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CHANGING THE WAY WE SEE OURSELVES IN THE WORLD

Changing the Way We See Ourselves in the World:
Critical Youth Participatory Action Research Investigating Intergenerational
Trauma and Macro-Cultural Influences with Adolescent Girls

A Dissertation

submitted by

RAJA SINJAB

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

LESLEY UNIVERSITY
January 2023

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**Dissertation Final Approval Form
Division of Counseling and Psychology
Lesley University**

This dissertation, titled:

Changing the way we see ourselves in the world: Critical youth participatory action research investigating intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural influences in adolescent girls

as submitted for final approval by Raja Sinjab under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the Counseling and Psychology Division and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Degree at Lesley University.

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I want to acknowledge the brave co-researchers for sharing their life stories with me in order to try and better the world together. I want to acknowledge so many surrogate parents, supervisors, and present-day Elders that have mentored me along the way to nurture and navigate my soul's experiences. To all the friends that have drifted through the chapters of my life to be on this journey with me and provide a sense of comfort that I am not here doing this alone. I want to acknowledge a higher presence that has continued to present people, opportunities, and circumstances that align with a purposeful calling that guides my life.

Thank you

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my Syrian grandfather who was forced to leave his family for two years at a time to work laying the masonry stone foundation around the holy Ka'ba in Mecca so people could walk their pilgrimage and to my Syrian grandmother who waited for his return each time while raising 10 children by herself on a farm in the midst of poverty. I want to acknowledge the hardships of my immigrant father who fled from a war-torn country to raise his children in a safe place and has molded my philosophical mind to makes it capable of achieving this accomplishment.

I also dedicate this work to my Portuguese adopted grandfather who worked hard to raise a family of four while battling with his own feelings of not belonging and to my Portuguese grandmother who endured his emotional aloofness all while trying to be a loving caretaker to their four daughters. I want to acknowledge my mother who taught me that steadfast work and perseverance pays off and who continues to support my dreams.

I dedicate this piece of work to my Syrian and Portuguese ancestors that have gone through the pain of not knowing what was wrong with them and to the ones who have suffered and continue to suffer in Syria without having an option for a better life. I dedicate my life's work to ending the cycles of trauma that infect our bodies, minds, cultures, and souls with a hope of a cleansed world where we can love and exist.

ABSTRACT

This study explores the social-ecological experience of human development in adolescent girls in attempts to better understand what young people may need. Five adolescent girls participated in a three-month long critical youth participatory action research study utilizing a photovoice method to investigate environmental messages that impact their identity. Specific themes of intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural influences were identified through a co-generated data analysis process, which contributed to a community action plan. The data generated with the co-researchers provided thematic information for the researcher to apply in a critical discussion exploring the influence of social power structures on families and youth. A Social-Ecological Model of Development in Young People was designed to illustrate the environmental influences that impact mental health in young people. Sociological multi-tiered interventions were also provided as recommendations to support de-pathologizing children and adolescents within the psychology and mental health counseling fields.

Keywords: Adolescent girls, intergenerational trauma, historical trauma, macro-cultural influences, critical theory, holistic, phenomenological, critical youth participatory action research, photovoice method, liberation psychology, de-pathologizing youth, corporate capitalism, attachment theory, social-ecological models

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

At some point in my childhood, I knew that the conditions of my environment were not healthy but I had no power or authority to do anything about them. Understanding myself and how to handle life unfolded as I went through different stages of my educational career. Discovering things about myself has helped immensely in understanding how to work with people. My personal journey has led to a professional venture of trying to understand how other young people may experience the world. This investigative process has led to a multi-faceted critical exploration of how the relationship to societal standards and family environment can affect a young person's development. Understanding these dynamics could potentially lead to better supports and resources that align with what young people and their families may need in the community.

The powerlessness that children experience is a cultural condition where they are known as *pre-people* (Call-Cummings, 2019, p. 174). This concept describes the assumption that young people do not have the ability to actually think for themselves and need authority figures to tell them what they need. Through this conditioning process a child's autonomy and sense of power is undermined in the world (Jung, 1933) and this places them in a position of helplessness (Cromer, 2018). The Western-American¹ world has molded systems that emphasize high standards for children to be their *best self* which can pre-determine how their identity forms (Farr et al., 2016). One system in particular is the educational system that prepares young minds for a

¹ The term Western-American is utilized to capture United States and Western European culture, which in the literature is generalized to be an individualistic society valuing independent thought, equality and autonomy; rather than societies based on group harmony and hierarchy (Ashbourne & Baoaid, 2019; Kim & Matthews, 2014; Yousaf et al., 2022). However, it is important to note that there is a continuum within each society.

work-force mentality. Expectations placed on children at a young age by family beliefs and social pressures can manifest into low self-esteem and mental health symptomology (Arnold, 2017). The relationship between people and their environment is in constant mutable communication, with many individuals internalizing the oppressive structures without questioning the social systems that create them (Subedi, 2020). The predetermined set of rules that go along with these ideologies can be confusing when young people are figuring out who they want to be (Erikson, 1994).

