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"LET ME TALK MY SHIT":
EXPLORING RACIOCULTURAL TRAUMA THROUGH EMBODIED ARTS

A Dissertation Presented

by

ANDREW B. TORRES

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Social Justice Education

"Let me talk my shit":

Exploring Raciocultural Trauma through Embodied Arts

A Dissertation Presented

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Approved as to style and content by:

_____
Jamila Lyiscott, Chair

_____
Keisha Green, Member

_____
Laura Valdiviezo, Member

_____
Jennifer Randall
Associate Dean of Academic Affairs
College of Education

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my Guela Carmen and Guela Maria; to the island of

Boriken and her people around the world; to my community.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

ANDREW B. TORRES, B.A., SUNY BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY

M.S.Ed., UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Ph.D., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by Assistant Professor Jamila Lyiscott

This dissertation focuses on a qualitative study drawing on critical ethnography in

conjunction with the self-reflective components of autoethnography, the critical race

methodology of racial and counter-storytelling (Johnson, 2017; Solorzano & Yosso,

2002), and youth-centering components of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)

(Cammarota & Fine, 2010; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Torre et al., 2012). The

purpose of this study was to explore the complex relationship between trauma, the lived

realities of racially minoritized youth, and the arts. As theory-building research, this

study sought to expand trauma theory toward raciocultural perspectives of trauma while

expanding performance arts theory into an embodied understanding of performance arts.

Moreover, this theory of trauma is based in the lived realities of racially minoritized

youth as they live with and through trauma. In this way, trauma functions as a haunting

for racially minoritized youth (Derrida, 2012; Gordon, 2008). Observations were

conducted at a monthly open mic, L!t (pseudonym) that the researcher volunteered at for

two years and hosted prior to gaining permission to conduct research. One cisgender

woman and two queer women youth artists participated in the study, which consisted of

10 unstructured interviews held over the course of a year in the New England region of

the United States. The participants and researcher identified as Puerto Rican, although

one participant identified as bi-cultural and another participant identified as multi-cultural

and were mentored by a Puerto Rican artist who was the founder of the monthly open mic, powerful community leader, and a member of the Nuyorican Literary Vanguard. Instead of focusing on pain narratives, this study focused on the various forms of power and wisdom that come from being haunted by traumatic experiences. Findings from this study reveal that participants use embodied arts as a means of therapy that is rooted in culturally sustaining practices. Participants also view performing embodied arts as a pathway toward disrupting the culture of silence around trauma that exists in their communities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Grounded in my personal experience as an Afro-Boricua, cisgender man and over five years of cultivating relationships with youth as a teacher, it has become increasingly clear that too many racially minoritized youth are facing systemic traumas—a perpetual haunting of physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental violence that goes beyond a singular event or crisis and is lived with and lived through—both directly and indirectly within educational and social contexts. This definition of trauma is self-defined and has been developed with feedback given in coursework, conversations with scholars and peers, and my own personal experience with trauma. According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2019), 80% of children evaluated reported experiencing at least one type of trauma, with 77% experiencing more than one type, 27% experiencing three to four types, and 31% experiencing five or more types of trauma (n = 11,104). Based on information from their website, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2019) highlights 12 types of trauma, including but not limited to physical abuse, bullying, sexual abuse, and community violence. In his presentation on social and cultural perspectives of trauma, Jeff Duncan-Andrade (2017) discloses data from a national database on youth trauma that says 1 in 3 urban youth display mild to severe symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in comparison to the Pentagon's data for soldiers coming home from live combat. This evidence shows that urban youth are twice as likely as soldiers returning from the battlefield to experience PTSD. The effects of PTSD are compounded by the fact that unlike soldiers, racially minoritized youth cannot remove themselves from their battlefields, as many of them are located in

their communities and homes. Trauma transcends time and space in this context, as young people continue to be haunted by their trauma while most trauma research focuses on medically-based therapies for coping that are historically grounded in Eurocentric whiteness. I seek to investigate cultural modalities of healing and thriving rooted in the lived realities of racially minoritized youth (Caruth, 2016; Dutro, 2011, 2013; Kaplan, 2005; Leys, 2010; van der Kolk et al., 2005).

Unfortunately, conceptualizations of trauma are historically rooted in Eurocentric theoretical frameworks (Freud, 1920, 1961; Janet, 1907) that often render the trauma that racially minoritized youth live with every day as nonexistent. As a result, discussions of race and culture are often left out of trauma scholarship. *Racially minoritized* is used here to indicate that participants did not identify as minorities, but their racial background is labeled as minoritized by society (Benitez, 2010). Using a raciocultural lens, I argue that trauma goes beyond any one moment and is a perpetual presence of discomfort in our lives that haunts as it informs how we navigate and define our lived realities (Craps, 2013). For many racially minoritized youth that I have worked alongside, the ways in which they make sense of, negotiate, and navigate trauma is gendered, racialized, and generational. Ultimately, trauma is subjective—a reality clear to and felt by the survivor—and those voices that have been silenced and erased for generations should be allowed to speak for themselves in the academies that tend to diagnose and victimize human beings in the name of science.

Whiteness has infiltrated almost every aspects of trauma theory and trauma studies (Bond & Craps, 2020). Leonardo (2002) defined whiteness as a "racial discourse" that impacts the way white people, a socially constructed identity, see the world and

therefore can be considered a "racial perspective, or worldview" that is "supported by material practices and institutions" (p. 32). For racially minoritized youth whom I have encountered over my time as a teacher, overexposure to various forms of institutional and individual violence tends to desensitize them as they often reject the notion that they are traumatized, describing it, instead, as the normal circumstances of their lived realities. Research shows that without addressing the traumas that racially minoritized youth live with, mental health issues, such as stress, anxiety, and depression begin to develop (Carter, 2007; Pierce et al., 1977). There is a lack of scholarship outside of psychology and psychotherapy in exploring pathways to better understand how trauma is informing lived realities. Education is one such field that would benefit from exploring such pathways considering the overwhelming levels of trauma that young people face in schools from bullying to school shootings. More importantly, because much of the scholarship on addressing trauma falls into the psychoanalytic and medical fields, much of methodology is tied to medically based interventions and practices that are dehumanizing to the extent that they label and view the traumatized person as a victim rather than a survivor (Leys, 2010). Cultural pathways that center the lived realities of racially minoritized youth in the context of living with and through racial trauma is also scarce in research literature. One such cultural pathway can be considered 'embodied arts,' which is defined as a framing of performance arts that focuses on the relationship among mind, body, soul and racialized storytelling (Johnson, 2017). To this end, I argue that embodied arts is a concept worth studying as a pedagogical and reflective pathway to begin to address racial traumas in creative and performative ways. In the context of this study, embodied arts is used to center the richness embedded within the lived realities

and voices of racially minoritized youth. I contend that embodied arts is a reconceptualization of performance arts that aims to center the dialectical relationship among the body, mind, and soul in the production and performance of works of art.

For many racially minoritized youth with whom I have worked closely, speaking about one's lived reality or telling one's story is seen as taboo even at the family level that tends to lead young people to being raised to internalize their truth in fear of making oneself vulnerable. As these youth internalize these feelings, they often begin to create safety/defense mechanisms/behaviors that mask what is truly going on in their worlds. With the exponential increase of youth-led movements centered around police brutality against black and brown bodies, gun violence in the form of school shootings, and injustice on indigenous land and bodies—although not new—there has been a rise in national and international media attention over the last eight years, since the murder of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman.

Given the current geo-sociopolitical climate, racially minoritized youth whom I have taught have expressed fear, anxiety, and frustration with the daily reports of violence and death. Based on these revelations, there is a need—in theoretical, methodological, and practical terms—for a pathway to understanding the lived realities of youth who live with and through trauma, to confront those internalized fears and to liberate their voices. This pathway must not view youth who live with and through trauma as broken and should work to create opportunities for youth to envision their lived realities as resources. As they self-realize these resources, they translate them into assets that might be useful in transforming their limited situations of their traumas through *praxis* (Freire, 2000). For educators who work with racially minoritized youth, not

understanding their lived realities may generate tensions that manifest themselves in various microaggressions including but not limited to emotional outbursts, miscommunication/misunderstandings, and (un)intentional harm of the multiple identities racially minoritized youth embody and how they intersect and interact at any given time and in any given space. I have personally experienced these tensions with students as a teacher and even now with administrators as a doctoral student. Using spoken word poetry, I have been able to reconcile some of these tensions by centering storytelling as a pathway to actualizing my authentic self.

This study also used embodied art—a framing of performance arts that focuses on the relationship among mind, body, soul, and racialized storytelling (Johnson, 2017) —to capture the different art forms that perform at the monthly open mic. Embodied arts are conceptualized as a way to expand our understanding of what comes to mind when one thinks of performance arts to include forms beyond spoken word or slam poetry, such as stand-up comedy, dancing, and/or music (i.e., singing, hip hop, instrumentation) that we have experienced at the monthly open mic.

The purpose of this study is to explore the complex relationship among trauma, the lived realities of racially minoritized youth, and the arts. Performance poetry, which can be considered a modality of embodied arts, engenders a sense of creative freedom in which many racially minoritized youth feel that they are not limited in their expression of self. As youth share their stories in spaces that they construct and that center their lived realities, they begin to see the power that is and has always been deeply rooted within them; a power that is dormant and grounded in survivance (Vizenor, 2008) of oppression and its pervasiveness in multiple intersecting ways. The youth begin to see that they

never needed to be empowered because they were always in possession of what I have come to call (in)power, or the internalized power that is dormant and reveals itself periodically within all who are constantly labeled as broken and/or damaged. This problem is not one that can be addressed in one linear way or in an instant but in a plurality of nonlinear pathways as a continuing, organic process of self-realization and self-actualization that can take many forms. Embodied arts are seen as one of many pathways to better navigating this process for racially minoritized youth who experience trauma daily as it invites youth to disrupt traditional writing conventions through the use of symbolic creativity (Willis, 1990) and storytelling (Johnson, 2017; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

The primary research question at the center of this study is: In what ways might embodied arts address trauma in racially minoritized youth? This question was developed as a descriptive question attempting to investigate the complex relationship among trauma, lived realities of racially minoritized youth, and embodied arts performance. There was also an attempt to avoid the assumption that embodied arts is used by racially minoritized youth to address trauma. A qualitative approach to addressing this question provides the humanizing element of creating spaces for participants to speak their truth by sharing stories.

The chapters to follow provide a framework to better understand where this study will fit within existing scholarship. There will be a deeper explanation of the theoretical framework and how it will be used. The next chapter focuses on a literature review of relevant scholarship and puts these studies in conversation with each other to identify gaps and make connections with the study. At the core of the literature review will be a

discussion of trauma theory and trauma studies through various lenses beginning with a history of trauma theory/studies to detail traumas Eurocentric roots. To follow will be a discussion of relevant scholarship on trauma and homing in on how they are defined, the ways in which they will inform the study, and the potential gaps that are not addressed. The next section focuses on haunting as a way to frame the terrifying nature of living with and through trauma. This section describes how racially minoritized youth are often not believed by adults when they experience a trauma, similar to the way ghosts and hauntings are often questioned. The sections to follow focus on counter-storytelling and racialized storytelling to generate a distinction and make arguments for conceptualizing embodied arts as a modality of racial storytelling. The next section discusses scholarship on performance arts and spoken word as a means of gaining a deeper understanding of how embodied arts fits into the scope of performance arts. To follow is a section that discusses the conceptualizations that this study will seek to validate. To close out the chapter, there is a discussion of a personal anecdote as an exercise in racial storytelling and then a conclusion to synthesize the information in the chapter. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and rationale for the particular choices made in qualitative instruments.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

<u>Introduction</u>

The purpose of this study is to explore the complex relationship among trauma, the lived realities of racially minoritized youth, and the performance of embodied arts. Understanding the origins of trauma theory and trauma studies is pivotal in tracking the ever-changing landscape of the field. Moreover, due to the expansiveness of the field of trauma theory and trauma studies, it is important to narrow down the specific and relevant literature that can provide a linear and cohesive context for the theoretical framework of the study. This chapter seeks to review relevant literature within the scope of trauma and trauma studies. To begin, I offer a short history of trauma to better understand its origins. Next, I build on the concept of race-based trauma. To follow is a discussion of racial trauma and its connection to race-based stress. Subsequently, I offer a description of cultural trauma and how this theory looks at the collective effects of trauma. Furthermore, I delve into complex trauma to further understand how to theorize youth/adolescent trauma. I then discuss the connections between trauma and media to describe ways that we are desensitized to violence and trauma. Lastly, I describe the efficacy of trauma, witnessing, and testimony as an area that needs deeper connections into *feeling* what youth go through.

<u>A Review of Trauma Theory/Studies</u>

A Brief History of Trauma

The genesis of the term trauma can be traced to medical scholarship where, "trauma was originally the term for a surgical wound" (Leys, 2010, p. 19). Despite the

evolution of the medical term, scholarship on trauma regularly highlights psychoanalytic studies on Holocaust survivors, war survivors, and war veterans (Caruth, 2016; Leys, 2010; Radstone, 2007). This is in no way saying that surviving genocidal or war-based events are not traumatic. What is missed is that there is cultural and racial analysis of trauma that is experienced outside of these Eurocentric paradigms that often goes unnoticed and is frequently silenced by academia and systematically erased by the world.

The pattern of centering the experiences of white Europeans has often dictated the trajectory of trauma literature, which has now become mountainous in volume. The word *trauma* itself has origins in Europe, "the Greek *trauma*, or "wound," originally referring to an injury inflicted on the body" (Caruth, 2016, p. 3) is the source for the English and German iterations of the word. What wound do we talk about? Is a wound inherently damaging? Trauma has gone through various interpretations beginning with the study of bodily traumas and slowly moving into neurosis. The focus on the body shifted to pain inflicted on the mind with the rise of Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud and his work on hysteria. With Freud and the works of French psychotherapist Pierre Janet and American physician Morton Prince, "The emphasis began to fall on the hysterical shattering of the personality consequent on a situation of extreme terror or fright" (Leys, 2010, p. 4). This change emphasized the concept of dissociation, which looks at the disconnection of trauma survivors from their thoughts, feelings, and memory.

It is important to note that interest in trauma was not necessarily strong, as many medical professionals were not convinced of the academic or scholarly validity of trauma as a diagnosable illness. Leys (2010) further explained this issue stating, "not even the independent psychoanalytic studies of the long-term effects of trauma on survivors of the

Holocaust…succeeded in arousing widespread interest in trauma" (p. 5). It can be argued

that the origins of trauma are grounded in a constant need to persuade academic, political,

and legal gatekeepers of the existence and persistence of trauma on actual lived lives

(Bond & Craps, 2020). Advocacy for trauma as a medical diagnosis is "the result of an

essentially political struggle by psychiatrists, social workers, activists and others to

acknowledge the post-war sufferings of the Vietnam War veteran" (Leys, 2010, p. 5). Up

until 1980, trauma in the context of PTSD was not recognized by the American

Psychiatric Association, when "the third edition of the…*Diagnostic and Statistical*

Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1980) accorded the

traumatic syndrome, or PTSD, official recognition for the first time" (Leys, 2010, p. 5).

Considering that it took over 100 years from its inception before trauma was officially

recognized, trauma as a scholarly and medical concept has a history of being contested.

This contestation can be taken as evidence of an epistemological tension in which the

theory of knowledge around trauma was not seen as valuable by established medical

professionals and scholars. Once it was finally categorized in a canonical text, trauma

began to branch off into various fields of study, including the humanities, arts, literacy

studies, and social sciences. This process of validation is similar to the experiences of

racially minoritized youth who are constantly attempting to convince their family

members, teachers, and peers only to be surrounded by a culture of silencing and erasure.

As a result, young people with whom I have worked have described internalizing their

feelings to protect themselves from being emotionally, physically, or mentally hurt.

Race-based Trauma

A more specific take on trauma is *race-based trauma* as argued by Carter (2007). Understanding the lived realities of racially minoritized youth and the idea that "the events that may produce race-based traumatic stress reaction(s) occur in many different forms" (p. 88) may provide opportunities to develop trauma-informed pedagogies. This understanding is central to developing a deeper sense of how complex trauma is in relation to the lived realities of racially minoritized individuals. Carter went on to state:

> [Race-based trauma] can occur on an interpersonal level (microaggressions, verbal assaults, use of symbols or coded language), and can be the effect of structural or systemic acts. Racism may occur on an institutional level, as an application of racial stereotypes or as encounters and assault(s), and it may occur through cultural racism. (p. 88)

The multiple levels at which race-based trauma occurs speaks to the depth of emotion and feeling that accompanies the living with/through such trauma. The depth of emotion and feeling adds to the complexity of how trauma affects racially minoritized youth, which requires further investigation for deeper understanding and effective action to support them.

The intersectional nature of race-based traumatic events applies also to the multiple identities that racially minoritized individuals embody at any given time, in any given space (Tatum, 2017). As Carter (2007) pointed out, "It is important not to treat members of racial groups as monolithic or psychologically similar in regard to their experiences and understanding of racism (Carter & Gesmer, 1997; Helms et al., 2005; Thompson & Carter, 1997)" (p. 68). This quote provides evidence that historically, experiences and understandings of racism have been oversimplified and often conflate the experiences of multiple ethnic groups as being the same. The need for complicating

the experiences of members from different racial groups in relation to trauma must strive

to be respective of their unique lived realities and multiple identities.

Carter (2007) described a fundamental component to race-based trauma

delineating:

> For race-based traumatic stress to be present, one must perceive the class of racism event(s)—racial discrimination, racial harassment, or discriminatory harassment—as *negative* (*emotionally painful*), *sudden*, and *uncontrollable*. Furthermore, one should have some elements of the following reactions: intrusion, avoidance, or arousal. When there may be greater presence of the intrusion and avoidance elements, because they contribute to the arousal features of the trauma, the reactions may be manifested physiologically, cognitively, behaviorally, and through emotional expression. They can also be manifested as anxiety, anger, rage, depression, compromised self-esteem, shame, and guilt. (p. 90)

The uncontrollable aspects of events show how race-based trauma is unpredictable and

the various reactions that stem from living with/through race-based trauma. Words, such

as acknowledge and recognition can be found riddled throughout the rhetoric of Carter's

(2007) article, but in the same sense that witness and testimony is not enough, neither is

acknowledgement and recognition. There is the danger of a slippery slope especially in

neo-liberal ideology that says simply recognizing or witnessing or acknowledging trauma

is enough to fully comprehend the incomprehensible. This tends to leave a void, a

termination of investment, once there is a sufficient feeling that the researcher has

acknowledged or recognized the lived realities of participants. Who defines

acknowledgement? What happens after the trauma is recognized? Does it stop affecting

the lived realities of participants? Do participants go on to live with/through the trauma

despite multitudes of recognition, acknowledgement, and witness of their worlds?

Racial Trauma

The social construct of race is complex when we center and understand the lived realities of racialized people in the United States. Racial trauma carries with it a unique quality that is mostly felt and experienced by racially minoritized folks. This unique quality is the desensitization and normalization of trauma that exist within racially minoritizied communities. Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005) delineated, "Racist incidents, which are similar to acknowledged traumatic experiences such as rape or domestic violence, may result in posttrauma-like symptoms" (p. 479). The bombardment of racism and racist incidents causes "racism-related stress," which can be defined as "the emotional, physical, and psychological discomfort and pain resulting from experiences with racism" (Truong & Museus, 2012, p. 228). This is not to say that trauma is a direct and sure result of racism but rather that the effects of racism are felt in a plurality of ways, many which can be defined as traumatic. Racial trauma is defined as "severe cases of racism-related stress" (p. 228). Due to increased efforts to understand the racism-related stress involved with racial trauma we have seen growth in the field of trauma.

Researching racial trauma requires an examination of "how contextual factors and the role of racial socialization in contributing to racial identity development shape the choice of strategies" (Truong & Museus, 2012, p. 249). In more recent scholarship, racial trauma is viewed as direct and indirect experiences that are compounded as they are experienced and how they contribute to chronic stress (Comas-Díaz, 2016). Increased visibility of attacks against racially minoritized folks on news media may be linked to the development of trauma symptoms (Comas-Díaz, 2016). Furthering these important theories means pushing beyond reductionist understandings of trauma in which

13

definitions are limited and move toward a more organic and complex paradigm that systematically questions how racial trauma is defined and experienced beyond the stress paradigm. This paradigm conflicts with understanding trauma outside of a pain framework. Trauma is painful and stressful, but it is also revealing and fortifying. Educators and scholars must also validate the inherent power and wisdom that comes from the pain and stress of those who live with and through trauma rather than focusing on the damage that trauma can cause.

Cultural Trauma

Cultural trauma takes into consideration certain aspects of racialized experience that is often missed in racial trauma literature. The collective nature of experience among racialized folks and how this experience informs culture and community is rarely observed in racial trauma literature. Alexander et al. (2004) opened their book, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity,* saying, "Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (p. 1). A collectivity can be defined along racial lines as well as gender lines among other identity lines. There is an interplay between the individual and collective in the experiencing of trauma. The traumatic event that is collectively experienced by the group informs the individual identity of those within that group and vice versa. Within this context, there is also a sense of agency or choice within the group by which "'collective actors" "decide" to represent social pain as a fundamental threat to their sense of who they are, where they came from, and where they want to go" (p. 10).

