What would need to change?

Psychology, Mental Health Care, and the Judicial System

Implications for the field of psychology, mental health care, and the judicial system in healing in the Black community each center around promoting individual agency and systemic change. For instance, Hall (2006) details the need to increase diversity at all levels in clinical psychology. Gómez (2015b, pp. 131–132) suggests multi-level change in both psychology and mental health care:

(a) societal advocacy for equality, (b) in-depth historical and cultural education in psychology training programs and continuing education courses, (c) relationship-building with professional allies, (d) creation and advertisement of concrete changes in the structure, policy, and professionals of organizations—thereby regaining trust in the Black American community, and (e) recruitment and retention of professionals diverse in background and expertise into the field.

Finally, non-profit corporations like Help Not Handcuffs (<http://www.helpnohandcuffs.org/> (<http://www.helpnohandcuffs.org/>)) are working with legislators to enact laws that protect against police brutality (Thompson et al. [2018](#)). Taken together, individual and systemic change can come from empowered individuals across races and professions using these and other strategies to take action to make a difference and engender healing (Pope [2015](#)).

In Context

Black women and girls' experiences of cultural betrayal trauma (e.g., sexual assault) is shaped by their multiple identities and social statuses, including gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, age, national citizenship, and disability status (Bryant-Davis [2005](#)). Crenshaw ([1991](#)) discusses how the marginalization of Women of Color at various levels of their identities contributes to sexual assault and subsequent disempowerment. For example, some Black women and girls who experience sexual assault have pre-existing vulnerabilities of unemployment, lack of education, and poverty. These social locations coupled with gender and class oppression (Taylor [2017](#)) might create barriers for some Black women and girls who have survived cultural betrayal trauma. For example, a Black woman who presents for mental health treatment following cultural betrayal trauma may need access to resources for transportation, legal rights, criminal justice system processes, childcare, and housing prior to therapy. If systems are not set up to allocate these resources, then Black females will continue to suffer unnecessarily.

Extra-Therapeutic Options

Healing can take place outside therapy. Such healing options can be broadened (see Bryant-Davis [2005](#); Gómez et al. [2016](#), for discussions) to incorporate different sociocultural contributors into recovery (Brown [2004](#)). For instance, Bryant-Davis ([2005](#)) suggests that journaling/poetry, movement, drama/theater, music, nature, arts and crafts, spirituality, social support, and activism can help individuals heal in the ways that feel most true to themselves. Moreover, anonymous online forums (e.g., Drexel University [2016](#)) may be another way for Black women and girls to receive support while avoiding both (intra)cultural pressure and discrimination in mental health care (Gómez [2015b](#)).

Finally, *Condemned to Dance: Cultural Betrayal Trauma Theory* (Gómez and Johnson-Freyd [2015](#)) is an arts-based research project that uses music and movement to illustrate racial trauma, (intra)cultural trust, and cultural betrayal with a fictional group of minority individuals. This film is a creative avenue that is easily accessible to the general public on the video sharing website, YouTube. Arts projects such as this can create belongingness from shared access to empirically-supported information. Such work has the potential to validate the experiences of Black women and girls who experience cultural betrayal trauma by highlighting the omnipresence and harm of racial trauma.

Emotion Emancipation Circles

The Association of Black Psychologists in collaboration with the Community Healing Network produces Emotion Emancipation Circles (EECs) within Black communities (Grills [2013](#); Myers [2013](#)) to provide healing from racial trauma. Designing similar circles for Black women and girls who experience cultural betrayal trauma can capitalize on (intra)cultural trust to mitigate the harm of racial trauma and cultural betrayal. Specifically, these EEC-inspired circles can be constructed in collaboration with community partners to create a structure that would meet community members' needs (e.g., Black women only vs. open to all genders). One goal could be to implement EEC-inspired circles that incorporate psycho-education on racial trauma, interpersonal trauma, and cultural betrayal trauma theory, while facilitating individual- and community-level healing through (intra)cultural trust.

The Black Church

In the U.S., the Black church has played an influential role in the Black community (Taylor et al. [2004](#)) since the slave era when sexual assault and exploitation of Black women were rampant (see Tillman et al. [2010](#)). For instance, ministers and clergy are often consulted for psychological issues, including support in the aftermath of intimate partner violence and sexual assault (Starzynski et al. [2005](#)). Although religiosity and spirituality have been linked to posttraumatic resilience (Alim et al. [2008](#); Gall et al. [2007](#)), negative or shaming responses to sexual assault disclosures within the Black church can be harmful (Ullman [2010](#)). Thus, collaborations between the Black church and mental health professionals may serve much of the Black community in addressing both racial trauma and cultural betrayal trauma.

Partnerships between the Black church and mental health professionals also have the potential to challenge the culture of silence and stigma related to mental health (Gary [2005](#)) and sexual assault (Hampton et al. [2003](#)) in the Black community. Mental health professionals can work alongside church officials to provide education and strategies for responding to sexual assault disclosures in supportive ways (e.g., see Foyne and Freyd [2011](#)). Such strategies can be used in culturally sensitive mental health services within faith communities to promote recovery from racial trauma and cultural betrayal trauma.

Researchers have documented examples of collaborative partnerships with the Black church that address a variety of mental health issues (Allen et al. 2010), including sexual assault (Coleman 2010). For example, *The Dinah Project: A Handbook for Congregational Response to Sexual Violence*, authored by theology scholar, Monica A. Coleman, provides specific guidance regarding how the Black church can promote recovery among people who have been victimized.

Concluding Thoughts

The #MeToo movement (e.g., Robertson 2018) has provided new momentum for eradicating sexual assault and harassment in the United States. As interpreted through the lens of cultural betrayal trauma theory (CBTT; Gómez 2018c), Black women and girls' experiences of intra-racial sexual assault and harassment before (Gómez 2016; Hill 1997) and after the rise of this movement is impacted by racial trauma, sexism, cultural betrayal, and (intra)cultural pressure. In CBTT (Gómez 2018c), societal trauma, in addition to characteristics of the individual and/or the trauma, impact outcomes. Consequently, addressing racial trauma has implications for healing from cultural betrayal trauma as well. As Gómez (2016, para. 7) urged:

Black people are often placed in an impossible position of having to choose whom to protect; this protection can be so necessary against a society that alternates between denigrating us and erasing our very existence. That truth does not mean we should turn on each other through violence or, perhaps even more dangerous, in our reactions to such violence.

By understanding how racial trauma operates in and around intra-racial trauma—on “individual, institutional, societal, and systemic levels” work with CBTT perhaps can aid in dismantling societal inequalities, humanizing Black women and girls who have been victimized, and ultimately promoting healing and liberation (Taylor 2016) through the #MeToo movement and beyond.

Notes

Compliance with ethical standards

The authors report no conflicts of interest. As a theoretical paper, primary research was not conducted. Reporting of previous research was in accordance with ethical reporting standards.

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