Youth, and in particular, Black, Indigenous² and people of color (BIPOC) marginalized youth, are generally objectified with silenced voices (Crenshaw, 1991; Harrison, 2017). Crenshaw (1991) describes this tokenistic way of oppression with examples of “allies” (p. 1262) that may be contributing to the disempowerment of BIPOC voices. By othering marginalized people and inferring they need help, the message is that they are helpless. These systemic messages can be internalized into societal norms. The internalized oppression can affect families and individuals, contributing to mental health symptoms that reinforce roles of helplessness, and ultimately continue the trajectory of the oppressive culture. Critically understanding this intersectional convergence allows for the deconstruction and a re-negotiation of normalized white patriarchal systems. The environmental messages of disempowerment have historically been overlooked within the field of psychology (Brown 2021) and have more recently been explored in positive youth development (Arnold, 2017). Investigating how family and societal narratives shape and form young people could provide information for initiatives that could lead

² The term Indigenous is defined in this study as “the original inhabitants of a place and generally have traditional cultures and ways of life that were closely tied to local ecology” (Gone & Kirmayer, 2020, p. 236). These local traditions also involve notions of “cosmology, ceremony, and the sacred” (p. 239) which have been colonized by different cultures throughout the world.

to altering the course of their lives, potentially mitigating future suffering. Understanding how the social-ecological dynamics can impact young peoples' emotions can begin the process of integrating *praxis*, (1970) critical thinking and action, as a trajectory of change.

From my experience as a clinical practitioner, I have noticed the oppressive sociocultural systems can influence symptomology, including depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, suicidality, substance use, self-harm, high distractibility and immense inner confusion (Arnold, 2017; Cromer, 2018). The child becomes sick, when in reality these symptoms are an example of the child's internal struggle grappling with a *sick society* (Kellermann, 2007). I am now at the point where I am able to do something about this dissonance for not only my young self, but for young people in general. The progressive passion I feel is fueling the desire to fulfill this dissertation study, empowering young girls to explore and become critically conscious of the messages that are placed on them from their outer world. The following sections will outline the research problems, my positionality, and overview of the remaining chapters. Details will be provided on topics within the literature examined to further understand adolescent girls and their relation to power.

Research Problem

Through family and society, people are given distinct identities (Farr et al., 2016) that categorize who they are and the expectations they need to fulfill. Individuals inevitably take on assumed identities that are given to them from their families, community, and/or societal structures. This process of understanding the human experience is fully viewing the reciprocal relationship dynamics of an individual and their environment (Matsueda, 1992). A South African expression beautifully narrates this interdependence between self and environment: "Greetings. I see you. I am here. Until you see me, I do not exist. When you see me, you bring me into

existence” (Schrader, 2007, p. 276). Understanding someone as a human being living within their world is needed to capture what is actually happening to them rather than the traditional way of focusing on symptoms in the mental health field (Maté, 2022).

Labeling human experiences as mental health disorders has become a barrier to understanding the multi-layered factors that affect a person and places the individual as the sole problem. I have many young teenagers that are referred to my practice by primary care doctors or psychiatrists that want me to teach them DBT skills as a form of correcting their borderline personality disorder traits, as if their emotional lability during puberty is not supposed to be occurring. The process of diagnosing a person with a mental disorder rather than examining the environment that is producing the stress to promote the disorder is ultimately reinforcing the idea the individual is at fault. This reinforces the power structures to maintain the status quo without any societal accountability or change.

The assumed power adults have over children within Western-American society is a product of accepted and normalized hierarchical relationships (Call-Cummings, 2019). The influence adults and societal structures have on young people impact how the latter see themselves in the world (Maté, 2022). For example, this can come in the form of an adult labeling a young person as a “troublemaker,” where the youth eventually sees themselves as being troubled and embodies this reflection further through their behavior and life choices. It can also come from broader systems within society inherited in the form of social class, race, gender, and more (2022). Whether it is through social media, television, signposts, or symbols (Orlowski, 2019), there are constant messages supporting white heteropatriarchal power structures that create assumed identity roles for young people.