Another iteration of cultural trauma is described as involving, "more than physical destruction of people, property, and landscapes such as might be seen in warfare or ethnic cleansing" (Stamm et al., 2004, p. 3). This is key in widening the scope of trauma by creating opportunities to highlight trauma in contexts that have rarely been focused on in psychotherapy scholarship. Furthermore, cultural trauma, "directly and indirectly attacks what constitutes culture, of which there are some essential yet vulnerable elements: body/space practices, religion, histories, language, state organizations, and economics" (p. 4). Through this framework of cultural trauma, we are allotted a complex interpretation of trauma that is inclusive of a multidimensional and multivariant perception of identity. However, we must call into question how these fields of study are historically authored by white, heterosexist gatekeepers and inherently exclude the very populations that are discussed in their studies from developing, authoring, and/or validating a theory. We must also question how this type of theory is complicated when it is informed by empirical studies that are done by, with, and alongside those who identify within the same cultural and racial identity group. Investigating trauma at the intersection of race and culture might work together to further advance our theorization of trauma.

Complex Trauma

A growing need to address the PTSD paradigm and those who exhibited post-traumatic stress symptoms but are not diagnosed influenced the emergence of complex trauma. Complex trauma focuses on "emotional abuse and neglect, sexual abuse, and physical abuse, as well as witnessing domestic violence, ethnic cleansing, or war" (Cook, et al., 2005, p. 390) that occurs in the experiences of young children and informs their development into adulthood. This theorization of trauma is critical of how trauma affects

15

young people in ways that are systematically defining the behaviors, attitudes, and actions of these individuals as they enter adulthood. Put another way, complex trauma describes, "the experience of multiple, chronic and prolonged, developmentally adverse traumatic events, most often of an interpersonal nature and early-life onset" (van der Kolk et al., 2005, p. 402). The multitude of traumatic experiences coupled with the severity of those traumatic experiences dictate how we navigate our world. This is important for trauma studies within racially minoritized communities as it provides an avenue to justify and validate the experiences of racially minoritized youth. What is absent from complex trauma is a cultural/racial lens through which we might assess the efficacy of complex trauma within racially minoritized youth. It is critical that scholars and educators recognize that "the threshold for defining a complex trauma reaction as a problem warranting intervention differs not only across national and cultural groups, but also within sub groups" (Cook et al., 2005, p. 396). Investigating these differences across cultural and racialized groups is paramount to further developing trauma theory in relation to cultural and racialized experiences of young people.

Trauma in Media

Trauma is constantly evolving, and one point of inquiry that is still being investigated is the impact of racially minoritized youth seeing trauma regularly on television. With the emergence of technology that allows us to access various types of media, Berger (1997) described the need for scholarship at the intersections of trauma and literary theory. Considering "popular culture and mass media" within our society that is "obsessed by repetitions of violent disasters: at the successions of *Die Hards*, *Terminators*, and *Robocops*" (p. 571), the review describes a need for scholarship to

16

better understand the connections between real human trauma and how it is translated into popular culture and mass media. We must also strive to develop scholarship that addresses how overexposure to trauma is desensitizing the populace. Berger continued describing how media is preoccupied with family dysfunction as characterized by talk shows that systematically discuss different forms of "child abuse, incest, and spousal abuse" (p. 571). To this end Berger argued that "these events, and the visual representations of these events, have in large part shaped contemporary American modes of viewing the world" (p. 572). Thus, it is suggested that there is a need for a theory of trauma that "intersect with other critical vocabularies which problematize representation and attempt to define its limits—discourses of the sublime, the sacred, the apocalyptic, and the Other in all its guises" (p. 573). There is an absence of agency in the poststructuralists and postmodern arguments made in this review. Is there no agency in the viewer as they watch television? There seems to be an inability on the part of those who live through trauma to overcome the structures that open up opportunities for stress-based anxiety due to being triggered by visual stimuli. One course of action can be to tell their story so that others may experience and learn from the lessons embedded in the narrative. There must be more to the story that must be tapped into.

Trauma, Witnessing, and Testimony

Feldman and Laub (1992) introduced their seminal work *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* noting "a 'life-testimony' is not simply a testimony to a private life, but a point of conflation between text and life, a textual testimony which can penetrate us like an actual life" (p. 2). Testimony is an important concept in trauma scholarship because it has "become a crucial mode of our

17

relation to events of our times" (Feldman & Laub, 1992, p. 5). Understanding our relation to world events can give credence to the influential nature of trauma, as it has been compounded by accessibility to experiencing what others go through. Our relation to world events and how they are transmitted to us is often deeply tied to memory. Trauma informs how we remember world events, their impact on our lived realities, and how we remember the messages given through the media. This is the case because "the subject of trauma theory is characterized by that which it does not know/remember" (Radstone, 2007, p. 20). Humanization has been crucial in the development of trauma theory. Radstone explained how interactions between individuals who are and are not traumatized inform testimony and witnessing in the context of subjectivity. In her deliberation, she delineated "trauma theory's moving beyond modernity's coherent, autonomous, knowing subject to a model of subjectivity grounded in the space *between* witness and testifier within which that which cannot be known can begin to be witnessed" (p. 20). The space between witness and testifier provides a buffer zone of subjectivity that can be assessed. Subjectivity is important in the scope of trauma theory, as it is often the level at which trauma is frequently contested. The concepts of witnessing and testimony have a strong foundation in trauma theory, but what type of testimony invites more than just witnessing? Is the audience witnessing enough or is there a way to engender an experiential encounter?

Dutro (2011) theorized trauma in literacy studies as she described difficult experiences as "exposed wounds and the *exposing* of wounds" (p. 194), which may be considered as damage-based rhetoric. The concept of the wound is entangled throughout the scholarship of Dutro as well as "the metaphors of testimony and witness" (p. 197),

which reflect positivist approaches within social science research that seek to gaze into the wound. In her work, Dutro invited teachers to not only witness the testimonies of their students but to offer their own. This can be seen as a form of reciprocity as teachers and students both participate in the act of bearing witness to and sharing testimonies. One issue in this body of scholarship is the constant centering of damage in which the emotion being evoked is hurt. Dutro expressed her desire to understand how the tough experiences of students in high-poverty schools can inform classroom instruction and learning. She argued for *critical witnessing* to address this desire, which entails "a self-conscious attention to both connection and difference between one's own and others' testimonies" (p. 199). Ironically, terminology that engenders othering and power dynamics in certain social structures, such as class, is visible throughout, which often contradicts the more compelling notion of teachers reciprocating what students share. To an extent,

> We may know intellectually that children carry difficult stories into classrooms, but when students' hard stories are allowed to matter in their school experience, we live in a liminal space in which language is both all we have and not nearly adequate. (p. 302)

In this context, language is not enough to fully understand the extent to which these experiences inform our ways of being and knowing. Using a more desire-based framework may alleviate some of the tensions that exist in trauma-based work. Desire-based frameworks entails "understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives" (Tuck, 2009, p. 416). It is important to witness testimony from all stakeholders in a given space, but is that enough? One might argue that there must also be an experience tied to the witnessing of testimony. Through the cultivation of experiences, we invite more than simply witnessing. There is an invitation to *feel* what the storyteller felt at the moment of the experience being described.

The concept of witnessing and testimony is further complicated when examined through a postcolonial lens. This entails understanding how trauma exists as a product of settler colonialism as well as seeking definitions of trauma outside of traditional Western, Eurocentric interpretations. These interpretations can be considered cultural in context because "hegemonic definitions of trauma have been criticized for being culturally insensitive and exclusionary" (Craps, 2013, p. 3). These hegemonic definitions champion an event-based model of trauma that disregard non-traditional renderings of trauma theory. In order for trauma theory to produce instances of cross-cultural ethical engagement, "traumatic colonial histories not only have to be acknowledged more fully, on their own terms, and in their own terms, but they also have to be considered in relation to traumatic metropolitan or First World histories" (Craps, 2013, p. 6). Addressing the settler-colonial origins of trauma means centering cultural definitions of trauma that come from the people who are systemically traumatized. This allows trauma to be more expansive and inclusive of the suffering of historically silenced and erased people.

Haunting

What comes to mind when you think of a haunting? One thought that may come to mind is the believability of a haunting; is this phenomenon real? Another thought that might come to mind is the sheer terror that comes with being followed, watched, and harassed by something that evades definition. "Haunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities" (Gordon, 2008, p. 8). Hauntology provides a comprehensive framework for theorizing how the believability of the trauma that racially minoritized youth go through are systematically contested. Hauntology also provides a framework for

understanding the terrifying nature of living with and through trauma as a racially minoritized youth. The origins of hauntology are rooted in Derrida's (2012) final work *Specters of Marx* in which he argued that deconstruction was a radicalization of Marx's legacy. For Derrida, hauntology, "supplants its near-homonym ontology, replacing the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive" (Davis, 2005, p. 373). These binaries represent the tension that exists between positivistic science and pre-modern mysticism.

Derrida (2012) explained that proof of a haunting is rooted in the appearance of a specter or ghost, which he described through Shakespeare's Hamlet and interactions of the characters with the ghost of his father, King Hamlet. Gordon (2008) also contended, "the ghost is...the empirical evidence...that tells you a haunting is taking place" (p. 8). The nature of the ghost is to *cajole*, which shocks and scares us into questioning, "the very distinctions between there and not there, past and present, force and shape" (p. 6). This cajoling is what allows us to recognize when we are making contact with the ghost. These points of contact evolve into ghost stories or "stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a countermemory, for the future" (p. 22). Examining these ghost stories may provide insight into understanding the ghosts as a means of gaining control of the haunting in which ghosts are conjured rather than randomly appearing uninvited. In this context, conjuring is defined as "a particular form of calling up and calling out the forces that make things what they are in order to fix and transform a troubling situation" (p. 22). Conjuring can be viewed as a practice in praxis

21

with the goal of showing that one's life is much more complex than can be perceived on the surface.

Racially minoritized youth are consistently haunted by trauma, which is where the theorization of living with and living through trauma came from. The idea of living with trauma connects to the concept of being haunted, as it is assumed that to be haunted is to live with a haunting. Ghosts are often perceived as terrifying, that is they incite terror byway of haunting. Hauntings can be horrible reminders of a memory that one is trying to forget but somehow always finds its way into conscious thought. In this context, haunting is terrifying and causes reactions in the one being haunted. In addition to being terrifying, hauntings and ghosts are unbelievable, or they are rarely believed to be real, as many narratives of hauntings indicate. Meanwhile, the one being haunted cannot deny the reality of what they see, feel, hear, taste, touch, and convincing others of the haunting can cause high levels of insecurity and lack of self-confidence in other aspects of their life. For these reasons haunting will be used as a framework to conceptualize the terror and believability of the trauma that racially minoritized youth live with and live through every day.

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Storytelling and Race

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Race is deeply grounded in the settler colonial foundation of the United States (Tuck & Yang, 2012). In *Playing in the Dark*, acclaimed author Toni Morrison eloquently described how race has shifted from its historical origins in science and biology. Morrison (2020) noted, "Race has become metaphorical—a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological 'race' ever was" (p. 63).

Critical race theory, which historically began in legal studies and has evolved in the discipline of education, challenges the metaphorical nature of race to critically examine and highlight its *real* impact on lived realities. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) named three propositions to be aware of with regard to how we conceive of race within our society:

1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States.

2. U.S. society is based on property rights.

3. The intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social (and, consequently, school) inequity. (p. 48)

The connection among race, property, and social inequity shows the need to further examine race because "Race, unlike gender and class, remains untheorized" (p. 49). Moreover, we must constantly remind ourselves that "these inequalities are a logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which discussion of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized" (p. 47). The systemic neglect of race at the institutional level has informed interpersonal relations within our society. Omi and Winant (2010) furthered this conversation by providing a theory of racial formation within the US context. They stated, "Race is a matter of social structure and cultural representation" because it is based on a "sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (p. 56). This process has contributed to the "evolution of hegemony, the way in which society is organized and ruled" (p. 56). Considering the concept of race and racial formation, we come to an understanding that race must be addressed at every level of our society. Centering the voices of those who have been racially minoritized by society is critical to developing holistic, humanizing

approaches that seek to understand how race informs the lived realities of marginalized

social identity groups. In this context "The 'voice' component of critical race theory

provides a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, a first step

on the road to justice" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 58). As we center voices that

have been historically silenced and/or erased, we expand the ways in which race is

theorized. One method of centering these voices is through sharing stories because "For

the critical race theorist, social reality is constructed by the formulation and the exchange

of stories about individual situations. These stories serve as interpretive structures by

which we impose order on experience and it on us" (p. 57). Sharing stories in a way that

pays close attention to the individual shows the shift from positivist quantitative research

concerned with reductionist statistics to decolonizing qualitative research concerned with

humanizing individual lived realities.

Storytelling can be considered as an age-old practice used by various indigenous

and cultural groups as forms of teaching and/or learning, entertainment, mythology, and

creative expression. Storytelling is one of many ways that human beings communicate

with each other. There are various forms of storytelling that invite individuals to delve

into the nuances of their lived realities in creative and symbolic ways. There may be

many purposes behind why someone shares a story, but there is always a message

embedded within the narrative. Employing critical race methodology implies "a

theoretically grounded approach to research that foregrounds race and racism in all

aspects of the research process" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24). Using the

comparative lens of race, I am able to better envision the way racialization defines and

informs the lived realities of racially minoritized youth. Two concepts that are often

intrinsically grounded in messages that are received from society are the concepts of white supremacy and privilege, which can be defined as "a system of opportunities and benefits conferred upon people simply because they are White" (p. 27). Within this context "the ideology of racism creates, maintains, and justifies the use of a "master narrative" in storytelling" (p. 27). This master narrative often erases and marginalizes many communities, especially indigenous, black, latinx, and other racially minoritized communities. The inherent silence wrought by these master narratives tends to be deafening and often perpetuate damage-centered discourse because "what some scholars originally attributed to the biology and genetics of students of color were reclassified and described as cultural deficits" (p. 30). This is problematic because these theories were established without consent of the communities that they generate from. In doing so, there tends to be a downplaying of the notion that "the intercentricity of race and racism in the discourse helps tell majoritarian stories about the insignificance of race and the notion that racism is something in the past" (p. 32). To combat this injustice, Solorzano and Yosso offered *counter-storytelling* as a critical race methodology that shifts the narrative to center those that have been historically silenced. Theoretically speaking, one might envision how stories inherently counter master narratives by simply being spoken into existence whether it was intentional of the storyteller to counter whiteness in their performance or not. I believe that stories have the capacity to do this because they are imbued with the subjective truth of the author, which is informed by their lived reality, and in this way, stories serve as microcosms of the larger world.

The counter-story can be understood as "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society)"

(Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). Researchers may better grasp the efficacy of storytelling in addressing trauma within racially minoritized youth by shattering "complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform" (p. 32).

There are three forms of counter-storytelling that Solorzano and Yosso (2002) described in the article which include *Personal Stories or Narratives*, *Other People's Stories or Narratives*, *Composite Stories or Narratives*, which are defined as follows:

1. Personals stories or narratives recount an individual's experiences with various forms of racism and sexism

2. A narrative that tells another person's story…can reveal experiences with and responses to racism and sexism as told in a third person voice

3. Composite stories and narratives [that] draw on various forms of data to recount the racialized, sexualized, and classed experiences of people of color (p. 33).

These forms of storytelling can be incredibly powerful pathways to accessing the lived realities of racially minoritized individuals.

A form of storytelling that is newly emerging is *racial storytelling*. Johnson (2017) stated that "racial storytelling illustrates how my racial encounters from the past situate themselves in the current moment and still haunt me today" (p. 4). Racial storytelling can be a vehicle for comprehending the complex ways in which lived realities are informed by our past in the moment because storytelling creates spaces for understanding and exploring racialized experiences. There are certain requirements that racial storytelling demands of the storyteller beginning with revisiting "memories that we hope to forget but that continue to live on—memories that trigger feelings of joy, guilt, happiness, sadness, frustration, anger, and rage" (p. 6). Racial storytelling also requires us

"to illustrate our vulnerabilities" (p. 6) for the purpose of liberating narratives that have been held hostage at the hands of white supremacy. These feelings and vulnerabilities are necessary in developing a holistic sense of what the storyteller felt living with and through racial trauma. Through the embodiment of race-based trauma, audiences are invited to experience, in addition to witnessing, recognizing, and acknowledging, the trauma. Johnson argued, "if we do not confront our racial ghosts, then it is an act of repressed and symbolic violence against y(our)self that ultimately continues the narcissism of whiteness and white supremacy" (p. 5). This act of violence furthers master narratives in their mission of erasure. To humanize this process and use a desire-based framework, there must be an explicit effort by researchers who work in indigenous communities and communities of color to center these racialized stories not only as a means of challenging power dynamics, but also inviting different forms of knowledge production and meaning making to build with and alongside the community (Tuck, 2009)

As racially minoritized youth partake in racial storytelling they simultaneously embark on a journey of self-actualization. Due to the idea that "racial storytelling allows us to confront our racial hauntings and to work against our own miseducation while moving toward liberation and self-actualization" (Johnson, 2017, p. 4). The process of self-actualization can be understood as a process that "serves as complex "breakthroughs" and "turning points" that have shaped my worldview" (p. 3). Baszile (2006) argued that a turning point is when "people whose identities are denied, troubled, invisible-ized must create the medium, the voice through which they become" (p. 95). The notion of *becoming* is key as it entails a certain type of growth that is intimately tied to the self and the multiple identities we embody. Using their own voice, racially

minoritized youth speak their truths into existence in ways that are meaningful to them and align with their lived realities. As they hit turning points throughout their process of self-actualization, it is critical that racially minoritized youth are given the space to create their own mediums of expression. Using a desire-based framework requires that researchers make efforts to humanize participants so that they are not taken advantage of during the study. Within a study around trauma, desire-based frameworks provide opportunities to envision racially minoritized youth beyond the damage-centered frameworks that have historically defined their experiences (Tuck, 2009). Some stories are told for the sake of the communities from which they generate and not necessarily as a means of countering whiteness.

> On the one hand, for people of Color, racial storytelling is merely telling a story involving race and racism without the gaze of the dominant narrative. Simply stated, our experiences and who we are as people of Color are not always in relation to or with white people. That is, racial storytelling does not have to be utilized to counter dominant narratives… However, this does not mean counter-stories cannot transpire from racial storytelling. (Johnson, 2017, p. 8)

In this context, storytelling serves more of a unique purpose than simply countering the gaze of dominant narratives. The true goal of racial storytelling is to understand our racialized experiences, confront our racial ghosts so that we might develop a deeper sense of self in relation to our lived realities. As the journey of self-actualization takes shape, racially minoritized youth concretize their street wisdom and develop their identity doing what Johnson described as soul work, or work that nourishes their souls. Through the multimodalities of embodied arts, soul work can start to become an inherent part of the creative and performative process of self-reflexivity.

Racial storytelling can be understood as a practice of *culturally sustaining pedagogy* that requires researchers to "support young people in sustaining the cultural

linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). Racially minoritized youth begin to speak their truth in ways that are self-validating and self-affirming, which "perpetuate foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism" (p. 95) of the youth. To further this pedagogical approach, McCarty and Lee (2014) offered *culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy* that "attends directly to asymmetrical power relations and the goal of transforming legacies of colonization" (p. 101). Shifting power dynamics is another feature of racial storytelling, as all voices are centered and listened to with intent to build understanding and relationships. Furthermore,

> [Culturally sustaining pedagogy is] committed to envisioning and enacting pedagogies that are not filtered through a lens of contempt and pity, but, rather, are centered on contending in complex ways with the rich and innovative linguistic, literate, and cultural practices of...youth and communities of color. (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 86)

Similarly, racial storytelling aims to disrupt notions of damage and sympathy by spotlighting the inherent power and wisdom that comes from the racialized lived experiences of young people. Key to this concept of culturally sustaining pedagogy are the four Rs of "Respect, reciprocity, responsibility" and "caring relationships" (Brayboy et al. as cited in McCarty & Lee, 2014, p. 101). Respect can permit a challenge of conventional societal norms by envisioning racially minoritized youth as respectable on the basis that they are wise and powerful. Reciprocity can generate from the practices that give back what is taken in research data collection and also in how time and effort on the part of the researcher is invested within racially minoritized communities. Responsibility assists researchers to understand that there are consequences to our actions and that we must be answerable and responsible to those communities that we build with and

alongside of. Lastly, the cultivation of caring relationships is lacking in research inquiry, and as a doctoral candidate, the notion that researchers must not get too close to their participants because they will eventually leave the community comes up often. Caring relationships help to combat this fallacy by reimagining the connection between researcher and participants and engendering a sense of longevity in those connections that extend beyond the time of the study. It is through these practices that desire-based frameworks are operationalized in humanizing and decolonizing research.