The message the “troublemaker” child is receiving is that there is something wrong with them, which ultimately pathologizes their identity. The drive of this research study is towards the larger picture of pathology in the mental health field by dismantling the idea that *the person is the sick one*. The study will examine the person-environment relationship more closely to further understand what is needed to intercept messages of inherited expectations. My interest in this study is to focus on youth having voices in the community to empower themselves as an important aspect to intervene with mental health issues earlier rather than waiting for a later crisis. Societal action could potentially be taken earlier to nurture young people’s experience. Understanding how youth view themselves, others, and the world is part of the dismantling process by basing the need to reexamine power structures that create the disorders, *the societal sickness* (Kellermann, 2007). A deeper investigation is needed to understand what youth are actually experiencing. I am attempting to disrupt common discourse that assumes children do not have an understanding of what they need by centering their voices and perspectives as expert knowledge regarding their experience. There are two overarching terms that facilitated the further understanding, intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural influences which will be described below as defined terms within the research purpose.

Intergenerational Trauma

“*Ka mo’opuna i ke alo*” is translated as “the grandchild in the presence” (Conching & Thayer, 2019, p. 74) and refers to the Hawaiian proverb that describes “the importance of being conscious of how one generation impacts future generations” (p. 74). The importance of family history has become increasingly more relevant in the mental health field. Recent research has explored the idea of how events within family history have affected present day symptomology.

The term *intergenerational trauma* is one of the ways the literature is beginning to describe the interconnection of family trauma. Isobel et al. (2019) described the term as follows:

The process by which elements of parental traumatic experiences are passed on to the children of the next generation. It is debated whether the trauma that is transmitted is a replication of a parent's trauma, a response to familial trauma or a predisposition or susceptibility to further trauma but may manifest as a unique entity in the offspring. (p. 552)

The definition of *intergenerational trauma* is linked in the literature with *transgenerational trauma* (Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2008) and *ancestral trauma* (Hubl, 2020) as varying ways of expressing the same concept. During an interview of the Collective Trauma Summit 2022, Tamala Floyd (2022) discusses with Thomas Hubl and Richard Schwartz the idea of *legacy burdens*, or the passing down of ancestral wounds to the next generation, which is also interchangeable with the terms, describing the suffering many people experience from the unhealed experiences of their families.

The concept of intergenerational trauma became popular in the field when Ley-Wiesel (2007) conducted a qualitative study on Holocaust survivors, interviewing three generations and seeing a pattern of trauma behaviors through each generation despite only the first having been exposed to the initial traumatic incident (Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2008; Maffini & Pham, 2016). Grandchildren of the Holocaust survivors had evidence of posttraumatic symptoms without having experienced a direct trauma. The relationship between caregivers and children formed a distinct attachment pattern, which ultimately modeled the unconscious trauma.

Examples of intergenerational trauma can be seen as a form of emotional aloofness, withdrawn

behavioral patterns, low motivation, somatization high distractibility, hyperactive responses to loud stimuli, and anxious or avoidant attachment to others (Maffini & Pham, 2016).

The presentation of intergenerational trauma in children and adolescents can often be seen as pathological symptoms of depression and anxiety (Mitchell, 2018), “when the pain of generational trauma rises up in the second- or third -generation recipient, the response can seem extremely disproportionate to the experience at hand”(p. 55). The issue with intergenerational trauma is the passing down of behaviors, thoughts and beliefs that perpetuate unhealthy dynamics (Jiang et al., 2019). Young people may not know the effect of their environment and the messages may continue in children unless a level of awareness occurs to do something different. Often times, people unknowingly operate from distorted beliefs and contribute to the same state of being that created their unhappiness. The inherited trauma can be subtle at first glance; however, the individual that did not experience the trauma becomes very confused and asks, “Why am I so anxious?” Without a definitive reason, the individual may begin to feel a sense of unexplained unworthiness or dysfunction, creating a sense of deeper distorted beliefs about themselves, which may potentially lead to mental health issues.

The intergenerational research began to uncover how these inherited traits came to existence, providing answers and relief for the clinical world (Maffini & Pham, 2016). Notably, researchers also began to acknowledge relational patterns being passed down through family members cross-culturally (Ungar et al., 2012). Intergenerational trauma is captured by two main theories that explain the nature vs. nurture debate—neuroscience and attachment theory. This will be explored in detail within the literature review. Intergenerational trauma was an overarching term that was investigated within the adolescent girls’ experience in order to understand how the messages received from their current home environment may have been

impacted by family trauma and are now currently creating the behaviors, thoughts and beliefs about themselves and potentially prompt mental health issues.