Poetry and Youth

Poetry has been used to elicit the experiences of young people by being a "medium to speak about their experiences in ways often not censored by structures and rules" (Jocson, 2005, p. 132). Breaking away from the structures and conventions of traditional writing and performance, youth tend to be more willing to engage in sharing their lived realities for various purposes. Lorde (1978) described poetry as "illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are—until the poem—nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt" (p. 36). As a framing of performance arts, embodied arts seeks to focus on the relationship between mind, body, soul and racialized storytelling (Johnson, 2017) in the expression of lived realities. Considering poetry as a form of embodied arts (spoken word), the artist, at the moment of their performance, illuminates their lived reality to the audience. Writing and performing a poem can be considered a process of imagining our lived realities in ways that can be transformative and self-actualizing for the poet. Rich (1971) so beautifully said, "For a poem to coalesce… there has to be an imaginative transformation of reality which is no way passive" (p. 43). In other words, I would argue that agency and action can exist

within the process of writing a poem that is grounded in the ways in which racially

minoritized youth navigate and experience their lived realities. In this way, poetry can be

considered "more than something to be simply recited or read in a book" (Muhammad &

Gonzalez, 2016, p. 445). Expanding on this point about a specific form of poetry known

as slam poetry, Muhammad in discussing Somers-Willett (2009) described how poetry is

now "a platform for engaging in debate, grappling with ideas, and sharing stories" (p.

445), especially for students of color. Fisher (2007) quoted Kelley's (2002) definition of

poetry as "a revolt, a scream in the night, an emancipation of old ways of thinking" (p. 5).

This definition is compounded when one considers that

> In the poetics of struggle and lived experiences, in the utterances of ordinary
> folks, in the cultural products of social movements, in the reflections of activists,
> we discover the many different cognitive maps of the future, of the world not yet
> born. (Fisher, 2007, p. 9)

As racially minoritized youth use their voice through poetry to liberate their way of

thinking, educators are invited to co-experience students' lived realities in ways that are

true and meaningful to the student. One of the main differences in embodied arts lies in

the opportunity to expand how we might imagine performance arts. Much of the literature

on performance arts centers on poetic forms, such as spoken word poetry and slam

poetry. Embodiment invites artists to understand the physical nature of what they feel

internally as these feelings are informed through their lived realities. The main idea

underlying embodiment is that "cognitive representations and operations are

fundamentally grounded in their physical context" (Niedenthal et al., 2005, p. 186). In

this context embodied arts are grounded in exploring the dialectical relationship between

mind, body, and soul in the performance of art. Embodied arts seeks to expand the

frameworks that have been used to describe performance arts to be inclusive of

alternative performance art forms such as stand-up comedy, singing, dancing, and rapping. These differences do not take away from the nuances of resistance and disruption that exists in the performance of lived realities through the arts.

Toward Embodied Arts, Raciocultural Trauma, and Self-Actualization

Trauma has a long-contested history in scholarship that is grounded in Eurocentric frameworks. Without alternative frameworks, trauma becomes a limiting theory that excludes various experiences and lived realities that are traumatic. Another common feature that has been reviewed in trauma scholarship is the focus on a singular event and dissociation of individuals who cannot process the event in that moment. Traumatic events are critical, real, and cause large amounts of stress, but there is also a lingering effect of traumatic triggers—certain images, behaviors, speech-acts, or attitudes—that make trauma more of a reality that is lived with and lived through. Many racially minoritized youth understand this dynamic so well that they have become numb to it. There can be instances in which it is difficult to even recognize when they have experienced trauma because it is normalized. The normalization of trauma in racially minoritized communities tends to inform the lack of conversation, mediation, diagnosis, and intervention for racially minoritized youth, especially in urbanized community and school settings. To address these gaps, racial storytelling provides an outlet for racially minoritized youth to speak their truth into existence for expansive audiences. The following discussion will delve into how scholars and community members might expand our understanding of trauma and develop a framework that is more inclusive of experiences that exist outside of the current trauma paradigm. Next, will be a discussion on how to complexify performance poetry to be critical of the ways performances

embody certain experiences, encompasses a variety of alternative art forms, and can be positioned as a modality of racial storytelling. The section will close with a call for more work around racial trauma as a necessary step toward building trauma-informed practices and pedagogies when working alongside racially minoritized youth.

A Framework for Raciocultural Trauma

I operationalize the portmanteau of raciocultural to emphasize the need to understand the interconnectedness and interplay of race and culture in urbanized contexts when investigating trauma. Race and culture are often conflated in the Western context, so it is important to study each separately as well as in relation to each other (Brock, 2013). Racial trauma provides a framework for understanding how race as a settler-colonial social construction manifests itself in the form of racism and racist acts, which leads to racism-related stress.

This framework also explores direct and indirect experiences, such as increases in visibility of attacks on racially minoritized folks. This notion supports the claim that trauma is not unique to soldiers returning from battlefield or survivors of genocide and might be considered more of a continuum. This continuum would show how traumatic events begin to blur into each other, making it harder with time to trace the genesis of trauma related symptoms. This continuum of trauma often disrupts space and time so that the traumatic past tends to be systematically (re)lived in the present. These moments can trigger traumatic symptoms that inform our future as we develop our identity. Trauma is often experienced in a nonlinear manner and does not follow a rigid, chronological order. Instead, trauma can be lived with and lived through as it continually haunts like a poltergeist that can manipulate the physical environment (Gordon, 2008). And like living

with a poltergeist, living with trauma can be terrifying and rarely believed to exist for racially minoritized youth. In other words, trauma can be like "a haunting whose presence is not often recognized in most contexts and institutions, a haunting that appears to not be here, but its seething presence is *always* firmly present" (Johnson, 2017, p. 5). A haunting means "to be tied to historical and social effects" (Gordon, 2008, p. 190) of trauma in addition to the racial and cultural effects. The haunting effect of trauma can be informed by physical, emotional, mental, psychological, and spiritual violence. This violence, if left unanswered, can instill a sense of fear that numbs the senses, but when addressed may yield evidence of how racially minoritized youth resist the very same mechanisms meant to break them. This form of resilience is unique, as it can shows the inherent forms of power and wisdom that emerge from living with and through trauma. In this way, there is a shift from the historically damaged framework of trauma scholarship toward a more desire-based framework (Tuck, 2009). What this entails is celebrating and centering the ways in which racially minoritized youth thrive in the midst of overwhelming trauma.

Cultural trauma provides a framework to envision how trauma can often be experienced collectively for those who identify along similar racial lines These dynamics present opportunities to further complexify trauma as experienced by racially minoritized youth. There tends to be a group mentality in racially minoritized youth that is based in race and gender as I've observed in the classroom. Race and culture are often conflated in the Western context and raciocultural trauma seeks to understand how these two constructs inform each other to generate distinct forms of connectedness, wisdom, and power. In some ways, collectives are built around cultural and racial identities

respectively as well as in conjunction with each other. For instance, in the open mic

space, youth artists connect through their racialized experiences that speaks to their racial

identities. Exploring trauma through the hybridized bilateral lens of race and culture, or a

raciocultural lens, aims to explicitly address the systemic, institutional, community, and

interpersonal forms of dehumanization in the lived realities of racially minoritized youth

in urban contexts. While much of the literature across trauma theory and trauma studies

stress *acknowledging* and *witnessing* the trauma of others, one of the goals of

raciocultural trauma is to underscore the visceral nature that traumatic hauntings can

have; how *real* they can be and how *real* they can feel. Focusing on the lived reality of

racially minoritized youth speaks to the idea of living with and through trauma. To live

with trauma can be comparable to being perpetually accompanied by the poltergeist of

disturbing memories/experiences in the present moment and occupied space. On the other

hand, to live through trauma can be to experience trauma in direct or indirect, nonlinear

ways, from all directions, that is made to feel inescapable. This is salient to the sentiment

that racially minoritized youth cannot escape the color of their skin and the consequences

of living in a society that historically disenfranchises, marginalizes, and commits

violence against black and brown bodies. Living with and through raciocultural trauma

frames trauma as a reality that we systematically process. Thus, any attempt at healing

must also be processual and dealt with in real, reflexive, and practical ways.

A Framework for Embodied Arts

Embodied arts seek to explore "the way performances move the use of

heterogeneous stylistic resources, context-sensitive meanings, and conflicting ideologies

into a reflexive arena where they can be examined critically" (Bauman & Briggs, 1990, p.

60). Furthermore, embodied arts seek to expand how scholars, educators, and practitioners might envision and imagine performance arts. This involves researching art how forms, such as stand-up comedy, hip hop/rap, improv, dance, singing, playing an instrument, live painting, photography, and drawing, embody the lived realities of racially minoritized youth. This also means investigating why racially minoritized youth choose certain art forms over others in particular circumstances and exploring youth artists who employ more than one art form. Embodiment can be conceptualized as referring "both to actual bodily states and to simulations of experience in the brains modality-specific systems for perception, action, and introspection" (Niedenthal et al., 2005, p. 184). I would add a cultural definition of embodiment to accompany this academic definition, which entails how nuances of our lived realities manifest themselves into bodily behaviors, affectual modes of expression, and sociocultural attitudes. Embodied arts is framed as a theoretical concept that aims to substantiate and examine the dialectical relationship between the body, mind, and soul during the moment of performance in relation to the lived realities of racially minoritized youth. Through this model, we can begin to create an inclusionary field of study in the arts that attempts to complicate notions of reductionism. To do this, embodied arts is rooted in identifying the complexity that characterizes the lived realities of racially minoritized youth.

Embodied arts are also being framed as a modality of racial storytelling in the way that it might address the lived realities of racially minoritized youth. The way that these experiences are communicated is through the sharing of stories. These stories take the form of various types of performance arts that attempt to speak to the personality of the performer. In many cases, the content of the stories that are shared are influenced by

nuances of the performers' lived reality. Understanding these stories through an explicitly racial lens affords an outlook that does not set out to counter whiteness or master narratives but to embark on a journey of self-actualization among and with our own people. While on this journey, there are folks who join in for the ride, and together there is a collective sense of progression as they move from a space of isolation to a space of belonging. There is collective power in numbers as we come in contact with folks who have similar experiences as our own, but there is also individual power as we come to recognize that our voice can inspire our community. The importance of racially minoritized youth self-realizing their voice lies in the need to create opportunities for youth to speak their truths uncensored by adult authority. Embodied arts as a modality of racial storytelling can sustain the linguistic practices of marginalized identities and raciocultural communities. Through this process of sustainment, racially minoritized youth can begin to gain confidence in self as they self-actualize opportunities to build toward liberation.

When the Dead Look Like You

I would like to model an exercise in racial storytelling by sharing two moments of raciocultural trauma that I experienced personally in the last two years. The first story takes me back to my first summer as a doctoral student. I just finished a year's worth of academic courses and was feeling extremely excited to start my second year. One night in July, I received a call from one of my cohort members. She told me that a professor from our program committed suicide. This professor was a Latinx cisgender man just like me, married to a wonderful partner and father to a beautiful daughter just like me, and he worked with urbanized youth who looked like him, also just like me. What many did not

realize was that he was also listed as my co-advisor although that relationship was constrained so hearing this news shook the very foundation that my confidence was built upon as a racially minoritized scholar. This was two years ago, and I still go back to the moment during our last class of the semester with him when students asked how he was doing, and he said something to the effect of, "I'm good. I got to be, right?" I did not know then that he was dealing with the trauma of institutional and interpersonal racism as he navigated an institution that was not built with him or his people in mind. I have gone through similar instances in which I found myself questioning whether I belong in this academic space or not. I often find myself thinking about him every time I feel unsupported by the administrators in my program or when the weight of imposter syndrome gets too heavy.

The second story that I would like to share occurred back in June of 2018 when 15-year-old Lisandro Guzman-Feliz was brutally stabbed to death by members of the Trinitarios (Trini), a Dominican gang, in the South Bronx. The violent murder of Lisandro was posted on social media sites and went viral. The gravity of this tragic act sent shockwaves throughout the five boroughs of New York City as the public pressured law enforcement agencies to bring the perpetrators to justice. I still remember the images of Lisandro being chased into the bodega, a local grocery store, in his home neighborhood where he attempted to hide from the culprits. The owner of the bodega proceeded to force Lisandro back out into the street, attempting to avoid inviting drama into his place of business. As Lisandro fought to stay behind the counter where the owner stood, two members of the gang grabbed him and pulled him out of the store where they begin to stab him in his torso. More members of the gang came into the frame from

different directions (they were sitting in cars waiting) and continuously stab him with the fatal blow occurring when a machete cut into his neck. The killers ran away, and Lisandro shouted something as he raised his hand toward the sky and then began to jog to the hospital, a regional trauma center, that is only four blocks away. He succumbed to his injuries at the entrance to the emergency room of the hospital where he was still being recorded by community members who recognized him and scurried to find his sister. In the final moments of the video, you can see Lisandro sitting down as he bled out—the blood rushing out faster because of his attempt to make it to the hospital—and police officers questioning him. Lisandro looked like me. He looked like the students that I work with. What made this tragedy salient to my experiences was the fact that it occurred in my home borough, six blocks from the school where I started my teaching career. Lisandro could have been me; he could have been one of my students.

Conclusion

In this literature review, I examined how trauma affects many racially minoritized youth who live in urbanized communities. I was guided by the questions: *In what ways might embodied arts address trauma amongst racially minoritized youth? and How can we begin to expand our conceptualizations of performance arts*? The literature review has provided ways of understanding the efficacy of embodied arts in speaking to how racially minoritized youth live with and through trauma. Haunting provides a framework for understanding the terrifying nature and believability of trauma among racially minoritized youth. Embodied arts, as a modality of racial storytelling, aims to explore the relationship among mind, body, and soul in the performance of art. Furthermore, the literature review aimed to show the need to explore these forms of trauma due to the lack

of scholarship that specifically addresses trauma in these populations. Moreover, this literature review is a call for new theories and conceptualizations of trauma through a bilateral lens of race and culture. Trauma is more than a singular event it is a haunting that we process for the duration of our lives. There is no finish line to cross as if to say there is a point at which one can say they have officially overcome or healed the trauma. Trauma is something that is lived with and lived through. To better understand this dynamic of trauma, embodied arts functions as a modality of racial storytelling to ground the various nuances of power and wisdom that racially minoritized youth possess and employ in their lived realities. There must be a move toward more pathways toward empathy and humanization that invites racially minoritized youth to unapologetically speak their truths into existence.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH APPROACH

<u>Introduction</u>

The purpose of this study was to explore the complex relationship among trauma, the lived realities of racially minoritized youth, and the arts. This qualitative study was rooted in shifting theoretical frameworks, such as trauma theory, performance arts theory, and storytelling. I seek to expand trauma theory toward raciocultural perspectives of trauma while expanding performance arts theory into an embodied understanding of performance arts. The study can also be understood as a theory-building study, which entails "the ongoing process of producing, confirming, applying, and adapting theory" (Lynham, 2002, p. 222). Theory-building is appropriate for this study as there seems to be a void in trauma studies and trauma theory outside of psychotherapy, literature, and psychoanalysis. As such, this study will move toward defining theories that emerge from the data. Another way of looking at this concept is through grounded theory, or theory that is:

> Inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis and theory stand in reciprocal relationship to one another. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23)

Through grounded theory, I am able to look at the specific nuances of the data to then make meaning that is systematically questioned, explored, and investigated. Moreover, theory-building projects provide ample opportunity for those who have never been invited to create or develop theory at the academic level to show that theory exists

outside of the academy and can be produced by cultural forms of knowledge production and meaning making.

This chapter focuses on the methodology of the study and a rationale for why choices in methodology were made. Opening the chapter is a rationale for qualitative research design to better capture the reasoning behind using qualitative design in this study. To follow is a rationale for ethnographic research and the purpose for employing ethnography to investigate the relationship between trauma and embodied arts in racially minoritized youth.

The subsequent section discusses the proposed research sample. Next, there is a section on the information that was needed to conduct the study. As the chapter continues, there is a literature review to synthesize scholarship in the field and situate the study in an ongoing conversation with theorists and scholars that came before. The section to follow is the research design section that details the data analysis and data collection methods chosen and a discussion of why they best serve the purpose of this study. To close out the paper, there is a section on ethical considerations, followed by a section on issues of trustworthiness and how they will be addressed in the study. Sections on limitations and delimitations are included to better encapsulate the study's potential shortcomings and how they were addressed. Lastly, a conclusion to synthesize the overall themes and major points of the chapter is included.

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

The study used qualitative research design because qualitative research methodologies create room for questioning research itself as an inherently imperialist and colonialist concept that extracts information from marginalized communities to

42

regurgitate findings and enjoy accolades that boost careers (Smith, 1999). Although qualitative research is also an imperialist and colonialist endeavor, it is a form of research in which stories can be centered, which aligns with the goals of this study. Quantitative methods provide the statistics to show how far the problem extends, while qualitative methods show how deep the problems go. As such, qualitative research with careful, critical considerations, that center research participants and their communities, can disrupt imperialistic features of research inquiry. Knowing that research has historically dehumanized racially minoritized folks, considering the sterilization of Puerto Rican women on the island of Vieques as well as the Tuskegee Experiments, it was important to use research methodology that was humanizing (Paris & Winn, 2014). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) described qualitative research as "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world" (p. 3) and being situated in the world that is being researched can create opportunities for humanizing research inquiry and methodology as opposed to being a fly on the wall simply observing phenomenon from the periphery. Furthermore, the qualitative researcher attempts "to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them" (p. 3), and in this context, participants are driving the definitions, conceptualizations, and theorizations. Qualitative research is where stories are shared and narratives are created and considering the nature of studying the arts, qualitative methodology is arguably the most efficient way to capture stories that contain thick, rich description. It is through qualitative research that a dehumanizing and imperialist process can be rendered humanizing and decolonizing.

Rationale for Hybrid Ethnographic Methodology

This study will use a hybrid combination of qualitative research methods that aim to humanize the research process while allowing for democratic, co-participatory, and transparent forms of research. Using methodologies, such as participant-observation, unstructured interviews, thematic analysis, and open/axial coding, Youth participatory action research (YPAR) provided ample opportunity for producing rich descriptions and gaining a deeper understanding of the lived realities of participants (Creswell et al., 2003). The question that is at the foundation of this study is: *In what ways might embodied arts address traumas within racially minoritized youth?* Exploring this question meant delving into a world of vulnerability that would need a certain level of participation on my part in order to better understand the true nature of trauma and how it informs youth. My positionality is that whatever is shared with me I must reciprocate to ensure that the sharing of information is not one-sided. Moreover, this study is not about me or my needs but rather the needs of participants, which is why their needs were centered in the study. L!t is the open mic space where the study took place, and because I was invited to do research in this space, it made sense to center the needs of those whose space I was navigating.

Methodology

This research study focuses on exploring the ways in which embodied arts, such as spoken word/slam, music (instrumentation/singing), stand-up comedy, or improvised skits, as a means of self-actualization, might address traumas within racially minoritized youth. While there are many research methods that could potentially be appropriate for this study, the goal was to find ways to humanize participants as more than just a point of

44

interest worth studying. To create equity within the research process, it became increasingly crucial that power dynamics were challenged throughout the study. Throughout my time as a participant-researcher with three Puerto Rican artists, I made it habit to open with a check-in, even if it took an hour because it was their time and their voices that mattered. Challenging power dynamics meant giving participants access to data, write-ups, and any other materials that are recorded during the study as well as inviting participants to write certain components of the study, including their profiles and transcribing interview data. With the sensitive nature of the topic being studied, it was critical that I created ways to make the research process as transparent as possible so that there was no hidden agenda in any part of the study (Anyon, 1980).

Participants in this study functioned as "co-participants or co-informants" (Chang, 2016, p. 65), which is an explicit and intentional move to be inclusive and provide participants with opportunities to co-collaborate and inform the way the research was conducted, executed, and produced. Another goal was to find ways to center the needs of participants, rather than imposing a research topic that doesn't generate from within the culture of participants. A critical aspect that needs to be addressed within the scope of the study is the potential that the researcher and participants will identify along lines of similarity including racial identity, cultural identity, and artistic identity. Keeping these goals in mind, critical ethnography (Madison, 2005), which invites the researcher to be critical of their positionality in conducting research and in connection to a deep commitment and sense of duty toward human freedom and questioning systems of power, became the method that most aligned with the goals of exploring topics that are critical to racially minoritized artists. Furthermore, this study finds the reflective aspects of

autoethnography an appropriate tool to theorize researcher positionality throughout the study (Chang, 2016). To ensure that our study was co-participatory and that participants' needs were centered, we agreed that certain democratic aspects of YPAR (Cammarota & Fine, 2010; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Torre et al., 2012) would benefit the study. Lastly, racial storytelling (Johnson, 2017) was used as a method of data collection to better understand the ways in which racially minoritized youth speak their truth into existence in authentic ways that are meaningful to their racialized lived realities.