Macro-Cultural Influences

The second key concept to be defined is macro-cultural influences, which in the literature is described as macro-cultural factors (Ratner, 2009). *Macro-cultural factors*³ are described as institutional power relations (government, corporations, educational and health care systems, family structure, religious organizations); artifacts (technology, art, buildings, clothing); and cultural concepts (about time, sex, children, privacy, private property, a fetus) (Guitart & Ratner, 2013), and the interactions extended from those social institutions (Orlowski, 2019). These institutions within society create systems of operating and expectations of how to work within those systems in order to stay in them. Macro-cultural influences can create societal expectations within the local community, on a national scale, and through the international media. The institutional and societal hegemonies are also influenced by race, gender, and class expectations (Orlowski, 2019) including white supremacy, gender inequalities, and capitalism. Through all these societal paradigms, there are relationships between these structures that overlap and create multi-layered issues. All of these paradigms, however, perpetuate an expectation of how society should be behaving.

Social consequences often occur when the normalized social expectations are not met. The normalized expectations should also be considered through time. The shaping of these macro-cultural systems within history has also been influenced by *historical trauma* (Cromer,

³ Macro-cultural factors is the term within the literature, and there has been literature utilizing macro-cultural factors in a pathologizing manner. For a softer description within this study in order to align with a sense of empowering language, I have chosen to use the term macro-cultural influences to describe the overarching term.

2018). This societal trauma has created patriarchy, class systems, and white supremacy structures that influence messages repeating within daily culture. Kendi Ibram (2016) describes in his book *Stamped From the Beginning*, that the racial ideas were constructed in order to imprint and rationalize racial inequities, which intersect with social class. Through these oppressive systems, the hegemonies of what society deems as normal have been created from a foundation of historical trauma events that continue to perpetuate trauma dynamics within the culture (Maté, 2022). The influence of these social structures and how they affect family belief systems is an intersecting relationship (Farr et al., 2016) that needs more research within the literature.

According to social identity theory, behavior can be understood as a reciprocal relationship between self and society (Hogg et al., 1995). The larger macro-cultural messages create systems of how to mold identity *as a way of being* within a larger group in society. Through this perspective, people become products of their social interactions. For young people, understanding the pressures of the external environment comes with growing adulthood (Arnold, 2017) and there is recent literature on the need for social-emotional learning to be integrated into child development (Bierman et al., 2021). However, it has been my experience that society does not have built-in tools to navigate social pressures for young people. Rather than navigating the social pressures (having schools teach social-emotional learning, expected support groups within each community, Elder mentors to support young people, support for parents to understand their emotional selves and how it may affect their children, emotional support for teachers, etc.), I have seen young people model any existing beliefs or behaviors in their environment in order to be accepted. This is not to say these resources do not exist, however, I have not found them within my area. Other than individual therapists or treatment facilities for crisis intervention, the emotional needs of children are merely supplemented and overlooked. These dynamics will be

looked at further within the study to investigate the macro-cultural influences that impact adolescent development. Through my findings it was also important to further define historical trauma, an important term related to white patriarchal oppressive social systems, which will be defined below.

Historical Trauma

Historical trauma acknowledges groups of people that have been oppressed by other groups of people (Cromer, 2018). The importance of the term historical trauma is the fact that the events of the oppressed happened and still continue to occur in present day. Legette et al. (2022) describe how dehumanization is implemented by structure and process. They give the example of *chattel slavery*, slave owners having ownership over enslaved people which occurred in United States history. The slavery itself was a dehumanizing social structure created by white supremacists, while anti-Black⁴ racism became the byproduct process of the dehumanizing social structure (2022). These systems were deliberate in order to gain and sustain power for white men. This is only one example of how societal oppression has existed in history, but is being highlighted for this study due to the research with marginalized BIPOC adolescent girls.

The ramifications of a group being oppressed reinforce social hegemonies, such as, white heteropatriarchy, which continue as assumed societal norms. Oppressed groups are at higher risk for mental health symptoms (Cromer, 2018) because of the historical trauma patterns that have been passed on through family which are then reinforced by societal standards. On the other

⁴ Capitalizing Black was used to identify the race that identifies as Black. Jesse Jackson, a longtime civil rights leader emphasized that black is a color and Black is referring to a race. There is concern that not capitalizing Black when referring to race creates a hierarchy between African American and Black people because African American has been normalized with having capital letters. The capitalization is to bring respect to the race and importance which is why I capitalized Black throughout my dissertation (Eligon, 2020).

hand, I have witnessed individuals in powerful dominant groups that may be reinforcing marginalized oppression through behaviors, such as, being in denial or dismissing the harsh impact racism, classism, and sexism have had on marginalized people overtime. This reflection of white people having symptoms of colonial sickness is a reflection of societal analysis. This is not to say all white people mimic these behaviors, however, it is important to bring attention to what may not be happening in society as well. Further understanding the intersectional relationship between a person and their environment is multi-faceted. The defined overarching terms of intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural/historical trauma influences became the basis of the research purpose, which will be explained below.

Research Purpose

The purpose of my research is to explore how family and societal influences may be affecting teen girls and generate community interventions that could potentially be implemented to prevent future mental health issues. The overarching aim of the study is to investigate the intergenerational trauma and macro societal-factors that contribute to the reciprocal relationship of influencing teen girls' identity. The term intergenerational trauma was chosen to capture family dynamics that may be influencing a young girl's experience, while the concept of macro-cultural factors captures the macro lens of messages that may also be impacting young girls. Through a critical theory lens, the issues of power, knowledge, and truth claims are analyzed to identify the macro oppressive societal systems that may be affecting youth and their families. The need to learn more about the interaction between person and community within adolescents will potentially strengthen how the field of psychology navigates mental health prevention for young people in the future.

A key model that will be represented throughout the dissertation is Harvey's (1996) person-community ecological model of trauma. The ecological model provides a holistic framework that incorporates levels of interaction between person-environment rather than strictly a biological lens of inherited trauma. This supports the social theory of identity lens combining the fields of sociology and psychology as an interactive view (Hogg et al., 1995). The model also promotes the idea that change needs to occur within systems in order for individuals to experience longstanding healing (1996; Prilleltensky, 2008; Nutton & Fast, 2015; Subedi, 2020). Healing the larger collective depends on resources that are available and ways of accessing those resources. The need to change systemic opportunity rather than solely focusing on deficits of an individual is necessary for a collective change (Brown 2021).

The resiliency of the community depends on community-based connections and supporting resources to develop the strength of community members (Harvey, 1996). This may encompass local community centers, activity groups (sports, etc.), or government funding, which can have a healing impact that can promote alternative messages. The healing process of the traumatized individual is not the sole responsibility of the individual, but a collective effort within the community (Dahlgren et al., 2020). If we begin the reconstruction of power systems through practices of dialogic engagement, a process of including the disempowered youth within the communities, these messages can alter future generations (Freire, 1970). As a collective, we need to keep talking about how to keep healing.

The intent of my research study reflects *heuristic significance*, which “moves people to further explore, research or act on the research in the future” (Tracy, 2010, p. 846) and *phronetic research*, which is analysis that “enables practical wisdom and space for transformation” (p. 846). My research intention is to set the stage from an activist standpoint by utilizing critical

youth participatory action research (CYPAR) as a vehicle or voice for social change. The young people in this study allowed me the privilege of learning their inner thoughts to potentially help make those vehicles happen for future young people.

Working alongside young people while initiating change together was/is an honor. Creswell (2004) describes this as a transformative worldview where stories are collected of young people using a narrative approach. Examining narratives can potentially uncover further information needed to make changes within our communities. The messages that youth receive can be verbal and non-verbal interactions in their environment, which may impact their identity for the rest of their lives. How their reactions are handled by family and society can also further shape their responses. If the youth are unsupported when trying to navigate the messages of their environment a mental crisis can occur in the shape of depression, anxiety, substance use, suicidality, and behavioral issues. The idea of having an intervention before the dissonance becomes a crisis is a needed area of further research (Isobel et al., 2019). This could occur by taking a proactive approach of involving young people in their social-emotional learning and applying healthy thought processes early-on. This preventative mindset may lead to breaking the *chain of pain* that has occurred across generations and could potentially ripple into societal healing (Kass, 2017, p.10). The hope is for the study to lead to further action by future researchers or participants that are inspired to make potential changes from their experience as a result of this reflective research process.