Autoethnography

Interest in the self is nothing new in the social sciences. For those who support self-focused research, the trend is argued to be "based on intentional self-reflexivity" where researchers are "turning their scholarly interest inward on themselves" (Chang, 2016, p. 45). Despite the increase in popularity for this type of research, critics often argue that "the postmodern obsession with self-reflexivity and with ethnographer subjectivity stalls the progress of anthropology" (p. 45). These two perspectives reflect the objective and subjective positional binary that exists within qualitative research. For the purpose of this study, the self-reflexive tenets of autoethnography were used in order to avoid essentializing the experiences of participants as separate from my own. Autoethnography allows the researcher to turn their research into an introspective exploration, inputting their subjective viewpoints throughout the research process; whereas, historically, research inquiry has promoted a positivistic ideology in an attempt to remain objective and removed from the subject of study. One could argue that even in an attempt to remain objective, subjective bias inevitably infiltrated the decision-making process, including what topic to study and what research methodology to use. This is

problematic as it tends to engender "looking-in-from-outside" perspectives that "assumes

that other cultures are observable" where researchers develop a "sometimes essentialist

and often exotic profile of culture to describe a bounded group of people, focusing on

observable differences" (p. 18), which "has historically been damage centered, intent on

portraying our neighborhoods and tribes as defeated and broken" (Tuck, 2009, p. 412).

The study is rooted in approaching research from an exploring-from-within position in

which participants all identify as *others of similarity*, or "those who belong to the same

community…who share similar standards and values" (Chang, 2016, p. 26). Considering

the context, this study embraces a combination of what Reed-Danahay (1997) described

as,

> (1) native anthropology, in which members of previously studied cultural groups
> become ethnographers of their own groups, (2) ethnic autobiography, in which
> personal narratives are written by members of ethnic minority groups; and (3)
> autobiographical ethnography, in which anthropologists interject personal
> experience into ethnographic writing. (p. 2)

Our communities and culture have been studied for generations, and in this study, racially

minoritized folks are the investigators, inquiring about our multiple social identities, our

culture, our trauma, and our communities. Considering this positionality, lived realities

can be deeply political.

Madison (2005) described the importance of positionality, stating, "Positionality

is vital because it forces us to acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases just as

we are denouncing the power structures that surround our subjects" (p. 7). The narratives

that we write and the stories that we tell can often define our positionality as both

personal and political as it is expressed and embodied through artistic mediums. These

texts, academic or otherwise, that we researchers write become "texts by complete-

member researchers" where we explore groups where we are full members because of how we identify or because it is earned (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 740). This idea of complete-member researchers and native anthropology speaks to Enrique G. Murillo, Jr's journey in educational ethnography when he said:

> My experience as an educational ethnographer, to date, can sometimes be described as traveling those blurred boundaries when Other becomes researcher, narrated becomes narrator, translated becomes translator, native becomes anthropologist, and how one emergent and intermittent identity continuously informs the other. (Noblit et al., 2004, p. 166)

These shifts in research inquiry illuminate a long-standing need for alternative ways of doing research that break from conservative and positivistic epistemologies and ontologies and move toward humanizing, culturally sustaining, and decolonizing paradigms.

Chang (2016) defined autoethnography as a combination of, "cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details. It follows the anthropological and social scientific inquiry approach rather than descriptive or performative storytelling" (p. 46). Within this context, autoethnography extends beyond the self and connects to the larger societal picture as well as others within the community. Positionality helps to understand how the self in situated in a given context. The interconnectedness of the self in relation to those around them is incredibly important because "self cannot exist alone in the context of culture" (p. 27). Autoethnography allows the researcher to capture this relationship through self-reflexivity in connection to the sociocultural domain of our society. Freire's (2000) concept of *praxis*, or "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 52) provides a framework for how we understand self-reflexivity. In the context of the study, self-reflexivity is transformative in the ways that it

48

changes the self by creating opportunities for growth through increased self-awareness.

As the self is changed, how the researcher can navigate and impact our community also

changes. In this way, reflection can be both a form of action and a catalyst for action.

Through *praxis* we begin to understand the power that we hold within us and the

possibilities that exist when we view our oppression as limit situations that can be

transformed (Freire, 2000). As researchers normalize self-reflexivity, we make ourselves

vulnerable while systematically, intentionally, and unapologetically disrupting and

humanizing the research process as it has been conceptualized historically.

Critical Ethnography

I have always found it difficult to reconcile the politics of my lived reality with

my personal beliefs. The method of critical ethnography provides a lens through which

we can understand the relationship between the personal being political and the political

being personal. In connection with autoethnography, critical ethnography shapes the

mode of inquiry by compelling participants to constantly be aware of how the self is

positioned. Being critical of how the self is positioned can be understood as an ethical

responsibility for the researcher. Critical autoethnography also speaks to this as it

"involves both a material and ethical praxis" and "engages us in processes of becoming"

(Holman Jones, 2016, p. 229). This ethical responsibility can best be described as "a

compelling sense of duty and commitment based on moral principles of human freedom

and well-being and hence a compassion for the suffering of living beings" (Madison,

2005, p. 5). However, the focus of the study is not the researcher but that does not mean

that there should not be accountability in the form of praxis. There is a history of critical

ethnography that is tainted with studies focusing on issues of racial and/or social justice

without the researcher addressing their own positionality and how they perpetuate, disrupt, or comply with these issues. According to Noblit et al. (2004), "Critical ethnographers must explicitly consider how their own acts of studying and representing people and situations are acts of domination even as critical ethnographers reveal the same in what they study" (p. 3). The idea of what it means to be *critical* as critical ethnographers takes on a different meaning than simply dealing with politics, injustice, and oppression within a particular culture or space.

The way that I conceptualize critical is as a hyper-aware state of systematic questioning. It is critical because we constantly question ourselves, others, and the spaces that we share and systems of power that we are embedded in. This constant state of questioning compliments our self-reflexivity as it prompts us to stay on our toes and never become compliant with comfort; to stay in a process of awakening. This is crucial because "politics alone are incomplete without self-reflection. Critical ethnography must further its goals from simply politics to politics of positionality" (Madison, 2005, p. 6). As we question ourselves, we also hold ourselves accountable for our actions and thoughts, and as we question those around us and the spaces we enter, we hold our community accountable. My sense of criticality also stems from my level of care for the work being done. I am critical of this work because it can be meaningful to the lived realities of racially minoritized youth. Criticality becomes a pathway for framing our inquiry and passion for the work that we do. Critical ethnographers invite their audiences to look behind the veil, to see through the hidden curriculum through practices that look "beneath surface appearances, disrupts the *status quo*, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of

50

power and control" (p. 5). Critical ethnography is a method that seeks to "address

processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular *lived* domain" while resisting

"domestication and moves from "what is" to "what could be" (p. 5). Choosing data

collection and analysis methods was informed by the idea of what could be in our

research. In order for the data to reflect the criticality that is central to the study of this

topic, there will need to be methods that allow for transparency. Critical ethnography can

disrupt traditionally dehumanizing methods by sustaining cultures that have been

historically silenced.

Racial Storytelling as Method

Storytelling as method has roots in critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate,

1995). Considering the importance of sharing stories in racially minoritized communities,

especially youth, conceptualizing storytelling as a form of research method may yield

incredibly complex data worth centering in academia.

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) introduced what they call *critical race methodology*,

which they defined "as a theoretically grounded approach to research." They offered five

tenets and push for a methodology that:

> (a) foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process. However, it
> also challenges the separate discourses on race, gender, and class by showing how
> these three elements intersect to affect the experiences of students of color; (b)
> challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain
> the experiences of students of color; (c) offers a liberatory or transformative
> solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; and (d) focuses on the
> racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color. Furthermore, it
> views these experiences as sources of strength and (e) uses the interdisciplinary
> knowledge base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history,
> humanities, and the law to better understand the experiences of students of color.
> (p. 24)

Using this research approach can shift the historical trend of reductionism that positivistic-oriented methodology often produces. While there are useful qualities to quantitative methodology, such as surveying and statistical analysis, the stories behind the numbers are often left untold and silenced. This promotes a quantity versus quality attitude in research inquiry by which doctoral students are taught that you must have a certain number of "subjects" for your study to be considered "valid." When the stories behind the "sample" are seen as rich data, they provide specific details that are often missed in z-scores and t-scores. Quantitative research seems to care more about the instruments of measurements, the methods, the null hypothesis, the science of it all and not enough about the lived lives that are producing the data that the science is based on. Critical race methodology is a powerful pathway toward reimagining what research by, with, and alongside racially minoritized communities might look like. It is a lens that is and was developed by racially minoritized scholars and for researchers who identify within these communities. It is a methodology that is rooted in empathic perspectives that align with the experiences and lived realities of racially minoritized people.

Storytelling can be an effective way to counter grand narratives (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002), and at the same time, it can serve a purpose that does not compare the experiences of racially minoritized youth artists to whiteness. Racial storytelling invites stories about racialized experiences for the sake of self-actualization. Although there may be elements of racial storytelling that counter grand narratives that circulate throughout society, attempting to define certain communities, racial storytelling explicitly "illustrates how my racial encounters from the past situate themselves in the current moment and still haunt me today." (Johnson, 2017, p. 4). Moreover, racial storytelling "requires us to

52

revisit memories that we hope to forget but that continue to live on—memories that trigger feelings of joy, guilt, happiness, sadness, frustration, anger, and rage" (p. 6). I argue that embodied arts as a modality of racial storytelling uses voice and body to "confront our racial hauntings and to work against our own miseducation while moving toward liberation and self-actualization" (p. 4). This can be understood as a journey undertaken in research projects toward liberation and self-actualization, specifically through the sharing, experiencing, analyzing, and examination of stories about racialized experiences. Racial storytelling is a method that "allows us to (re)enter and to bear witness of our racialized past to assess where we are in the present so that we can begin to (re)imagine our future" (p. 8). It is also a method that can be inclusive of the multiple identities that many racially minoritized youth embody by understanding how these multiple identities "all influence how we are racialized and are always in complex dialogue with each other" (p. 8). This complex dialogue exists as a means of self-preservation and healing. It is also important to recognize how this method differs from counter-storytelling and autoethnography. Although countering dominant narratives is an important and necessary practice, "racial storytelling does not have to be utilized to counter dominant narratives" as they are "merely telling a story involving race and racism without the gaze of the dominant narrative," although "this does not mean counter stories cannot transpire from racial storytelling" (p. 8). Autoethnography "is a method, methodology, and process that challenges the traditional ways of writing and conducting research, and it views research as personal and political," but "does not necessarily center racism, whiteness, and white supremacist patriarchy" (p. 8). Racial storytelling explicitly centers race and racism in order to understand our past, present, and future selves.

Despite these differences, it must be acknowledged that "counter-storytelling, autoethnography, and racial storytelling as modes of storytelling…can support one another and are members of the storytelling lineage" (p. 7). The combination of these powerful modes of storytelling invites a more intimate research experience with participants that goes beyond the academy and degrees. These modes of storytelling promote this practice as a valid, critical, and humanizing method of research that is rooted in the telling of our truth rather than having someone interpret it for their own purposes. Storytelling reminds the gatekeepers that we are still here—living, breathing, thriving.

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)

Getting participants involved in the research process challenges many aspects of research inquiry, including researcher/participant positionality, hierarchical social power dynamics, and levels of transparency throughout each stage of the research process. When youth are engaging with college-level research, there is a shift in what gets centered in the process as well as what is produced. Understanding youth-centered processes of meaning-making and knowledge production is central to YPAR. Cammarota and Fine (2010) discussed what young people learn through YPAR, stating, "Young people learn through research about complex power relations, histories of struggle, and the consequences of oppression" (p. 2). For many racially minoritized youth, learning about these concepts broadens their perspective on what is affecting their realities. Exploring power relations, oppression, and struggle can enlighten racially minoritized youth to (in)visible systems and structures that inform the institutions, spaces, individuals, and communities that they navigate daily. As a research method, YPAR

"provides young people with opportunities to study social problems affecting their lives and then determine actions to rectify these problems" (p. 2). YPAR can push racially minoritized youth to engage in developing awareness around what is influencing their real-world problems while taking steps to address their problems in ways that are meaningful and authentic to their lived reality. Torre et al. (2012) defined critical participatory action research as a method,

> Rooted in notions of democracy and social justice and drawing on critical theory (feminist, critical race, queer, disability, neo-Marxist, indigenous, and post-structural), critical PAR is an epistemology that engages research design, methods, analyses, and products through a lens of democratic participation. (p. 171)

Taking this model and employing it while researching alongside racially minoritized youth can provide a framework to further our notion of criticality as we explore racial trauma. The democratic and social justice orientations of critical participatory action research hold salience in working alongside racially minoritized youth, but to further this work, I also seek racial and gender justice in the scope of the study. There are many ways to conduct critical participatory action research; however, for the purpose of this study, we focus on:

> Critical and participatory commitments throughout the research process, such as finding ways to harness varying forms of expertise; coconstructing what questions most need asking; collaborating to develop both theory and method; coanalyzing data; and creating ongoing and multiple forms of dissemination with a principled purpose of working against unjust, oppressive structures. (Torre et al., 2012, p. 175)

This democratic and participatory model of research can engender a sense of accountability for participants because all involved become stakeholders in the work. It was this aspect of YPAR that was operationalized in the study. The type of data that YPAR yields contains a plurality of meaning that is complex and imbued with authentic,

vulnerable, visceral, and transparent experiences. Having the owners of these stories be the ones to analyze them and determine how these stories are represented is a necessary shift that must become normalized in academia and scholarship. A goal of the study is to highlight the inherent forms of power and wisdom that participants possess and the way that YPAR centers youth can give a way to provide evidence of this.

Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) described how YPAR achieves the goal of highlighting youth intelligence, stating, "We surmised that one way to think about positioning urban youth as intellectuals was to place them front and center in the research process" (p. 106). As racially minoritized youth are centered and take lead in the research process, they become experts in knowing, defining, and addressing problems that have persisted in their lives. It is important to note that this study is not exclusively a YPAR study but borrows from the practice of YPAR to involve participants in the research process. For instance, the research question central to this study emerged out of what I experienced attending a monthly open mic. There has also been a level of transparency that I believe is partial to YPAR and inviting youth to partake in college-level research is also a tenet of YPAR work. Lastly, centering the needs of youth who participated in the study is an aspect of YPAR that was critical to our research.

The Research Collective

The sample for this study is youth who identify as racially minoritized in the northeast region of the United States. This means that they identify as part of a racial group that is labeled as a minority in society. Youth was defined as young people aged 18-22, and these parameters were determined to target young people who are legally adults but are still considered young by society's standards of access and privilege that

56

comes with age. Participants also performed some type of performance art and attended the monthly open mic L!t. Lastly, participants identified as having experienced some type of trauma in their lived experience. Each of these parameters addresses particular aspects of the primary research question and hold salience with particular identity markers for the researcher, which provides an extra layer of cultural relevancy and belonging (DeJaynes, 2015; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Racially minoritized youth are rarely a part of research done with and alongside them; instead, they are historically investigated by members of distinctively different racial backgrounds as well as cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The goal in attempting to generate such a sample is to spotlight those narratives and lived realities that are often misunderstood (Duncan-Andrade, 2009).

<u>Information Needed to Conduct the Study</u>

Qualitative research focuses on four areas of information, including contextual, demographic, perceptual, and theoretical. Envisioning the type of information for a research study is beneficial in the ways that it allows the researcher to have a clear understanding of the kind of information that aligns with the primary research question.

Contextual information that will be needed includes the history of the open mic space and the context of the space as understood by the youth who perform there. Other contextual information that is useful includes a deeper understanding of the community where the open mic is situated and the communities that the participants come from.

The demographic information that I needed pertains to participants' race, age, and gender. This information ensured that participants meet the identity requirements of the study regarding being racially minoritized youth. This type of information provided data specific to communities that have historically been marginalized.

Another important point of information that was needed for the study is participants' perception of their own lived reality as having traumatic experiences. With this information, conceptualizations of trauma can be more participant-centered and focused on youth experiences. Information regarding participants' perceptions of themselves as artists when they perform was key in understanding how they envision their artistic identities. All of this information is key in answering the primary question of the study.

Considering how contested the field of trauma theory and trauma studies are, an ongoing literature review that includes updated information to capture the changes that are currently occurring in the field. Theoretical information provides a more holistic understanding of the field and where the study fit in. Maintaining an up-to-date literature review provides the theoretical grounding for the study.

Literature Review

Trauma has historically been theorized and studied in the medical, mental health, literary, and psychoanalysis fields in ways that champion Eurocentric and Westernized epistemologies (Leys, 2010), is rooted in settler colonialism (Craps, 2013), tends to exclude cultural interpretations of traumatic experiences (Alexander, 2005), often focuses on the interpretative and communicative concepts of testimony and witness (Dutro, 2011, 2013; Feldman & Laub, 1992), is grounded in an event-based model (Kaplan, 2005), and often centers around post-traumatic stress disorder (Radstone, 2007). Scholarship regarding trauma also tends to highlight the experiences of Holocaust survivors and soldiers who survived wartime battle (Caruth, 2016) at the expense of marginalizing the experiences of many racially minoritized youth (Duncan-Andrade, 2017). Along the

academic pipeline, there have also been various theories that define trauma as race-based (Carter, 2007), racial (Comas-Díaz, 2016; Truong & Museus, 2012), cultural (Alexander et al., 2005; Stamm et al., 2004), and complex (Cook et al., 2005; van der Kolk et al., 2005). Within the grand narrative of trauma, there has been an ongoing need for a theory that moves beyond the event-based model and is more inclusive of experiences outside of the Eurocentric and Westernized paradigm. Racially minoritized youth are one of many populations that is systematically silenced and erased as a consequence of their not fitting the stereotypical image of those who suffer trauma (i.e., soldiers). To address these voids in the scholarship, this study operationalizes the definition of trauma noted in the introduction.

Exploring trauma through the bilateral lens of race and culture, or raciocultural, presents opportunities to envision how race as a settler colonial social construct persists as a quintessential factor in determining traumatic experiences for the lived realities of a large number of racially minoritized youth in urbanized contexts. Race represents the color of our skin and defines our experiences living in an inherently racist society. Culture is operationalized as a way to understand the collective nuances of our identity in relation to our ethnic and racial background. Furthermore, this working definition of trauma seeks to underscore the collective aspects of living with and through trauma as members of a common social identity group. Thus, raciocultural trauma is operationalized in this study as a framework for understanding the trauma of racially minoritized youth. To communicate these experiences, storytelling is framed as a way in which some racially minoritized youth theorize their lived realities as well as a data collection method. Storytelling has been studied as both a form of countering grand

narratives (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) as well as a medium for addressing our racialized experiences for our own sakes (Johnson, 2017).

In connection to this idea of storytelling is the concept of performance arts whose literature tends to focus on spoken word, slam, and performance poetry (Fisher, 2007; Jocson, 2005; Muhammad, 2016). Expanding this conceptualization, embodied arts is considered a modality of racial storytelling that reimagines performance arts to be more inclusive of alternative ways of performing, such as singing, dancing, and stand-up comedy. Moreover, in this study, embodied arts frames the dialectical relationship among the mind, body, and soul in the production and performance of creative self-expression. An important dynamic of this theoretical framing is its ability to allow participants to define their own experiences by speaking their truth in ways that are meaningful to their lived realities. In this way, we disrupt damage-centered frameworks that steal our pain narratives, invade our wounds, and dilute our truth as we move toward a desire-based framework that explores the complexity of our lived realities (Tuck, 2009).

The theoretical intersections of trauma, performance arts, and storytelling provides a pathway toward an equitable and humanizing paradigm shift in a scholarly field that has marginalized generations of racially minoritized youth who have continued to thrive in the face of relentless and pervasive limit situations (Freire, 2000). To follow will be a section covering the research design of our study.

Research Design

Data Collection

The use of qualitative methods, such as autoethnography and critical ethnography, entail the use of data collection methods, such as participant observation and interviews.

This section details the various data collection methods that were used in this study. To begin, I discuss the use of participant observation. Last, I offer a breakdown of how I used unstructured interviews during the data collection process. Self-reflection was also used to collect autoethnographic data but is not included in this section because it is addressed in detail in the methodology section on autoethnography.

Participant Observation

It is my position that the best way to address the central research question is through participant observation. Through this research method, I am able to partake in the creative process to see how arts have addressed and continues to address traumas within my own life as I explore this same phenomenon in those who identify along lines of similarity. DeWalt et al. (2010) defined participant observation as

> A method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture. (p. 12)

Participating in the process of observing can be an efficient way to develop deep and meaningful relationships with individuals within a space. The sensitive nature of the topic meant that there would need to be strong levels of trust among all stakeholders in the study. Writing and performing alongside participants can provide unique insights that may not be captured in traditional forms of observing. Emerson et al. (2011) described what is gained from participant observation stating,

> Through participation, the field researcher sees firsthand and up close how people grapple with uncertainty and ambiguity, how meaning emerge through talk and collective action, how understandings and interpretations change over time, and how these changes shape subsequent actions. (p. 5)

Experiencing alongside participants can solidify strong notions of empathy for the researcher. Ensuring that what is observed is not missed can sometimes be difficult in

participant observation. Jotting down notes in the moment can be challenging if the researcher is fully immersed in their participation.