Research Question

I wanted to better understand the relationship between an adolescent girl and her environment and how the environment may potentially be creating the mental health symptoms I was seeing in my therapy practice. I know I could not answer them alone and I had to work on a

deeper level with young people through this investigation. The process of understanding these research questions comes from an activist standpoint that aligns with highlighting young people's voices through research (Creswell, 2004; Doody & Baily, 2016). My main research questions are: How do adolescent girls experience the impact of family trauma and macro-cultural expectations? What is the impact of family and social expectations on adolescent female development? What social action is needed to intercept family and macro-cultural narratives for youth empowerment? The theoretical framework to explore the research questions will be described below.

Theoretical Framework for this Study

The theoretical framework that captures an ecological model of intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural factors is a critical phenomenological framework. Critical theory is an epistemological lens of understanding and navigating the roles of power, knowledge and truth assumptions (Carspecken, 1996; Call-Cummings et al., 2020; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011), while phenomenological philosophy aims to capture the essence of a whole person (Wertz, 2005). Understanding the environmental impact on young teen girls' experience is multi-layered and complex. Utilizing the critical phenomenological theoretical framework helped to support the integrity of my research and my attempt at upholding the values of self-empowerment within a community context throughout the study. Producing the data analysis together promoted a de-pathologizing view of human experience and highlights a vision of a liberation psychology movement as a means of reducing power assumptions of truth and knowledge (Fals-Borda, 2013; Freire, 1970). Liberation psychology shapes the methodological design chosen to embody the person-environment movement, which will be further discussed below.

Methodological Design

Liberation psychology is a movement that attempts to align with individuals to transform their own lives (Martín-Baró's, 1996). This was an important aspect when I choose the methodological design for this study. In order to promote a research environment of self-empowerment, I chose CYPAR utilizing photovoice to engage young people in healing circle discussions. This form of sharing snapshot photos of their day-to-day lives highlights their stories and understanding of life. CYPAR utilizes the practice of reflection and action as empowerment strategies for young people attempting to dismantle the power dynamics within their environment (Call-Cummings, 2019). The process of photovoice uses photos as a vehicle for reflection of how they, as young people, experience life. This information was later implemented to create an action plan.

CYPAR is the methodological choice for this dissertation study to embody the principles of liberation psychology (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Liberation psychology is rooted in the aim towards empowerment, emphasizing the need for dialogical interactions that are reciprocal in nature (Freire, 1970). Aimed at reducing the power dynamics youth face within their family and societal structures, the research process is a co-creation between participant and researcher. The collaborative process embodies the goals of neutralizing power, highlighting youth as their own seeker of knowledge. Through the process of photovoice, the essence of sharing intimately in a group setting has been a longstanding working tradition (Gupta et al., 2019). The process of storytelling and engaging in healing circles supports the person-community relationship as data collection methods to cultivate deeper levels of collective understanding (Hallett et al., 2017). Thomas Hubl (2020) describes the circle, or Buddhist symbol *enso*, is commonly represented with a Japanese word *kensho* or “seeing into one’s true nature” (p.3). By engaging in a therapeutic sharing circle, youth can potentially begin sifting through information to reveal

personal and collective data for further discovery. Their true reflection of themselves can be revealed through ongoing dialogue and self-exploration. This will be discussed in detail with empirical data findings to support this method in chapter 4 of this study. Taking this methodological approach was important to align with my own journey of self-discovery, which is something I reflected on immensely throughout this journey.

Researcher's Reflexivity

As long as I can remember, my father has always recited the Arabic term *naseeb*, which according to him, means “one’s share in life or destiny.” He says it repeatedly and in a deliberate manner throughout conversation. The calling words ring in my ears and my heart. Little did I know that my lived experiences of trials and rebounds had all along been building to a philanthropic *naseeb*. This doctoral research is a culmination of everything I have learned in my studies, as well as in my life. Nothing that I have experienced has been by accident and everything has been necessary for a larger meaningful purpose every step of the way, even if I had not seen it in the moment.

Personally, it has not been easy. As a young girl I remember slipping through the cracks, feeling intense confusion, chaos and mistrust of the world because of the experiences I had gone through. I could not decipher what was happening with my environment and I felt like there was nowhere to turn with no one to trust. When the message of home and school both replicated punitive punishment and blame for my human experience I felt completely disempowered. I was not okay and felt alone in the world. The confusion sent me down a dark road of self-destruction, including severe drug addiction, homelessness, involvement with law enforcement, which took years to come back from. During those struggles, I had experiences within systems that made me

feel ashamed and displaced. It felt like something was deeply wrong inside of me because the external messages supported the idea that I was the problem. *I was pathologized.*

Michelle Fine (2006) describes civilized oppression as “unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions which are supported by the media and cultural stereotypes as well as by the structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms” (p. 87). That deep internal feeling that something was wrong prompted me to self-medicate for my entire adolescence and led to a self-destructive path that I had to slowly climb my way out of. Instead of being supported, as a young person I was punished through multiple avenues of power. It took me years to realize my human experience was the result of my environment, not based on an immoral parasite within me. It took specific people to validate my experience as a person and parallel my process of growth. Liberation from that gave me the confidence to know I am capable of doing more, and that is why I have made it my life to engage in processes like this research to shed light on the need for change.

Many times, people do not understand why they feel depressed, anxious, suicidal, lost or empty in life. As time continues in the process of therapy, they begin to unravel the family narrative, *the story that has been told to them* through implicit messages. Many times, this narrative of unresolved family trauma is passed down in the form of *something is wrong with me* messages, such as; micro-managing weight loss; overcompensating with perfectionistic ideals; avoidance in striving for goals, being enabled to a point that children have no self-agency: leading to regret or disappointment in life. The invalidation people feel from these narratives combined with the social messages (competing on social media, academic pressures, peer group segregation) may create feelings of isolation and not being understood. When I started educating

myself on intergenerational trauma, it changed my internal concept of myself and how I practiced as a therapist.

Understanding that behaviors and mentalities had been passed down led to exploring societal constructs that were creating or reinforcing the breakdown in families. I had a sense that the separateness of people in Western culture was part of the problem. Thomas Hubl (2020) mentions how any form of isolation can become a form of weakness, illness, or disease. I have noticed during clinical work with clients that a deep sense of loneliness forms and people begin to present with chronic depression, anxiety, and confusion when they feel something is wrong with them. Often the symptomatic presentation occurs in adolescents when identity begins to form, asking deeper existential questions about themselves, family, and the world with no guiding direction to those answers. When their ontological views are being challenged and there is no emotional support at home, feelings of hopelessness and worry can perpetuate panic attacks, insomnia, depression and suicidal thinking. This study also became an extension of understanding societal paradigms that contribute to the separateness and lonely feelings that many people experience.

I chose to focus on the adolescent population in terms of a preventative approach to address and rework the imprinted messages, rather than a tertiary approach of treating the symptoms later in life. This does not dismiss the very important work in other developmental stages. However, sorting out these environmental messages at an early developmental age may change the trajectory and narrative of the individual as an adult. This investigation will always be ongoing, potentially for the rest of my life. Nakkula and Ravitch (1998) describe how the parts of human experience interact through two representational arcs. The first arc is that of projection, where our “forestructure of understanding” (p.25) comes from a place of experiencing the world.

With this knowledge of experiencing the world, we use a template of existence that we bring into the next arc of experience. There is never a completion of understanding, but a heuristic navigation of uncovering human experience. For myself, I use this cyclical investigation as a tool of inspiration—one of knowing that I will never really know. One question I intend to continue uncovering is whether or not the standards of living are acceptable and what we may need to do in order to make the world a better place.

Carspecken (1996) describes social research as a “personal need to do so, not exactly a choice” (p. 6). Becoming a therapist, I noticed a consistent pattern of dissonance within the teenage girls I was working with and wanted to learn more. The more we uncovered their narrative, the more I realized the messages they internalized became their negative world. This was exactly what had happened to me as a young girl. I realized the young people I work with need secure attachment as a guide to navigate the world. I make sure to reassure them that they were/are not the problem, while simultaneously balancing their personal responsibility to heal as young adults. This work is a life-long investigate path; an existential mission unsure of the destination. I do know making a decision to use critical youth participatory action research as a collaborative methodological approach embodies the process I wish I had as a growing adolescent.

Researcher Positionality

My positionality as a researcher is important to understand the power dynamics that may occur while working with a diverse group of adolescent girls. I understand my educated adult positionality holds inherited power that I am privileged with when working with these young people, and at the same time, my lived experience of being a female may provide some relatability. However, how my role as a researcher specifically affects the group is unknown, but

it is important to be aware of who I am in relation to these young people and claim how these barriers may have impacted this study in more detail.