Unstructured Interviews

Another method that helped to answer the research question was unstructured interviews. Jamshed (2014) stated that "unstructured interviews resemble a conversation more than an interview and is always thought to be a "controlled conversation," which is skewed towards the interests of the interviewer" (p. 87). Interviews were fluidly constructed in a manner that closely resembles an open conversation focused on the topics of study but specifically centering on participants' lived realities within the context of the topic of study. This style of interview is considered an "informal, conversational interview, based on unplanned set of questions that are generated instantaneously during the interview" (p. 87). Questions emerged as an organic process of dialogic exchange between participants, where the goal was to *listen to understand* rather than *listen to respond*. Through this understanding I constructed relevant questions that evolved with the conversation. I have worked on relationship-building to provide an avenue through which the artists felt comfortable speaking candidly with me. Without building up these relationships, the efficacy of unstructured interviews might be deemed invalid. Using this method of interviewing invited participants to speak freely and not feel constrained by the directive nature of specific questions. Having the interviews take place over the phone allowed for comfort on the part of the participant. Participants spoke from wherever they deemed safe. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed.

Data Analysis

Qualitative approaches to data analysis, such as thematic analysis, open/closed coding, and triangulation (Clarke et al., 2015; Denzin, 1978; Emerson et al., 2011) were employed because they are appropriate to the purpose of our study, which sought to understand how embodied arts addresses trauma. They are appropriate because they allow participants to see the collective and pervasive nature of living with and through trauma by identifying patterns across different data sets. Using these strategies allow for close and critical analysis of data and synthesis of findings across various and separate sources of data. Codes were co-constructed alongside participants through a process of reflecting on our conversations in order to determine what thematic patterns are emerging from the data. This section details the data analysis process that was employed during the study.

<u>Thematic Analysis</u>

Thematic analysis involves an iterative process that begins with familiarization with data that then leads into coding, which is followed by a search and review of themes and ends with defining and labeling themes before writing up findings. Thematic analysis "aims to understand events, behaviors, and cultural meanings of human beings in a specific culture" in order to interpret their experiences (Parse et al., 1985, p. 5). This goal of thematic analysis is pertinent to the study as it gives us a pathway to better naming experiences as situated within a particular culture and the ways in which they reflect each other along thematic lines. It also shows how themes are not simply tools for naming but can also be ways of exploring experience. Alternatively, Clarke et. al. (2015) defined thematic analysis as "a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering

insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set" (p. 57). Identifying these patterns of meaning illicits a deeper understanding of how certain experiences are interconnected, speak to each other, and are collectively experienced.

> Thematic Analysis allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences…this method is a way of identifying what is common to the way a topic is talked or written about and of making sense of those commonalities. (Clarke et. al., 2015, p. 57)

Making sense of these commonalities is critical to see the pervasive nature of trauma across racial and cultural lines.

Open Coding

The first phase of coding entails the use of open coding. Open coding can be understood as reading fieldnotes and transcriptions of phone interviews, "line-by-line to identify and formulate all ideas, themes, or issues they suggest, no matter how varied and disparate" (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 172). Using this definition, fieldnotes and transcriptions of our phone interviews were analyzed line-by-line alongside participants, asking questions, "of data in order to develop, identify, elaborate, and refine analytic categories and insights" (p. 175). The list that was generated was not meant to be limiting; instead, we sought to produce "as many codes as possible, at least initially, without considering possible relevance either to establish concepts in one's discipline or to a primary theoretical focus for analyzing and organizing them" (p. 182).

Focused Coding

The second phase of coding was informed by the list of open codes that are built. Noticing some redundancies prompted us to question how we can synthesize similar themes into categories that were more concise. Focused coding entails subjecting fieldnotes and transcriptions of phone interviews, "to fine-grained, line-by-line analysis

on the basis of topics that have been identified as being of particular interest" (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 172). As analysis advanced, I refined the process to focus more on core themes that were consistently recurring throughout the data. The data was broken down more finely "into subcodes," which allows for the discovery of "new themes and topics and new relationships between them" (p. 192). These subcodes are important in recognizing and developing understanding around themes that held deeper salience with the scope of the study. This means that I sought to concretize findings by centering themes that critically align with the research topic and answer the research question.

<u>Triangulation</u>

Qualitative research is often scrutinized for its lack of validity or generalizability of findings to the larger population. There are many ways to improve the validity, but for the purpose of this study, triangulation worked best. Triangulation, as a data analysis method, necessitates "the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon" (Denzin, 1978, p. 339). For qualitative researchers, this means the opportunity to "improve the accuracy of their judgments by collecting different kinds of data bearing on the same phenomenon" (Jick, 1979, p. 602). A key difference in the way that triangulation is approached in this particular study is in the co-participatory aspect of how we employed triangulation. This means that participants were involved in reviewing and analyzing field notes and transcriptions of phone interviews and identifying the themes that permeated all modes of methodology, if they so chose. Triangulating the pattern of themes across different methods of data collection can allow for a critical analysis of themes as they emerge. Triangulation can complicate preliminary

understandings of the themes discovered by highlighting a systematic relationship between themes.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues are assumed to present in any research study with specific emphasis on the protection of vulnerable populations and their privacy (Orb et al., 2001). Racially minoritized youth are especially delicate when it comes to the sharing of intimate information (Flewitt, 2005). In anticipation of ethical issues that may arise, this study employed an assortment of protective measures to ensure that the confidentiality, privacy, and rights of participants are thoroughly safeguarded. This study focused on an ethic of transparency and reciprocity. Participation was voluntary, and participants knew that they could opt out of the study at any time. Informed consent was a priority throughout the study. Another aspect that is aimed at addressing ethics in this study is the co-participatory component by which participants were invited to collect data, analyze data, transcribe, interview the researcher, and be given access to all data collected and write-ups to review at their leisure. I shared my own spoken word poetry and my process with participants.

It is important to remember that "our primary obligation is always to the people we study...The lives and stories that we hear and study are given to us under a promise" (Denzin, 1989, p. 83) and such an obligation demands that participants come first in this study. This means that they were centered throughout every aspect of the research process. If participants required support, even outside of the study, I did my best to use my privilege and access to meet their needs. To make sure the needs of participants were met I requested that participants share their own personal goals in choosing to participate

in the study and attempt to support their achievement of said goals. All data and research-related records were stored in secured drives provided by the university. To protect the confidentiality of participants and the research site, pseudonyms created by participants were assigned where needed.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research is important due to a history of being labeled "undisciplined," "sloppy," and "merely subjective" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 289). The need to prove that qualitative research holds the same validity as quantitative research can be seen in the various shifts in terminology that directly align with quantitative terminology. In quantitative research, the researcher deals with issues of validity, while in qualitative, the researcher is dealing with issues of trustworthiness. The shift in terminology was meant to provide criteria that allow for qualitative research to measure its rigor and parcimony. Moreover, scholars argued that qualitative research should be assessed differently than quantitative research (Shenton, 2004). This study uses the Lincoln and Guba (1985) model to address issues of trustworthiness. These criteria include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to correspond to the positivist framework of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. A further discussion of these criteria is needed to understand how they were addressed in the study.

Credibility

Positivist researchers must prove that they have minimized threats to internal validity, meaning that the study measures what they originally intended to study. For qualitative researchers, credibility ensures that the study is carried out "in such a way that

the probability of the findings will be found to be credible is enhanced" and "to demonstrate the credibility of the findings by having them approved by the constructors of the multiple realities being studied" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296). One technique that was used to address this criterion is the use of triangulation. Through the use of triangulation, multiple data sources and data collection methods are able to be compared to provide a more holistic picture of what is being studied. This study used triangulation to synthesize data and find patterns to develop codes.

Dependability

The extent to which a study findings can be replicated by similar studies is called reliability and it is equivalent in qualitative research is dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). It suggested that overlapping methods are used to address the dependability of a qualitative study (Shenton, 2004). For the purpose of this study, extensive documentation throughout each process of the study has been provided. In order to eliminate any inconsistencies on my part, I employed praxis and reflection regularly on the process to document my procedure on a systematic and ongoing basis to document changes and shifts that occurred in the midst of the study. Tracking these changes made it possible for study findings to be replicated through the implementation of similar studies.

Confirmability

Objectivity in any research study is viewed as the gold standard in avoiding researcher bias from infiltrating the study. However, Patton (1990) argued that because research studies are designed by humans and, as such, are prone to the bias regardless of the how intentional the researcher is in being objective. To address confirmability, the

study includes an "audit trail" that documents the various components and procedures of the study. This allows "any observer to trace the course of the research step-by-step via the decisions made and procedures described" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). Reasonings and arguments for choosing certain methodology over others have been assessed and reported. Praxis serves to keep reflections consistent and critical.

Transferability

An important feature of quantitative research is the ability of the study's findings to be generalized to the larger population, which is defined as external validity or generalizability. In the context of qualitative research, transferability is seen as the equivalent but is also a contested criterion of trustworthiness. Shenton (2004) questioned "whether the notion of producing truly transferable results from a single study is a realistic aim or whether it disregards the importance of context which forms such a key factor in qualitative research" (p. 71). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that the qualitative researcher can "provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility" (p. 316). The use of thick, rich description demonstrates a critical level of depth and detail that may be transferable.

Limitations

The potential limitations of this study were inevitable as is the case in any qualitative research study. One particular limitation that arose is issues of subjectivity and bias. However, as someone who identifies as racially minoritized and also performs spoken word poetry, the researcher's positionality may cause certain levels of bias in the process of the study, but this can be seen as an advantage in building connections with

participants. To address this limitation, a co-participatory component was employed to take into account the subjectivities and biases of the participants and researcher. Another limitation would be the relationship shared with the founder of the open mic. Due to their reputation in the community and their strong relationship with the researcher, there may be a desire to participate in order to please the founder of the open mic. This was addressed by ensuring that all expectations and predictions were clearly communicated and through the use of transparency. These strategies provided a pathway to exposing any hidden agendas.

Delimitations

While there may be a variety of delimitations to arise from the implementation of this study, there are two that will be highlighted. One potential delimitation is that trauma is a broad field, and I've focused on a narrow population. Some may question why participants who do not perform art were included to show a comparison. Another possible delimitation to this study is the fact that racially minoritized youth may take away from the complexities that exist within their identities (Tatum, 2017). Expanding the demographics might provide a deeper understanding of how trauma affects the multiple identities of youth; however, the goal was to conduct research along lines of salience in the context of identity. This salience of identity is between the researcher and the participants.

Conclusion

The study aims to examine trauma using qualitative methodology in order to create humanizing pathways toward co-constructing research that meets the needs of participants. This goal was achieved by centering participants throughout each stage of

the process. As participants are centered, they were invited to share as much or as little as they desire and had the option of opting out of the study. The combination of particular tenets from varying qualitative methodologies ties to the tricky ground that qualitative research is conducted on, so it stands to argue that to conduct this study required a creative set of tools (Smith, 2008). Ethnography provides a pathway that allows for deep connections in long-term studies, and considering the nature of the study, time was a big requirement. Transparency and reciprocity are powerful tools that are amplified within the context of ethnographic research. It is important that participants understand their ownership of the study because of their participation in the study. Participants were aware of the milestones that I reached as I progressed as well as the challenges I faced throughout my doctoral studies. They were given full access to all recordings, transcriptions, and notes from the study as well as all write ups from the first draft to the final draft. To further reciprocate their sharing of sensitive information, I shared with them my own experiences and poems—giving them access to poetry notebooks that no one has ever read before. Challenging conventional methods in research inquiry provides new ways to imagine what research can be for future racially minoritized scholars.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the complex relationship among trauma, the lived realities of racially minoritized youth, and the arts. The researcher believes that exploring this relationship would provide evidence of the various forms of power and wisdom that comes with living with and through raciocultural trauma. The researcher believes that cultivating a deeper understanding of this relationship would provide critical insights that could inform stronger systems of support for racially minoritized youth. This chapter presents key findings from 10 unstructured interviews, fieldnotes from 10 open mics, 15 poems, and other artifacts. During analysis, there were three major findings:

> 1. Participants regarded spoken word, rooted in cultural practices that are meaningful to them, as a form of therapy for processing trauma rooted in cultural practices that are meaningful to them.

> 2. Participants described poetry as a space or medium through which they can connect with others to engage in topics that are often not addressed because of the silence around acknowledging trauma that exists within racially minoritized communities.

> 3. Participants expressed a heightened feeling of vulnerability when performing pieces directly tied to trauma.

Findings from this study address the research problem of furthering our understanding of the trauma racially minoritized youth live with through a raciocultural lens as well as exploring youth-centered pathways of processing and healing. This study focused on one research question which asked: In what ways might embodied arts address trauma within racially minoritized youth? Finding #1, Finding #2, and Finding #3 all address the research question in their own respective way.

This chapter begins with a brief narrative on the setting and specific layers of identity that were shared across participants and researchers. The section to follow breaks down each finding by giving evidence from each participant with a focus on centering the voices of participants. Subsequently, there is an overview of an interview with our mentor and the founder of the open mic space that became the site of our study. An autoethnopoem is included to address researcher positionality and also as an act of racial storytelling. Quotations from interview transcript help to illustrate a connective pattern of shared experiences between participants. Spoken word poems are included to provide a glimpse into their lived realities through their art. Field notes from the monthly open mic add a descriptive layer of the setting and performances from participants. The interweaving of different sources of data provides an avenue for triangulation and complexity as the evidence is disseminated. The chapter closes with a brief summary of the findings, geared toward reiterating the established pattern that exists in the data.

The Layers

There were aspects of this study that should be disclosed before delving into the findings. These aspects were not planned and give the study a unique perspective on trauma and how it affects racially minoritized youth. The first aspect to discuss is that I volunteered for two years at the site where participants performed under the guidance and mentorship of the open mic founder, Magdalena Gomez (with permission). At the start of my third year working with Magdalena, she invited me to do research in the open mic space. This aspect of the invitation to conduct research was of particular importance, as it was an organic process that was not forced.

The other aspects to note from this study ties to the identities of participants and researcher. Both researcher and participants identified as Puerto Rican, although two of the participants are culturally mixed, they primarily identified as Puerto Rican. Spoken word poetry was the preferred form of embodied art for all the participants and the researcher. There was a common background in being raised in working-class homes and communities. Both participants and researcher were mentored by and revered Magdalena who is a decorated poet. Lastly, the researcher identifies as a cisgender man, who has a history of taking advantage of his gender privilege, who is centering and working alongside queer and cisgender women while raising a daughter and being raised in a matriarchal family. In many instances, my daughter was in attendance during interviews and open mics.

The aspects that have been discussed here are pivotal to understanding how the relationship between researcher and participants evolved before, during, and after the study. These aspects speak to the high levels of trust that permeates the study and comes with researching such sensitive subject matter. Moreover, the willingness of participants to make themselves vulnerable and transparent about their art and trauma is directly tied to these aspects, which will be evident as the findings are discussed.

Finding 1

All participants regarded spoken word, both writing and performing, as a form of therapy for processing trauma rooted in cultural practices that are meaningful to them.

The primary finding of this study is that embodied arts, namely spoken word poetry, is seen as a form of therapy that supports processing the trauma that participants live with and through. This finding is significant because all participants described embodied arts as a way to process their traumatic experiences in ways that are

74

meaningful to them. There appears to be a strong sense of embodied arts being a natural

gateway into understanding the self as trauma is lived with and lived through.

Participants described these sentiments in the following ways:

> Writing it would be the more therapeutic version like as a whole for art. And when I do perform I feel it's more relieving in the sense of accepting what you're saying because it's different reading it to yourself, or writing it and editing it, but actually being able to say it and stick to what you said in that one performance is a lot of truth and realness that sharing with other people, whether they agree with it or not, is just coming to your senses of it. And definitely reading it is way more intense than writing it. Writing is like drinking water if you're thirsty you're gonna do it…If it's in your head you're just gonna go. And performing takes a lot more of yourself and confidence to do that which is a lot, and overwhelming and scary. Honestly having to read a poem, even reading in front of a smaller group is easier in a way because there's less opinions and judgement than performing in a whole crowd. (D-Nice).

D-Nice expressed that her mother is the source of her depression, dealing with

mental health (depression and anxiety), bullying, and identity crisis. Trauma can also be a

whirlwind of multiple experiences occurring at once, "I feel like around the time with

Mima, I was really vulnerable because I was dealing with my foot, and this really weird

transition of graduation and family issues" (D-Nice).

> Bouncing off of what you said, I feel like writing is the more nerve-racking intense part…writing is not difficult but a lot more intense for me because when I'm writing I can't stop. It's never just one line…Sometimes it's like I don't want to say these things it's just how they're coming out. The writing process in my room is literally me yelling, it's me crying and it's me talking to some imaginary person in my room and in reality it's just talking to myself, like 'are you comprehending what you're writing right now' and I'm like 'word, word.' So I think performing is fun, but I definitely think that writing is always based in reflection work. So sometimes it's me coming to terms with things …I'm mentally like 'Oh! I came to terms with this. This is what I'm mentally connecting this dot with' because sometimes I'll be reading my poem and I'm like 'Oh that cleared up a lot for me.' So probably writing is harder because when it comes to writing trauma it's always like—going back to my mom really was like you don't tell people how hard you struggled [D-Nice agrees]. So the beginning of my poetry was always rooted in how can I say this without saying this so that she don't find out and I'm telling everyone our life kind of has been difficult. So I think that writing is a lot harder for me because there's still, even today at 18

years old, after my mom knows what I go out there and do, my mom's never actually been to a performance. So every time I'm there I'm like I'm about to air out all y'all dirty laundry. But I think that's harder because it leads up to the performance where I'm about to tell everybody…and this is why I'm not in therapy…[D-Nice and Meech say organically in unison] this is my therapy. But the performance part is literally just that I have to say this right now, this has to be said in this room right now. I don't know why but I'm gonna say it, I wrote it already (Meech).

Meech has been raped, deals with mental health (depression and anxiety), a toxic relationship with her partner, suicide ideation, and what she described as her "October event." Trauma can occur at home as Meech describes her inability to share her emotions with her family because "we raise soldiers, we don't raise kids. I talk a lot about survival tactics" (Meech).

My grandparents are very traditional. I haven't told anyone, in my entire family besides my parents about my diagnosis. They're the only two people that know because I feel like if I were to tell anyone in my family they would be like 'are you sure?' They wouldn't really understand or believe me. And it was hard for me to even tell my parents when it happened because I was depressed. I've been looking back at it and going through therapy sessions, I've been depressed with anxiety since middle school too. And I never did anything about it, I just lived in that. I would try to voice that to my parents and they'd be like 'everything is gonna be fine, you're gonna be ok' and for me that was tough because my mom has depression and my dad is bipolar and has depression and if I'm telling you I'm feeling this way you should be the first one to understand because you felt this way or you feel this way, but that wasn't always the case… I guess because of my traumas and stuff—mental health—I overthink everything so what wouldn't really be an issue for people becomes a huge issue for me because I overthink things from years and years ago I remember clearly and I'm like what if I did this differently, what if I hadn't done this…it gets really hard for me sometimes because even with friendships it's like what if it's my fault or I said this to her. (Lani)

Lani described her parents' divorce, mental health (depression and anxiety), death of great grandmother, bullying, suicide ideation, and identity crisis. The different forms of trauma that the participants experienced give us a scope of how trauma haunts so many different parts of the self. Trauma is experienced in schools, as Lani stated, "When I was

in elementary school my teachers bullied me. Almost every single day they made fun of my voice—the whole class laughed at me. They said they weren't going to listen to anything I say unless I stop whining" (Lani). Each of the participants experienced various forms of trauma through their lived experiences.

The following are poems that the participants wrote addressing a trauma that they lived through and continues to haunt them. The poems serve as an analytic kaleidoscope of shifting and moving imagery, symbolism, language, emotion, and catharsis. While the poems stand for themselves as rich pieces of thick description, the research study also included a self-analysis of poems by which each participant broke down their poem and the process to write it.

> **Title - 18.**
> There are days I remember the feeling of their fingers on me so clearly-....
> Grabbing me
> Grouping me
> Petting me like the most beautiful trophies
>
> Hands that traveled from my most intimate spaces
> Up my chest
> And over my neck
> Until they landed on my mouth.
> Like duct tape for the years to come.
> At 8 years old I learned the real monsters didn't live underneath my bed.
> At 8 years old I learned the power of silence.-
>
> One. //
> My lips
> still.
> Hurt.
> from being bruised by yours
> My hips.
> still.
> hurt.
> from being pushed into your couch
> I told you I didn't want you to be my first kiss
> I told you to get off me
> (You were my older cousin)

My mama always told me you were meant to protect me.
But at 12 years old
You taught me how to keep a secret. -

Two//

I smell good don't I?
That's why you have your face pressed against my flesh
As you believe I'm asleep
Smelled so good you just had to have a taste while she showered
So entranced with me
You didn't even notice I was awake the whole time
I have your hands engraved on me
Like I have theirs
Every crevice you touched
Every hair you disturbed
I promise you the day you cross me
I will break every single finger on your rough ass hands
I promise you
I will show just how much 5 years has hardened me
I promise you
She doesn't have to believe me this time.

Three//

At barely 17 years old
I met a boy
I will not call him a man
Because real men know they cannot possess my body.
My curves and crevices
The dips and valleys of my being
We're not his to be colonize.
That basement felt like it was 100ft deep into the earth
Because I can still feel myself scratching at the bed sheet in hopes that it can
ground me.
Drowning in a sea of tears
All while you ravaged my body
Like your ancestors who took and killed like wild wolves consuming everything
You ripped the only part they left me _
And reminded me that women aren't even safe in their homes so why would they
be safe in the presence of their boyfriends.

At 8 years old I learned the power a silence
At 12 I learned how to keep a secret
At 14 I learned no one would believe me
At 17 I learned I was not a fighter but a victim since paralyzed by fear.

I'm sorry mama.-
But I can't keep this secret
I tried to take my life over it
I'm tired of preserving you peace of mind
While screaming inside of me
I wish you saw it in my broken smile in our picture perfect family photos

My bed is no longer warm.-
My body was stripped of its resources
I now stand before every man I meet a broken being
Stuck explaining why I believe sex is a form of intimacy meant to be earned and
softly given
No one ever taught me how to take care of my body
Soap and water didn't wash away their sins
Soap and water didn't bring my peace of mind back to me
Soap and water ain't do shit to comfort me!
Soap and water
Soap and water
Soap and water
Soap and fucking water!

Whenever I can still feel their hands all over me
The chill that creeps into my core
And leaves me shivering
Frozen-
I run a steaming hot shower
And use soap and water
To scrub their hands off of me
Until my skin is raw
Until my eyes are puffy and red
Until I can gather my strength again.

I am a woman raised in a land of wolves.
Consider my calm soothing voice my war cry
Consider my doe eyes my greatest weapon
Because a wolf in sheep's clothing
Can see it all. (Meech)

In her analysis, Meech says that this poem took 18 years to write and is, "one of my best pieces of poetry because it was the easiest to write. It took so long that when it finally came out, it was all together" (Meech). Meech described feeling betrayed by her mother when it came to her sexual trauma because, "your mother's supposed to protect

you" (Meech), and her mother didn't believe her when she told her at 12 years old that one of her mother's boyfriend's assaulted her. Meech described feeling ready to perform for the open mic because, "I owe to the space to be authentic, raw—be myself" (Meech), but described her home has being traumatic for her. According to Meech, during the performance, she wore a sweatshirt and a hat because she didn't want to be sexualized or her face to be seen. Meech also stated from a cultural lens, "Being Puerto Rican you're just used to struggling in silence because you don't want anyone to see you need the hand of help—that's hard" (Meech). Meech went on to explain that sexual trauma is a process stating, "People think rape is the action—no! You are mentally raped right that for months on end, years on end" (Meech).

> **How do you describe a family torn to pieces?**
> take a blank sheet of paper.
> write down the words you associate with love.
> with mom.
> with dad.
> now tear it apart.
> watch the blood spew from the fractured edges.
> watch the joy fade from each letter,
> delicately drawn with your marrow.
> watch the white back drop wrinkle
> like pruned fingers, soaked for too long.
> now take the clear tape you hid
> in your back pocket.
> gently adhere each piece.
> hold them together with shaky palms
> and don't let go until
> the fragments forget they were apart.
> watch the blood slow,
> still dripping through the cracks
> but no longer spewing.
> tape damp and feeble,
> words still faded from the abuse
> of each tear,
> backdrop still pruned.
> watch through clouded eyes as the meaning
> of each word starts to distort.

watch the letters dissolve
as your marrow turns to tar,
black and heavy.
continue to hold the pieces together
until your fingers numb
and your arms grow weary.
continue to hold the pieces
until you're the one who forgets
that your notion of love
will never be whole. (Lani)

Lani focused her analysis on the struggles that it took to write about her parents' divorce and the relief that came with finally being able to get the words out. Lani described that she is, "not sure if I'm emotionally ready to perform it," but writing it was, "like taking a weight off my shoulders" (Lani). Continuing in this line of analysis, Lani stated that performing the poem is like, "releasing it into the air" and how it is a "relief to speak my truth" (Lani). The ways in which lived experience connects to her performance is shown as she explained, "connecting to performance makes me emotional, especially if I'm going through something" (Lani). During the time of her parents' divorce, Lani described her pride in having both of her parents while her peers did not share in this type of upbringing. Lani explained that she was "trying to be different, but because of this I became another statistic" (Lani). Further reflecting on the time period of her parents' divorce, Lani went on, stating:

> And I feel like with the whole divorce thing I've just lived with it. I've never really processed anything that happened throughout that time. And even though the divorce happened there was a lot of stuff going on within that so just thinking about my parents brings up everything else and I was just not ready…I still did it because I felt I had to for myself and just cause the space I was in, but afterward it was like damn now I gotta think about this" (Lani).

Mima's Poem
As I watch the children dance amongst the waves
Full of smiles euphoric dispositions lively
I ponder you and begin to cry

I also begin to laugh
Because I know everyone surrounding me
Who confides in sunblock
Is absurd unhinged and far from sane in the eyes of you
A more adequate way to protect ones self
From the robust star we call the sun is to wear
Layers of shirts preferably black
Wear jeans wear gloves also preferably black
Wear a hat seemingly only you can rock
And also… preferably black
While holding an infamous umbrella
Also black
I feel you
I feel you as I feel the beat sun on my back
And the heat rising from the sand into the veins of my feet
Which by the way I'm walking now I hope you can see me
I see you
I see you in every picture captured
Knowing your smile is grander than the ones in front
I hear you
I hear you with every uncontrolled burst of laughter
Most importantly I miss you
The irony of that
I knew my last memory of high school was going to be on graduation
What was blind to me was also my last memory of you
My memories of you were nothing but refreshing
A mango
Sweet tempting there's absolutely no desire to cut peel
Simply one has the urge to fully indulge into such sweet taste
Within every given bite never getting enough
Much is present to offer
Although indulging in every last sweet drop
Lingering tastes of you seems to fill one with the same past satisfaction
Almost as if you are still here
Leaving behind a pit
Not quite the same feeling but you're still here
Still feeling seeing hearing you
Still beauty left behind in its colorless flavorless pit
Never forgetting its true sweetness satisfaction and fulfillment in ones game
You will never be forgotten Mima
We all love you more than my poems can voice (D-Nice)

D-Nice analyzed her poem by beginning with, "everyone knew Mima" (D-Nice)

and how Mima always attended sports events. D-Nice explained that she would attend

sports events alone, and Mima would always sit next to her. As D-Nice reflected, she

realizes something:

> This isn't on one of the questions but you made me think of this. My grandma
> died of bone cancer when I was 9 or 10. We would go to Puerto Rico every
> summer but she was 60 when she passed away, she was super young but I never
> really knew her like that. I have these really small memories of drinking my café
> con queso in her bed but that's really it. So maybe that's why I defer to Mima
> because that could be my grandma…I would respect Mima as if she were my
> elder. So I think that would be why it hit me as much because I don't have a lot of
> friends with grandma's that would to talk to me. (D-Nice)

D-Nice went on to explain that her regret is not having shared her feelings with Mima

before she passed away, "I cried while writing it because I didn't get to say it to Mima"

(D-Nice). Since she couldn't share the poem with Mima, she shared it with Mima's

granddaughter, the girlfriend of her friend, and described it as a "spiritual experience"

(D-Nice). She also gave Mima's granddaughter the poem to share with her family and

she told D-Nice that it was "needed" and "good for her" (D-Nice).

The poems serve as an analytic kaleidoscope of shifting and moving imagery,

symbolism, language, emotion, and catharsis. While the poems stand for themselves as

rich pieces of thick description, the research study also included a self-analysis of poems

by which each participants broke down their poem and the process to write it.

Finding 2

All participants described poetry as a space where they can talk and connect with others
about topics that they are normally silent about or have no one to talk to about the topic
because of the culture of silence around trauma that exists within their family and
communities.

Another major finding during the study was that all participants described poetry

as a space where they can talk about sensitive topics in private. For each participant, there

is a culture of silence that begins in the home and expands into personal spaces,

community spaces, and school spaces. Participants discussed being silenced or silencing

themselves because that is what they were taught to do when it comes to their trauma.

The following quotes are from participants regarding the culture of silence and poetry

being their diary:

> For some reason inside Latinx families you can't talk about your struggle…I
> started writing poetry because mentally it was the only safe space…So I started
> writing poetry when my house got raided and I couldn't talk to my mom so I went
> to notebooks and for some reason poetry was all that came out. I used to think I
> was gonna be a rapper, gonna be the next Noname…that's where the therapeutic
> aspect of it was being able to openly complain and not bottle up something at the
> same exact time while realizing and thinking about it deeply—that was the
> therapeutic aspect, that's what my therapist is supposed to do—listen to my story,
> break it down with me and tell me it's going to be ok at the end. And when I
> wasn't receiving therapy that 's what I was doing for myself…Well if no one's
> gonna listen to me my ancestors will while I'm screaming in my room because
> they want me to write these things down… This is the only time I'm honest with
> myself. (Meech)

The significance of poetry is shown in the participants' intimate relationship that

is shared with their art. Meech highlighted the significance of poems as she said, "You

don't deserve to hear it when it's so sacred…this is a prayer" (Meech). Lani responded to

Meech saying, "I want to keep it for myself" (Lani). These examples elicit the spiritual

and sacred dialectics of poetry and embodied arts in connection with the power imbued

within them to choose who is worthy to share in these experiences.

> That's why I have a lot of trouble asking people for help now, just cause that's
> how I grew up. 'Do stuff on your own and if you can't then figure it out'… So
> that was always really tough for me so yeah I felt really alone and my writing,
> like short stories and poems, that was all I had—and drawings and stuff—that's
> all I had for myself where I can be like—everything that I was feeling I couldn't
> really tell people so I would tell the paper…My poems are like my diary entries
> so reading them out loud just feels like I'm telling people my business. When I'm
> writing or when I'm drawing in that moment I feel something triggered something
> and I just have to get it out. And so when I read back what I wrote or see what I
> drew or something, I'm forced to see what I was thinking about whether
> subconsciously or consciously. So I have to address what I was going through in
> that moment and usually most of my poetry that I've written is kind of for myself;

not really with the intention of reading it to anybody. It touches on past experiences of what I've gone through. So I think it does help me because I get to see where that came from or where this thought is from. (Lani)

Lani gave us insight into the isolation that is felt when she feels the need to ask for help, which is grounded in teachings from her childhood. The culture of "do for yourself" has created a vacuum when it comes to the voices of racially minoritized youth reaching out for support. Due to the isolation that Lani has with her work, we see an intimate relationship forming between her and her artwork—similar to Meech—that makes it much more difficult to share her stories with larger audiences. This contributes to the culture of silence in racially minoritized communities.

> There's so much truth behind poetry because that's yourself. Whatever you're performing is what you wrote. That's you telling it. I feel like that's harder to come to the truth of acceptance in being like this is me but this is for you guys although it's for me…I feel like you get insecure talking personally about things with whoever you're talking to because they don't want to hear it. They didn't come to hear about this… I feel like in a way poetry is an answer. Once you perform it, it's like looking in a mirror without looking at yourself but looking through others. I feel like that's where writing poetry feels good because it's one thing to be thinking in every direction but to have it actually written out and you're looking at it and it's right there, you know what I mean, it's not going anywhere unless you genuinely want to destroy it but I feel like that validation and reassurance—this is what I said, this is how I feel—and it's right here for as long as I want it to be. (D-Nice)

D-Nice described the control and power that she has in sharing her poetry, saying, "If I ever share a poem it's because I want someone to hear it, but we do have poetry where we do keep it to ourselves" (D-Nice). This reminds me of relationships and who we share our friends, lovers, and family with and who we choose not to share them with. D-Nice is describing the limited access she permits when it comes to sharing her most vulnerable experiences.

Participants described the silencing that they experienced that was centered around a discussion of what Meech described as her "October Event" in which she shared a poem about her experiences as a Puerto Rican woman that led to an avalanche of hate mail, death threats, and cyber bullying coupled with media attention and growing popularity as a spoken word artist. Meech never discussed this event in detail but gave information here and there regarding the impact that occurred after her performance. This has led to the creation of an ethnic studies program in her former high school that is currently at the center of some research projects. The participants described how Meech impacted them, saying, "You impacted our class" (Lani) and "You impacted a lot of things" (D-Nice). Participants described how silence functions in their community in this brief interaction:

> **D-Nice**: You may be traumatized but not show if no one talks about it typically, but it should be.
>
> **Lani:** In urban communities, people don't think about trauma.
>
> **Meech:** Being in an urban environment, there's no recognition of trauma.

Each participant described a different function of silencing that exists in the processing of trauma within urbanized communities with a focusing on the people of the community not *talking about*, *thinking about*, *recognizing* the trauma that is collectively experienced. The topics that are the focal points of their art often focus on these types of trauma that are seemingly silenced into erasure—buried deep into the fabric of our genetic code. The following poems discuss topics that participants feel they must be silent about as Latinx women.

> **Discernment**
> From the day we are born
> To the day that we die

We have a set life made for us
As if someone had a schedule for us to follow
Even before coming upon Earth
This schedule consisting of a routine
Consistency set ideologies
Where instincts told we need a certain amount of education
In order to prosper
In order to get a job
In order to then make enough money
to be able to fret for yourself
In order to then buy produce
In order to buy clothes
In order to rent or buy shelter
In order to then pay the bills that come with that
If one does not achieve such education
What society says is enough knowledge in order to prosper
One cannot obtain a career, buy produce, buy clothes, rent or buy shelter,
nor pay the bills that come with that
Almost as if we are set for failure
Set to follow the rules that may not apply to everyone
But oh well
You just have to deal with it right
What happens to those who cannot do what the rest can
And what happens to those who have been struggling
What happens to those who want to prosper
but simply cannot in the way we are supposed to
We are left to believe we are not good enough
We are not smart enough
We are not rich enough
We are not normal enough
Compared to those around us who meet society's standards of living
Enough
Enough of what is expected of us from people who know nothing about us
Enough of trying to accomplish what is almost impossible of us to do
Enough of trying to follow made up standards that we are supposed to believe is
realistic
Enough of believing what we're told to believe
Enough of following what we're told to follow
The American Dream (D-Nice)

Within these poems, participants are able to process topics that they are often

silent about in ways that are meaningful to their experiences and free from judgement. D-

Nice analyzed her poem, saying,

I really do feel we have a set routine in life and it's so sad and that's why I think art comes into play or we reach out to that so much because it's the only way to get out of this normalcy that time we have to live. Yeah, I hate our system if that wasn't obvious already. I can't stand that we really have to do that. I would love to not go to college and just be in the community or travel, but you need money at the end of the day to do that. It's a poem about the routine of life, the American Dream, and wanting to break away and be free. (D-Nice)

"Sept.26th"
I haven't touched a stage in so long
It is almost as if
its wood has become foreign.
This island has become
more isolated
 than all knowing.
I hope you know I never stopped praying.

I am telling you, you are not a broken being.
They false prophesied about you.-
"Self sacrificial" nonsense.
They pronounced you damaged before you were even given the chance to heal.
Softly whispered "victim" "poor thing"
You should have been given a hero's praise,
Survivor. -

I am here today to remind you it is okay to Donkey Kong style beat on ya chest
when proclaiming the title survivor.
The name healed
The name healing
I am reminding you it's okay to have not yet healed.
Do not fear the oblivion
It is now the time for you to listen quietly
For now your ancestors guide you .

Make waves my child
Make waves. -

Make waves of emotions
Allow them to wash over you .
For all those times you knew no other way than to hold it all in.
As if you have finally touched the hand of salvation
There comes a time in which you can't help but weep
So go ahead
Weep for all that you have lost.
Weep for all that you have long forgotten
Weep for all that you have had to sacrifice

Weep for how far you have come because r was not an easy journey,
Lastly weep because these decisions both yours and not has crafted your being
today.

I firmly believe
You wear your lasting decisions on you like a scarlet letter
When in the presence of someone who is watching.
Obvious to those who know
Obsolete to those who don't.

There are things you go through alone.
I cannot lie
I. have long since stopped healing.
Not because i am healed either
My soul and my mind have just come to a stalemate
And now neither knows quite what to do...

Torn and lost
I no longer spit out the silence of my emotions
I now use my silence to hide emotions
I put up a fight but i now realize the lasting damages.

There are days I still wonder if I have wasted the best version of myself on those
who just weren't made to see my brilliance.

Sometimes i wonder if i can bring some of those pieces back to me
Sorta like filling in pieces of a puzzle
But then that would insinuate I'm lacking parts of me
And this is not the time to not be whole!

This is not the time to be holding back.
So get on your knees and tell them how you feel
Lay your hands palm out and imagine the grass underneath you
Can you feel the power of healing and strength flowing up to meet your palms
with grace .
Let it fill you
And when you've gathered enough strength
Allow it to carry you even if on shaky feet
Allow it to give you a hand
And when you look in that mirror
I want you to see your ancestor behind you. -
Your lineage your people your greater inner being
I want you to stand with all the versions of your being and be calm again
This poetry will forever be one of the last things
I've ever felt really good at. –

I want to share with you what my ancestors say to me
On days I cannot stand on my feet any longer
They remind me to
Make waves my child
Make waves. (Meech)

Meech analyzed her poem that focuses on her absence from the stage and the

realizations that came out of this absence, stating,

I think it made me aware of how uncomfortable I get with whatever it is I'm
internally battling with. My depression has been really bad and so has my anxiety.
So it's really obvious that they're both clearly in the mix of like I can't say this—
this is hard. I didn't think the issues I'm having internally would ever reflect in
my poetry from how much progress I think I've seen myself make. (Meech)

Unbalanced

The white coats loomed over me, telling me I would be fine.
That it's all in my head and
a quick prescription of positive thoughts would fix me,
as if I am broken and need fixing, and injecting my veins with sunlight
would make a gray sky less cloudy.

Then they realized it was in my head and a hallowed smile was not enough.
Suddenly, it wasn't my fault that my mind couldn't produce enough…

Normal.

They kept saying it wasn't my fault that my laughter would turn into
silent whimpers, muffled by
mounds of blankets.
That other days I would get drunk on energy,
a delusion of invincibility making time creep behind galvanized thoughts too
animated for
a dark sky to soothe,
tricking me into believing I'm fine.

But I just can't…
            be still,
sit still,
        think still,
still be…

Normal.

So, they gave me an orange bottle to fix my broken mind

My broken me.

      I am broken.

      Fix me.
And the weight of the white-chalked positivity
Brought me to my knees
as I swallowed down the 100mg of

equilibrium
to breathe, and

      be

      happy,

      be

      fixed,

      be
      Normal (Lani)

Lani described how writing her poem helped her realized that her depression and anxiety was not her fault. In the moment when she was holding her last pill, she said to herself, "I really don't want to take this anymore" (Lani). She said, "I just felt broken switching between highs and lows…I couldn't control what happened, what the doctors did, how I was created—and so I guess this was me taking back control over the situation" (Lani). The negative effects of medication and its impact on writing is further divulged as Lani said,

> I think that's part of why it's really hard for me to write poems now because it's hard for me to feel anything toward the memories that I've had…I feel like part of it is the medication but I feel like part of it is me pushing it away—I don't know—but I noticed it more since I started taking the meds. (Lani)

The significance of poetry is amplified by the open mic space, L!t (pseudonym), as participants discussed their experiences in the space. This short exchange revolves around Meech who seems to have a deeper reverence of the space:

D-Nice: I felt uncomfortable first time I went because I didn't know anyone.

Lani: There's no expectation to be the greatest. Just come as you are.

Meech: I think that has to do with you and Magdalena.

Lani: I agree!

D-Nice: Yeah!

Meech: How you guys have created the space through our eyes…I showed up and it was the scariest shit I've ever and it's more fear of—we create a very intimate setting for people and it's something you can tell off the bat.

D-Nice: I agree.

Meech: But I feel that you and Magdalena (all permission given) have done a really good job of making this space so welcoming that a lot of people in other spaces, I realize, really don't do. Like you crack jokes; there's a constant reminder it's intergenerational work and you can tell throughout the thing and I feel when I go to other places I never get same feeling like L!t does.

There is a culture of silence in Latinx communities with regard to speaking about trauma, and this silence often pushes participants to find ways to process their lived reality and communicate their emotions. This is another way in which embodied arts addresses trauma within racially minoritized youth.

Finding 3

All participants expressed a heightened feeling of vulnerability, and connection with peers who have shared in similar experiences, when performing pieces directly tied to trauma.

The third and final major finding focuses on participants' dialogue around the vulnerability tied to sharing such intimate and sensitive material through their poetry. All

participants expressed a heightened sense of vulnerability when performing their poetry

in front of strangers. They also expressed the power the comes with performing and

finding resonance with members of the audience around shared experiences. The

following are the ways in which participants described the vulnerable nature of

performing trauma.

> Umm, when I feel like really connected to a performance it kind of makes me a little bit emotional especially if in that moment, I'm going through something. And umm, just hearing someone else talk about it, and in their own experience I get that feeling like wow there's someone else going through that, I am not alone in this even if I think that I am and it kind of makes me not happy, but relieved, I guess, that I'm not walking through this experience by myself…Especially with— especially with something as personal as like poetry and just reading a story or even just going up there and performing like comedy or a skit or anything. You're opening yourself up to people and your work and your art and I feel like that in and of itself can connect you with people. And knowing that you can come whenever you want to be in that space, it's not like oh and this is the last time. Knowing that you have a group of people to go back to, I think that—that can definitely build a community. (Lani)

Lani shared her thoughts on isolation and the sense of belonging and community

that comes with performing embodied arts. Opening yourself up can lead to new

connections and the idea that you are not alone in this struggle. The relief that comes with

having a space that you can show up to at your own discretion shows the need for more

spaces like L!t. Lani denoted the feeling of coming back to the space because there is

now confidence rooted in the knowledge that there are others who share in these

vulnerable experiences.

> So definitely when I am more open to people and I am more vulnerable I need the same kind of vibes coming from them like we need to meet at a certain point of understandment and kind of just a mutualness of acceptance because if it's a person that's not really accepting and they're super judgmental off the bat like I'm really going to hold off a whole bunch of stuff that's I guess just normal with any situation like sometimes you feel like you can't be expressive and I guess that's why, going back to poetry, I do what I do and I write about things I wouldn't say… I feel like I like to express what I think like although it might be

out there I think it's kind of cool just to see—like to have people see that and be like even if they're afraid to say it or even think it, once I say it it'll kind of motivate them to think, oh yeah or I think so too! Yeah, I think, honestly it's kind of a way of venting in a sense and just taking what's in your mind and finally being able to release that in a way of art and in a way that's interesting for other people to hear. (D-Nice)

D-Nice described the need for reciprocity when sharing vulnerable parts of herself and her lived reality. It is important to D-Nice that whomever shares in the space of performance and embodied arts must be prepared to reciprocate to develop what she calls a "mutualness," which is to say a common ground from which they might share, breathe, cry, laugh, and heal collectively. D-Nice also capitulated the impact of sharing stories through embodied arts as a means of motivating others and giving permission to those quieter, shyer artists to join in the process.

> I—poetry was like I can do this, my mom's like losing her mind, we don't have a home, their like—I need to write about this for my own self cause it's kind of like venting. Now it's like when I share my work it's so personal that when it comes to the trauma I'm sharing it in hopes that someone else understands, goes through it and knows that it's ok and that it will be ok down the road and that's kind of where it's been at…honestly it took some people telling me it's ok to be vulnerable, it's personal and it's ok to share your own stories. And now when I go out there I know like I'm scared—like this is the first time I'm vocalizing this pain this whatever I'm going through. And it's all about I know when I used to sit in open mic spaces and someone used to say things that I wouldn't able to say I found strength in it and decided that I could do that if they could. So now this whole being of personal it's just like I just hope, hope that like someone is listening not even just to like listen, but just to feel and understand and get it and be ok with like "oh yeah well that sucks, yes, but if they could do it and they could talk about it I know I could talk about what I'm going through." Honestly it's kind of like representation, sometimes you need a model, someone to show you hey it's kind of ok to be going through shit, it's ok to vocalize that, it's ok to hurt (Meech)

Meech described how poetry has been a useful pathway for venting in which she is able to discuss her vulnerabilities as opposed to repressing them. Moreover, she showed the power of sharing stories as a way to inspire others to share, which harkens

back to D-Nice's comments of reciprocity and Lani's comments on building a

community. Meech also took it upon herself to be a role model and leader in this work,

despite her traumatic experiences, which speaks to her resilience and tenacity.

Participants' expressions of how performing demands vulnerability, and the

opportunity to connect with others in a community of shared experience that revolves

around embodied arts, is furthered when Meech described her poetry as "vulnerable

work" (Meech) and Denise described not liking performing.

> I don't like performing my pieces like ever. I feel like I don't have confidence in
> myself at this point in time to perform. I feel really weird when I spit, because if
> I'm in my room or just writing it's good, but if I'm performing I always feel so
> shitty about it. (D-Nice)

Despite this lack of confidence, when asked if she felt that embodied arts helped build her

confidence, she alternatively responded, "Hell yeah! And also just meeting people that do

that is the dopest thing ever—like community" (D-Nice). Going into the relationship

dynamics between the audience and performer, Lani stated, "There's vulnerability when

you're performing, when you're opening yourself up to complete strangers trying and

hoping to connect. The audience gives strength to the performer to keep performing"

(Lani). The following poetry selections continue to reveal intimacy and depth, meaning,

and resistance while centering the spirituality involved in participants disclosing their

vulnerable truths:

> **Florence Weinstein, 1.11.16**
> I want to say I love you
> but in this house,
> I love you means goodbye
> and I am not ready to let go
> because I fear my heaven
> will be different than yours,
> and I will abandon you to an unknown. A question only answered with

empty gazes and
cold flesh.

I look at the cactus on your window sill, sitting quietly, drinking the sweat
that falls gently from your forehead. Your books release dust from their tired
covers, begging to be read one last time.
The only noise to fill the room comes from the quiet breaths
that barely escape your chest

The silence leaves my tongue deserted, bile rising to sooth the rawness in my
throat and some woman asks if I need water. The bones in my neck creek with
every nod as if relieved they can still move.
You lay still, sleeping, or practicing, I can't tell which.

But then you look at me, mouth agape and you scream,

"Please don't leave me!"

Your words pull me into a dream I had of a younger me, smiling and
naïve, running into your open arms,
your eyes twinkling and alive.
You told me you loved me while
hugging my frail body as though it was the last time,
your bright pink sweater leaving an afterimage on the back of my eyelids
as I breathed you in.

Then I am back within your
white-walled confines
and your distant gaze brushes past my trembling body, freeing the anguish
tucked deep in my bones,
as my mind races, begging,
Please. Don't leave *me*.

But all my lips could muster
Is a wisp of air escaping my lungs "I love you."

Then your screams stop
as an arm pulls me away.
Your hand extends out to me
and I realize,
you're already too far away
for me to reach (Lani)

The night that Lani performed had "about 20 people in attendance with more trickling in" (Fieldnote 12/19/18). The audience seemed like they were "actively listening (no one on their phone or random conversations)," however Lani in a dialogue with Meech where they were alone says:

> **Lani:** After that last open mic I think it's going to take time to be able to perform again.
>
> **Meech:** Why?
>
> **Lani:** Just cause I read something that was really traumatic for me.
>
> **Meech:** You read something?
>
> **Lani:** "Yeah about my great grandmother…I pushed myself to do it and the way it was received…
>
> **Meech:** Were you not ready? Who received it wrong?
>
> **Lani:** The crowd was dead and in my head I was like "Oh."

Lani then went on to volunteer to host the next open mic because "I don't want anyone to feel like that so I'm going to hype everyone up" (Lani). The impact of the performance was something Lani carried for 6 months after the performance as she explained, "I think that's why it hurt so much in December when I read it and there was no reaction. When I looked at the crowd, it was a disconnect. People weren't paying attention" (Lani). The loss she felt in the performance resonates with the loss of her great grandmother and her questioning "Where is her spirit" (Lani).

> **Signed a Spiritual Being**
> It's easier speaking this way
> As the alcohol dehydrates my body
> As this news has done this soul
> It is easier telling you this way
> Ignore the slurring please

I bare 17 years under my belt
In age
But have aged in ways
That have made me older than what I am

I have slept on floors
Given up my bed and
 yet I've realized that you don't need a mattress and a pillow To dream
I have given up my plate and went to bed hungry to provide my siblings with a fill
You never forget hunger pains
And that's something they'll never feel.

I've been fighting my whole life
And I am exhausted
They say these tribulations are proof of faith
But who do I pray to?
God? Buddha? A messiah? Who?
Where was god when my baby brother got his tumor?
and so much more
Where do i speak my faith?
Do I cry on church benches? yell at church altars? Do I seek a confession booth?
Do I read a holy text in search of you?
Oh I beg of whatever God there is that he can show me

Right now I'm talking to the sky and there's not an ounce of daylight
And yet here I am praying for a sign
Give me a breeze to cleanse my soul.
Give me a drop of rain to wash away my sins.
Give me a ray of sunlight to break through the angry clouds and send me hope
Put a stamp on it and sign it from god.
Here you go.-

But as I sit here and wait
I cannot lie
I am scared.
What if it is too late?
What if the steps necessary for holy salvation are too far away?
What if I die tomorrow and as my face drains I do not know how to ask for
forgiveness?
What if I take all these steps and when the time is right I am not greeted with what
I thought I'd be given?
Can you look in God's eyes (god's eyes?) with disappointment?-
Or do I just have to wait for the bigger picture he's trying to show me?
Does it even work like that?
You can't pay your way to heaven but if I could
I can't even lie I'm sure I wouldn't be able to afford that.

In heaven do you pay for a view?
Can you have more than one or is that a premium package
Because I want to see city skylines and oceans a blue
Or does it work in cycles?
Is everyday something new?
These are just some of my questions.
What about you? (Meech)

Meech performed a poem focused on her spirituality, saying, "This is one of my to-the-point pieces" (Meech) and described her relationship with her grandmother as an inspiration, stating, "She tells me to pray and connect to God" (Meech). At the time that Meech was writing her poem she was, "questioning religion" (Meech). Deepening her analysis, she said, "I'm deeply rooted in my ancestral beliefs so I look for signs" (Meech). Her grandmother was significant in her life, "When I think of God I think of Grandma" (Meech). There have been several mentions throughout the research project of spirituality by Meech and other participants, for instance, Meech and D-Nice almost in unison described the first open mic in September, saying, "The spiritual element was missing at L!t" (Meech and D-Nice), to which D-Nice responded, "I wanted so much more from everyone" (D-Nice). Even Meech stated, "I didn't feel in my spiritual element" (Meech) the night of the first open mic. Lani also stated in separate interviews, "I'm spiritual not religious" (Lani). These cyclical conversations denote embodied arts as a spiritual journey.

Crooked Smile
How long can a crooked smile
Fill the cavities for one desires
The itch of a palm
Bringing nothing but chaos into one's life
Finding nothing but quick hands to act
Each ATM lit up like a candy bar slot machine
Tu mama who feeds into temptation
And royally flushes it down the hole

Where everyone can come to a mutual understanding
Connecting with others before connecting with ourselves
Two fingers being put to practice
Hopeful for a good time
The flashing of red being neglected of the obvious signs
Driving straight through a curvy road
With faded white lines interrupting cracks
Running out of gas along the way
But still managing to find a quick fix
To get the job done
Maybe turning around would be safe
Maybe there is no turning around
Maybe just once more I could fix all the
Unforgivable cracks and holes in this crooked smile
Maybe (D-Nice)

The poem that D-Nice shared is not one that was performed at one of the open

mics as she lost track of which poems she performed during which month. During the

interview she performed the poem and immediately said, "That was really depressing"

(D-Nice). Her analysis is short and abrupt as she said the goal of the poem was to show

the "relation of craving it all (addiction, money, sex)" (D-Nice). Lani responded, saying

"It gets the meaning across" (Lani). Trying to get more out of D-Nice I focus on the

ending being "maybe" and how she knew when she was done writing the poem. Her

response reflected her analysis, "I knew I couldn't write anything more about it" (D-

Nice). The conversations then transitioned into editing poems.

Vulnerability functions as an empowering agent in the participants—there is a

power that comes with making oneself vulnerable in a world that demands strength,

fortitude, and the ability to bounce back after great loss. Within D-Nice, Meech, and

Lani, vulnerability acts as a superpower that they do not fully understand but

continuously lean into—trusting that there is a brighter horizon and that this journey will

get them there.

An Interview with Magdalena Gomez

The guidance and mentorship of Magdalena Gomez (permission given) was a key and foundational element of the study. Through dialogue and sharing stories, Magdalena taught invaluable lessons that became the building blocks of the ways in which relationships were cultivated during the study. The transparency and vulnerability of participants were directly connected to the ways in which Magdalena uplifted me in the L!t space. Her constant praise to the community regarding our work together opened the doors for a stranger in the community to connect with powerful youth artists. Participants even acknowledged that they came to L!t because of Magdalena. Her experiences in some ways reflect the experiences of the participants, including being a poet and experiencing educational trauma at an early age when a teacher snapped her pencil for doodling while responding to a question. In that moment, the snapping of the pencil was, "the loudest sound I'd ever heard" (Magdalena). Although Magdalena was not a direct participant of the study, the value of her interview cannot be undermined.

During the interview, we discussed the open mic, the youth collective that began in the middle of October 2018, and our history together. The major themes that emerged in connection with the study revolved around intergenerational partnerships, what Magdalena names "commitment phobia," and how adults should stop underestimating young people. The following excerpts from the interview will reflect a deeper understanding of these themes in her words.

Magdalena opened up the interview by discussing her beginnings with poetry, which included the aforementioned story of educational trauma and also that in asking

her an open-ended question, she came the realization that her relationship with poetry

began with Latinx holiday cards that she read as a child.

> Just the whole idea of doing this interview and the questions it--infers or implies whatever the word is--the importance of storytelling and the importance of asking open ended questions and how that doesn't happen enough in our culture and it doesn't happen enough in schools. What we're doing right now is relevant to everything that both of us dedicate our lives to. (Magdalena)

> The need for more a mixture of open-ended questions and storytelling seemed to

be not only a need in our communities for the younger participants but also from the

perspective of our mentor. Furthering her discussion of how her work started she

described what drives her:

> Well, what's driven me from day one, has been the dismantling of tyranny of all forms--tyranny in the personal, tyranny in the political, in the home, in the social. I've always been aware of that and I've always been aware of injustice even as a young child. I understood that there was inequity, I understood classism. I didn't have the words as a child, but I had the intelligence to feel and understand it. And I think that's one of the problems with our society: that we underestimate the brilliance and the depth of children. And I think that educators are not trained to deal with the most important aspects of the human mind, which is the intuitive, the improvisational, the imagination, the creative, and the innovative. Those are the aspects of the human being that enrich and make a society a benevolent one as opposed to a malevolent--money driven one, greed-driven one. Those are the things that children are deprived of and have always been. (Magdalena)

> There has always been an urgency to Magdalena's work. Her empathic and

intellectual abilities to understand her environment through an intergenerational lens is

unique. Therefore, she argued for intergenerational partnerships that have been a

foundational part of her work.

> The intergenerational thing is something that I've done all my life. I've always partnered with younger people I've always--whenever I had an opportunity for let's say poetry readings, I would always invite a young person to open for me. When it was possible, it wasn't always possible to get someone or to do that, but when I could do it. I would always do it. (Magdalena).

This point is further expanded upon in speaking about how, in the past, apprenticeships

worked as a hands-on form of education.

> There was a time when youth had apprenticeships. It was a time when they
> worked in partnership, intergenerationally. Where a young person would go into a
> body shop and learn at the body shop; how to work with their hands, how to do
> things, how to think mechanically, how to think math. There's so much that goes
> with that and social interaction, responsibility, the need to show up and to follow
> through. You know it was a different way of educating when we had
> intergenerational partnerships and that manifestation of youth learning from
> elders and that doesn't happen. It doesn't happen in the same way. Now a lot of
> the learning is tangential. A lot of the learning is written on the bathroom walls.
> It's like going to the shorter, the shorter, the less responsibility even in social
> media. How short can I make it, how fast can I make it, and how much of me can
> I put out there? And I think they're just looking for themselves, they're just
> looking for 'who am I' in the context of this world. (Magdalena)

Despite the power of intergenerational partnerships in the past, Magdalena explained how

the times have changed. According to Magdalena, given that society, namely adults,

underestimate young people, there is a numbing of the imagination in youth upon which

she reflected, "I think a lot of it is the injection, the constant inoculation against

imagination; it's like we can't cure cancer but dammit we'll cure imagination"

(Magdalena). With the continued underestimation of youth by adults there is a growing

distrust between generations which has led to *commitment phobia*. Magdalena explained

this concept.

> Now the problem with this work that you and I do, and I think the biggest
> obstacle to it, is that young people come into it not trusting it because they've had
> no other experience of it. Their experience of adults are adults telling them what
> to do. Adults underestimating their intelligence and capabilities and sensibilities
> and ability to see what is around them. And when adults say I see you, I see your
> gifts, I honor your innate abilities, and I want to give you tools to further develop
> those abilities that are already inherent within you. When they get that
> opportunity, they get a rush at the beginning, but they also have mistrust of it.
> 'How can this be possible?' 'It's not normal.' It should be the norm, but it is the
> exception and because they come in not trusting it. I think there's self-sabotaging
> that happens. (Magdalena)

Magdalena has consistently noticed a common pattern of excitement in young people that she works with, but with enough time the young people slowly fall off, making excuses as to why they cannot engage or participate in the work—this is "commitment phobia" as she defined the concepts. Disrupting the self-sabotaging that Magdalena was witnessing in her years of working with young people, specifically racially minoritized youth, has inspired the work that she does.

> Well, I want them to see themselves through their own eyes, but their eyes have to be replenished. Their eyes need tools with which to see… I was used to working in poor environments, in limited environments on slim budgets and all that so I was used to what I call "the witchcraft of the poor:" making something from nothing. So, we painted the room together and I had images on the wall of all Latino artists, Black artists; people who reflected them. And I used to have elders come. (Magdalena)

In her attempts to create *creative chaos* or as she defined it, "If you have a safe structure and you know it's safe to play then go in there and dance or make up a song or write a poem." Magdalena has cultivated a culture of "collaboration over competition" (Magdalena). Magdalena stressed the importance of preserving these stories and experiences, or what she calls *archival resistance*. Every open mic is recorded and stored in a database at the University of Connecticut to ensure that future generations will know the work that we were committed to as a community. This culture has made generations of young people gravitate towards Magdalena, even to this day.

Shifting Generations

Researcher positionality is significant in this study as expressed in the beginning of this chapter. As a measure of praxis and being critical of the self in the study, this autoethnopoem is included as a reflective work of embodied arts that was written and edited periodically throughout the study.

When I walk through these halls
That were once an elementary school
Next to the information desk, I see oil paintings hanging
Adorned in heavy frames; majestic
The men in those pictures don't look like me
Class after class reading, studying, learning
I thought about my mother
My first vision of God
My grandmother
The center of my family
My great grandmothers
My living ancestors
And then I was reminded of who I was
If I was to do the same work as those men
Frozen, immortalized in their privilege
This thing they call research
Then it would be different
Invitation only, an earned trust
Finding a space where I can be my true self
Was like finding that perfect stoop to chill and talk
The Founder was pure magic
I poured myself into this mentor, this juggernaut
Who called me revolutionary when I felt like an imposter
Who showed me the way of radicalism
For two years I followed until permission was granted
Until I earned my place and even then, I felt like I was stealing
Stealing something special from a community I grew to love
So I walked across quick sand trying not to sink
Knowing that every step could be my downfall
So I remembered my partner, my wife
Who moved away from her dreams to allow me to follow mine
I remembered my little one, my bubba
Who traveled with me through those halls with the pictures
Through this space that I love
I remembered the flags hanging over the clothesline
In front of my grandparents home in the Bronx
And then they found me
These three powerful artists
Glowing, prolific, fierce, quiet, lively
Puerto Rican and from the hood, just like me
Volunteering to share those secrets that they wouldn't share

Even with their own families
Even with their own friends
They shared it with me and I will never be able to reciprocate
Their vulnerability
Like a descendent who can never thank their ancestors
No amount of recommendations
No amount of advice
No amount of connections
Will ever equal the gravity of their stories
The sincerity of their labor
Sharing a story of a man bursting through your door
You said he was 6'2"; I'm 6'3"
You said he had a skin tone like mine
You told your story to me, the one who reflected the monster
You told me your story of losing your great grandmother
Cried in a corner when I shared a poem about mine
You loved yours and wore her pink sweater
I loved mine and slept in her bed
You shared a story about being raised by your mother
This story was familiar, I knew it well
It was always me and my mother
Just like it was always you and yours
Even without me they connected
Sleepovers, late night conversations, tears on pillows
Endless laughter and joy
Strangers turned trusted friends
And the bond only grew
I saw your wisdom
That intelligence born out of pain
I saw your power
That strength in refusing to live as a victim
Thriving as you survive the day to day
You never saw yourselves as broken
But you never denied the hurt
Even when you were numb
I was not needed, but you wanted me there
It was through your eyes that I saw the value
Of pursuing this milestone
You reminded me that I was a good parent
You made me believe I was a scholar
Doing research alongside and with

Rather than by and for
You listened to my trauma
Listened to my poetry
And even though I claimed reciprocity
You just wanted to hear my work
Treating me like how I imagined
I would treat Audre Lorde or Saul Williams
Our souls grew as we confronted our demons
Now when I walk through these halls
I remember each of you
And smile

Summary

This chapter details the three major findings that emerged from this study. The order of the findings was based on the frequency by which participants discussed or described the topic. Permeating throughout the study is an intergenerational energy best described through the work that this research project happened to blossom out of. Also included is an interview with Magdalena Gomez, who founded the organization that included the monthly open mic, which became our site. The last component is an autoethnopoem, which serves as an act of praxis in which the researcher's positionality is examined and reflected upon.

The first finding focused on participants' description of spoken word, both writing and performing, as form of therapy, which they used for processing trauma rooted in cultural practices that are meaningful to them. All participants spoke to this finding, explaining that they are financially unable to afford therapy, so spoken word provides a space to vent, process, and reflect. The value of spoken word in allowing participants to generate a dialogue around traumatic experiences that they have not shared with anyone. The group provided them an extra dimension of support that they were able to sustain on their own.

The second finding centered participants revelation that poetry (by way of the open mic) functioned as a space where they can talk and connect with others about topics that they are normally silent about. They also spoke to a culture of silence within their communities and homes that leads to self-surveillance whereby they chose not to speak on traumatic experiences out of fear of not being heard or believed. They express the value of poetry in providing anonymity and community who may or may not have shared in similar experiences. The level of connection is important to the ways in which they can cultivate a sense of belonging with peers in regard to their traumatic experiences.

The third finding highlights the participants discussing the heightened feeling of vulnerability that comes with performing their work that is directly tied to trauma. Participants expressed that as queer, cisgender, Puerto Rican women, they are even more susceptible to ridicule by their families and community. Each participant described a certain fear of performing and feeling relieved following the performance, although these reactions can change based on how the audience receives their performance.

Also included in this chapter is an interview with Magdalena Gomez who founded and facilitates the site of our research project. As a legendary poet, her use of intergenerational partnerships to curate youth-centered spaces and mentor youth-lead arts-based groups served as a foundational model for my project. The concept of commitment-phobia helps to understand the fear that is described by participants and why adults need to stop underestimating the genius of young people. The work that Magdalena has and continues to do is a testament to the longevity, sustainability, and power of this work.

The final section is an autoethnopoem that I wrote as an act of praxis in this study. The poem addresses the researcher's positionality with regards to the research project itself and the topic being studied. It was through this autoethnopoem that I was able to develop a deeper understanding of where I fit in this study. Magdalena's interview and the autoethnopoem provide additional context to further the intersectional connections that existed within the study and continues to live on through periodic check ins.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

"It's not your story—it's not your voice that needs to be heard, it's ours"

<u>Introduction</u>

The purpose of this study was to explore the complex relationship among trauma,

the lived realities of racially minoritized youth, and the performance of embodied arts. In

the first chapter, I mentioned that it was not my intention to look into the wounds of

participants or listen to their pain stories but rather to explore the various forms of

wisdom and power that exist in racially minoritized youth who live with and through

trauma. There were three major findings that emerged from the study and these findings

were:

> 1. All participants regarded spoken word, both writing and performing, as a form
> of therapy for processing trauma rooted in cultural practices that are meaningful
> to them.
>
> 2. All participants described poetry as a space where they can talk and connect
> with others about topics that they are normally silent about or have no one to talk
> to because of the culture of silence around trauma that exists within their family
> and communities.
>
> 3. All participants expressed a heightened feeling of vulnerability when
> performing pieces directly tied to trauma.

These findings reveal several gaps when it comes to racially minoritized youth and the

supports needed to address the trauma that they live with and live through. For example,

Finding #1 illustrates the adaptive, innovative, and improvisational ways in which

participants took control of their own healing when they could not afford therapy. The

economic gap to afford professional and medical interventions highlights an ongoing

issue in urbanized, working class communities (Kominski, et. al., 2017). Finding #2

provides insight into the lack of youth-centered and youth-driven spaces that champions participants' voices and lived realities. Youth-driven spaces also disrupt the culture of silence around trauma by providing a platform for participants to speak their truth in ways that are meaningful to them. Finding #3 illuminates the sense of vulnerability that participants feel while sharing sensitive experiences through embodied arts. Participants described being raised to be "soldiers" and showing no signs of weakness when it comes to their trauma, which normalizes the violence, the pain, and the suffering.

This chapter serves as a discussion of the findings from the previous chapter. The first section delves into a discussion of how the trauma that participants live with and through reflects hauntings, conjuring, and ghost stories. The section to follow discusses collective surviving and healing within the practice of racial storytelling. In the subsequent section, I discuss the nuances of power and wisdom that are rooted in how participants find ways to thrive amid overwhelmingly traumatic lived realities. The next section centers on intergenerational partnerships and the significance of raising a daughter as a parent-scholar, while doing trauma research as I learned from powerful women as a means of healing intergenerational trauma. In closing out the chapter, there is a section to discuss the applications of this research with different groups as well as the significance of this research given all the sociopolitical and sociocultural shifts caused by the events of 2020. The last section focuses on suggestions for further trauma research from a raciocultural lens, with specific emphasis on the need for culturally sustaining/responsive trauma-informed pedagogies in schools.

Hauntings and Conjuring Ghost Stories

Lani, Meech, and D-Nice each processed their trauma in multifaceted ways, but a common ground among them came in the form of the stage, notebooks, and sketchbooks. These media provided a pathway toward healing their trauma by giving Lani, Meech, and D-Nice some form of control over their memories. These memories were often the subject of our conversations during the interviews as well as the foundation for many works of embodied arts. The memories that became the poems, performances, paintings, and photographs were created in the wake of those turbulent moments that participants lived through and continue to live through beyond the event. It is the memories that haunt them and remind them of the moment of terror forcing them to relive the horror, the fear, the confusion that came with the trauma. It is also the memories that prove the trauma happened—that the evil to cause harm exists and is closer than expected. All the sensory details, the emotional rupture, the spiritual maiming, the absence of control is what haunts—cajoling them abruptly through memory flashes at the worst and most random moments. Perry and Szalavitz (2017) expands upon this phenomenon saying, "For an earthquake survivor who was brushing her teeth when the house collapsed around her, simply seeing a toothbrush might be enough to provoke a full-fledged fear response" (p. 47). It can be a sound or a look or brushing up against someone accidentally that can trigger those memories to rise to the surface and influence behaviors, choices, and relationships. Meech even described a moment when I touched her shoulder during one of our interviews and how she was unexpectedly triggered. She did not think of my touch as malicious, but it triggered her, nonetheless.

What characterizes the haunting—the most visceral parts—is what participants imbue into their embodied arts and through their performance they connect these experiences to larger audiences. What haunts them becomes a collective burden in the performance of embodied arts that is no longer carried in isolation. The embodied arts of the participants function as ghost stories that work toward creating *counter-memories* for the future (Gordon, 2008)—their futures and the futures of others. Performing embodied arts provides Meech, Lani, and D-Nice alternative possibilities and radical imaginings of a liberated and happy future. Lani, Meech, and D-Nice willingly chose to share these vulnerable parts of themselves, to conjure ghost stories for their own healing and to model a framework for healing that resonates for someone in the audience. The counter-memories seek to counter the culture of silencing that exists in racially minoritized communities when it comes to discussing trauma while countering the narrative that they are weak, victimized, and helpless as traumatized Puerto Rican, biracial, and multiracial cisgender and queer women.

The issues of believability are disrupted in the conjuring of ghost stories because as Meech, D-Nice, and Lani share their embodied arts with their community, they come to find that they are not alone. Although they continue to struggle with issues of believability when it comes to their family, each of the participants have expressed the sense of belonging that they feel in the open mic community. The responses and reactions that each of them received from the audience after their performances reassured them that there were people who believe their suffering and traumatization, which gives participants hope. As they hope more, they fear less. Lani described how devastating and confusing it was to see her parents suffer from mental health issues only to disregard her

when she opened up to them regarding her own mental health issues. Lani also described how certain stories that she shared with the research group during the study was not shared with her parents or anyone else. When you feel that someone believes you, the levels of trust can supersede lifelong bonds. Moreover, when you feel that someone believes you, understands you, and shares in some of your most vulnerable experiences, the relationship that is cultivated can change you in unpredictable ways. The terrifying nature of living with and through trauma is slowly broken down as they recognize that this fight is a collective one.

Racial Storytelling and Collective Healing

L!t provided a youth-centered and youth-driven space where D-Nice, Lani, and Meech could participate in the practice of racial storytelling through the performance of embodied arts. Open mic spaces can often be co-opted, and Lani, Meech, and D-Nice each expressed the unique nature of L!t that they did not find at any other open mic they participated in. This is what brought them back each month, but it was also what gave them confidence to share those vulnerable parts of themselves to an audience of familiar faces and strangers. Racial storytelling focuses on engaging racial encounters from the past to see how they situate themselves in our present moment and continue to haunt us (Johnson, 2017). Unitl they discovered the L!t space, Lani's, Meech's, and D-Nice's memories remained hidden, their experiences were silenced, but with racial storytelling, in the form of embodied arts, they were able to bring those memories to a community that they chose. More importantly, racial storytelling illuminated the vulnerabilities of participants—all those feelings and emotions that we are taught to hide and bury deep in ourselves becomes a pathway toward healing. Race cannot be separated from their

experiences, and therefore, each story that was shared, no matter how small or deep or vulnerable, was a practice in racial storytelling. The stories that they shared centered their experiences and not necessarily to counter whiteness or machismo, but for their own sake.

Racial storytelling provided the avenue to share, and as D-Nice, Meech, and Lani shared more, they began a process of collective healing that engulfed the entire L!t space. Coming together seemed to change the dynamics of the processing of their trauma. Based on my interactions with them it seemed they needed "the opportunity to process" their trauma "at their own pace and in their own ways (Perry & Szalavitz, 2017, p. 76). Coming together seemed to change the dynamics of the processing of their trauma. Lani, Meech, and D-Nice did not know each other personally prior to the study apart from Lani and D-Nice being aware of Meech's "October Event." There had not been any contact between them. Despite any prior connection, the relationship that evolved between Lani, Meech, and D-Nice was organic and seamless, starting with a text group and moving up to sleep overs and friendships that have lasted beyond the time of the study itself. Their relationships functioned as different levels of support for each of them. From the beginning, Lani was extremely shy, and each time we analyzed one of her performances, she would start with a negative critique, while Meech and D-Nice would instantly build Lani up, saying how much they loved her performance. This pattern existed for Meech and D-Nice as well where they would only say negative comments about their performance, only to be showered with love and encouragement. What was scheduled for one-hour sessions would often turn into three-hour sessions. Despite my efforts to minimize their need to travel, Lani, who came from 40 minutes away, would offer rides if

needed and D-Nice would also offer rides if needed. Even as they were newly

traumatized, they consistently showed up for each other and illustrated the power of

collective healing.

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The Powerful, The Wise, The Traumatized

</div>

Through all their trauma Meech, Lani, and D-Nice consistently found ways to

thrive, to smile, to find joy in life. The knowledge that generated from the lived realities

presented itself in the moves that they made to ensure their financial, emotional, spiritual,

and mental security. They leaned on each other as resources from helping each other find

work to staying up for late night talks, which was not a goal of the study, but was a

naturally occurring phenomenon during the study. They shared their wisdom with each

other, inspired each other to keep moving forward and building toward a future of their

own design. Meech was able to find her own apartment and is now working in the same

school where she was traumatized during her "October Event." Lani was also able to get

her own place and started working with youth who are traumatized and going through

mental health issues in her local community. D-Nice started consistently working and has

been saving her money in an attempt to get more independence from her mother. These

were all happening while they were sharing their trauma during our interviews.

There is also power in vulnerability and the ways in which D-Nice, Meech, and

Lani made themselves vulnerable through their embodied arts. From the beginning, they

trusted me with sensitive and vulnerable parts of their lived realities that they seldom

shared with others. The permission that they willingly gave me to enter the most intimate

parts of their lives was one of the most powerful gestures I have ever encountered. This

power was compounded as they shared those vulnerable parts of themselves with the L!t

audience during the monthly open mic. The power of inspiration was visible in the way

the audience would respond during and after the performances. Audience members would

often engage Meech, Lani, and D-Nice after their performances, which was something

that I encouraged the audience to do for all performers whenever I hosted. When Meech

performed *18,* the audience gave her a standing ovation, and during the intermission, she

was approached by many members of the audience. Even when Lani performed *Florence*

and did not get the response that she wanted, there was power in the risk. The moment

was powerful because her performance was a spiritual one, but the spiritual energy in the

L!t space was off, according to Meech and D-Nice. There was also the night that D-Nice

performed her poem for her Mima, and a member of the audience talked to her at the end

of the night, saying how they resonated with the poem. Lani, Meech, and D-Nice

systematically shifted trauma into triumph in the most incredible ways even when it felt

impossible.

From Generation to Generation

Bringing my little one, Amaya, to the interviews, the open mics, and even classes

was both a delight and a challenge. Challenging generational curses and disrupting

intergenerational trauma is exhausting but fulfilling work. While listening to the

interviews, I caught myself smiling while listening to Amaya coo in the background. I

also caught myself embarrassed when I would hear myself get frustrated because Amaya

was fussy. Listening to stories from Lani, Meech, and D-Nice while holding Amaya, I

could not help but think of Amaya's future and the world that she was born into and

would have to grow up in. During the interviews and at L!t, I was listening and

participating as a researcher, a Puerto Rican, a cisgender man, and a poet, but it was in

117

my capacity as the father of a baby girl that I listened the hardest, hoping to learn how to protect Amaya; feeling helpless. Surrounded by powerful women from different generations taught me that there is continuity in the oppression of BIPOC women and one of the most powerful ways to disrupt the perpetuation of this gender, class, and racial violence lies in the intergenerational partnerships that elicit complex forms of knowledge production and meaning making rooted in challenging historical power structures.

Lani, Meech, D-Nice, and myself all revered Magdalena even before the study. Magdalena impacted each of us separately, so when we came together, it generated a love for Magdalena and the work that she did for the community that motivated us to participate in fundraisers for L!t and a youth collective to manage the open mic. Hearing stories of Magdalena needing bodyguards during performances because being assassinated was a real threat only deepened our respect for her, but it also reflected how she was trying to shift intergenerational trauma. Magdalena pours herself into L!t and models how to make magic from thin air. Even with her history of living with and through raciocultural trauma as well as physical trauma in the form of a brain injury, Magdalena shines as a beacon of resistance. She has resisted white supremacy, sexism, rape culture, and machismo across the years watching them evolve and developing instruments and knowledge to fight back. Some of the challenges that we faced together were our crucible that tested the integrity of the work we were doing in the community. It was Magdalena who taught us how to better understand our power and wisdom and apply it as transformative community action.

Applications

COVID-19 caught the whole world off guard, leading to a quarantine that exposed inequities in our system that for many of us is an inescapable and historical reality. Kendi (2020) has collected racial data during the pandemic that suggests BIPOC people are dying at 4.4 times the rate of white people and has revealed that "COVID-19 is affecting Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other people of color the most" (The COVID-19 Tracking Project, 2021, para. 1). These revelations speak to one of many possible applications for raciocultural trauma research. Understanding the collective impact of COVID for BIPOC communities and creating spaces where those who are affected can practice racial storytelling and collectively heal may render powerful ways to address their trauma. Like the study, as folks come together and allow themselves to be vulnerable connections will be made and relationships cultivated toward a future where the community thrives amid a global crisis.

With restaurants, places of business, and schools shutting down, the levels of uncertainty and fear were staggering. Working as a teacher during this time has been a frustrating experience. We went remote in March 2020 and have been ever since but in that time, there are students who we have not heard from who are still being marked absent. Students who do not have the resources to succeed in a virtual environment are being penalized because they are missing assignments—all while relatives and friends are getting sick and dying, losing their jobs, and still going through the same struggles that existed before the pandemic. Social workers are opening cases with child services for truant students without understanding the full extent of the family's situation. Because I teach high school, many of the students are still being pressured to perform to progress,

to gain access to college, and to keep the school funded and functioning. No one has brought up the trauma they are living through in this unprecedented historical moment, and the lack of trauma-informed pedagogy is another application for raciocultural trauma research. Each of my students identifies as BIPOC, and I have personally witnessed the lack of opportunity to voice their opinions about how they feel. They are forced to comply with expectations that police their bodies in their homes over Zoom. Expectations that include being in uniform, not laying down or eating, and requiring cameras on or being kicked out of the class. As the teacher for a social justice class, I am often conflicted on how to support and advocate for my students without jeopardizing my job. An increase in trauma-informed pedagogies and school-wide practices could address many of these issues in ways that give students and teachers the support they need and deserve in this time of crisis.

One thing that did not stop during the pandemic was police violence, and the movement that swept the nation and the world continues to gain momentum. The protests revealed the need to abolish police and eradicate racism, but they also revealed the need to collectively heal our intergenerational trauma. The first protest I participated in was in the Bronx, and what started out as a peaceful protest was transformed into a night of terror as police used a technique called "kettling" to trap us, beat us, and pepper spray us. I can still hear the screams for help with the ones who we are supposed to call for help surrounding us. The second protest that I participated in was in Staten Island and was with the children and family of Eric Garner. We marched to the precinct that employed Detective Daniel Pantaleo, and I held my fist up as Eric Garner's family yelled at the police officers guarding the precinct, some of whom were working there the day Eric

Garner's life was choked from him for selling loose cigarettes. The third protest I

marched in was the largest and took place on the same day that the Puerto Rican Day

Parade was scheduled. The sea of people that converged on 125th street and Adam

Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard and marched to the 1st Spanish United Methodist Church

on 111th street and Lexington Avenue was awe-inspiring.

The protests show the power of the collective and how our bodies in motion can

shift politics and power structures. Music was used in all of the protests as well as call

and response, which are features of L!t and other open mic spaces. These tools were used

to unite the protesters with sound and words in rhythm with the stomps, claps, and beats

that echoed off the projects and tenements we marched through. During the protest in

Staten Island, the youth led the way showing folks from all generations that they can be

trusted with the responsibility to act. The energy in the protests felt identical to the energy

of sitting with Lani, Meech, and D-Nice analyzing our performances and sharing stories

or being at L!t on those distinctly memorable nights. Through the study and these

experiences, I learned that intergenerational trauma requires intergenerational

partnerships to heal.

A Talk to Teachers

In 1963, James Baldwin opened his article *A Talk to Teachers* saying, "Let's

begin by saying that we are living through a very dangerous time" (p. 7). In this current

era of education, the same sentiments still stand. Teachers have shown their significance

in these COVID times being labeled as essential workers through the pandemic alongside

doctors, nurses, and other essential workers. Like the culture of silence that exists in

racially minoritized communities, there is a culture of silence in the classroom. Teachers

in all subject areas are given opportunities to listen to stories, but the administrative demands of the school often hinder our ability to truly impact the lives of students. Our assignments must permit students the flexibility to share their stories in ways that are meaningful to them so that teachers can model the type of humanity needed to heal the trauma our students live with and live through. Racially minoritized youth are haunted by these traumas even in schools, and we see these hauntings when students struggle to complete assignments or are constantly distracted during instruction. Perry & Szalavitz (2017) furthers this argument saying, "In a classroom setting, unfortunately, both dissociation and hyperarousal responses look remarkably like attention deficit disorder, hyperactivity, or oppositional-defiant disorder" (p. 51-52). Students have expressed experiencing the death of a family member or friend and some have expressed the hardships they face at home and are then expected to complete work, get good grades, and follow the rules. And it should be stated that, "While not all ADD, hyperactivity, and oppositional defiant-disorder are trauma-related, it is likely that the symptoms that lead to these diagnoses are trauma-related more often than anyone has begun to suspect" (2017, p. 52). Their worlds have been shattered, and they are forced to perform normalcy to appease the structures around them and wallow in their discomforting loneliness. The burden that they carry in isolation and the way it informs their academic success must be investigated. We as teachers have a unique opportunity to support students in questioning the societal and structural problems that directly impact their lives. And it is, "the obligation of anyone who thinks himself as responsible is to examine society and try to change it and to fight it—at no matter what risk" (p. 7). We must be committed to authentically caring for the socioemotional well-being of our students especially at this

critical juncture in education. Regular check-ins and reflective journals are useful tools to dissipate the various issues that exist in the lived realities of students. We may not be able to solve the problem, but through trauma-informed pedagogies that center the needs and lived realities of our students, we can begin to push practices that can truly shift education and impact the lives of our students in unimaginable ways.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study was never meant to serve as an end-all-be-all to trauma research, but there are limitless opportunities to conduct research on raciocultural trauma and embodied arts. One suggestion for further research is to consider different populations. The Trump Era has become a haven for the traumatization of vulnerable populations. Immigrants are one of the most vulnerable populations that have been uniquely targeted by the Trump administration, forcing human beings into cages and separating children from their parents. Conducting research on raciocultural trauma in this population would not only develop its conceptualization but also possibly provide a pathway of healing for one of the least supported communities in the United States of America.

Another suggestion for further research is to investigate a larger sample. Although this study was small, it served the needs of the participants and provided an intimate and unique setting for powerful revelations and systems of support. A larger population could render different findings that can produce more applications for this type of research.

A final suggestion for further research is to explore the possibilities of embodied arts and youth-centered arts-based spaces in addressing the trauma of racially minoritized youth. The focus of the study was on spoken word poetry; however, Lani and Meech also painted and D-Nice was a photographer, and they spoke to these embodied arts in similar

123

ways to performing and writing poetry, and they also discussed how the art forms served them differently. Exploring these other art forms in relation to healing raciocultural trauma might develop more robust and specific intervention and support methods to secure our future and break the culture silence around raciocultural trauma.

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