I am a 33-year-old Syrian Portuguese Muslim cisgender heterosexual female. I was raised with divorced parents in four different households which included my grandparents' homes. I watched what it was like for my extremely intelligent but poor immigrant father, who despite being educated, had difficulty with the executive functioning skills needed to overcome his childhood trauma. This left an imprint on me and my half-siblings with a strong desire to overachieve and compensate for what he struggled so hard to do. I learned that living in two different religions/cultural backgrounds with two parents that adhered to different belief systems was confusing and shame-ridden. The process of healing family wounds that were never mine to begin with has been a long journey.

My intergenerational healing process provides an alignment with the marginalized youth. I have an idea of what it is like to have a parent with financial insecurities trying to survive and the pressures that brings to on the family system. As much as my dad loved us, he was tired; and my mom was busy working. Either household felt unavailable, and thank God my grandparents were there to fill in the emotional gaps. I also know how it feels to experience racism related to my Middle Eastern ethnicity and Islamic upbringing during the events of 9/11 and ongoing. Through my personal experience, the otherness of Islamophobia has taken a back seat to Black Lives Matter movements with a quiet hush mentality, but the lingering effects of mistrust by Americans are still there. Arabs have been deemed a white race according to Western-American standards; however, I must consider myself multi-racial. My name and my faith have also provoked questions of intrigue or separateness depending on the person inquiring. This otherness is potentially a point of positional understanding to the participants' marginalized experiences.

On the other hand, the patriarchal privilege that I have adopted according to societal standard of class, career, and academia are notable contexts to consider within the power structures of this study. Seeing my mother's white privilege and experiencing the confidence that I grew from her raising me as a feminist woman sculpted a self-assured mentality that I could do anything. These dynamics have impacted my identity and how I see the world. I know that the inherent privilege of being an educated female may have implied an authoritative stance within the study, which is why I chose a participatory action research study to eliminate the patriarchal roles as much as possible. During this study I kept in mind that some of the young girls may not have that confident perspective, and being a female could be felt as a limitation.

Understanding the dichotomous experience I had growing up will provide a certain lens of alternate perspectives and multi-layered views. I consider myself to be multi-cultural human being in constant pursuit of understanding the world. I am not telling my story through this participatory action research, but because of the complex dichotomous upbringing I had, I tried to critically view this study from all angles.

Chapter Summary

This study investigates the adolescent girls' experience through an ecological model of trauma perspective, which considers the reciprocal relationship between person-environment. The overarching terms that aim to include this ecological model are *intergenerational trauma* and *macro-cultural influences* as distinct terms through which to understand the impact of family trauma and societal social structures. These social structures also include understanding ideologies of race, social class, socio-economic status, gender and sex. A critical phenomenological framework was implemented as an epistemological lens of analysis to better understand the

relationship of how inherent power assumptions affect young girls' experiences of human development.

In order to begin exploring the power dynamics of these layers, a small group of adolescent girls was recruited in a critical youth participatory action research study utilizing the photovoice method as a way of capturing moments of day-to-day life. The pictures they took became a reflective platform for conversation to better understand the person-environment experience for deeper analysis. The thematic data generation that was gathered and implemented into a community action plan within the study can potentially be used to benefit youth empowerment in the future.

The remainder of the dissertation will begin to outline the adolescents' narratives and how they contribute to the larger picture of adolescent research. The next chapter will review in detail the literature findings related to intergenerational trauma, social-cultural factors, and de-pathologizing movements within the field of psychology to better understand the gaps needed for further research. By understanding the gaps within the literature, I was able to link the findings from the co-researchers narratives into a critical power analysis, which will be discussed in the final chapter in order to thread the literature and critical findings provided by the co-researchers. Through this understanding, it is my hope that Western society can begin to normalize the view of adolescent experience as a reciprocal relationship with the socio-ecological environment and begin working on societal treatment plans for the future. Recommendations for this view will also be outlined in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The presented literature review was determined by author positionality, professional experience, and extensive reading on the topics mentioned in the previous chapter. The literature review intends to uncover explanations of how familial trauma combined with macro-cultural messages can create internal dissonance in teen girls. The concept of intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural factors can be viewed through a trauma-informed bio-ecological lens including the relationship between biology, environment, and historical/cultural interactions demonstrated in an individual. This multifaceted lens allows for a deeper critical look at human experience. Intergenerational trauma can potentially be intercepted at an individual level (Maté, 2022), and there are acknowledgements of historical trauma as a problem (Conching & Thayer, 2019; Ungar et al., 2013). The issue within the literature is the minimal research of how to respond to both paradigms within the community. Macro-cultural influences are explored through sociological and psychology lenses within this paper to expand the lens of the human experience within the field of psychology. Throughout this literature review, I engaged in an iterative process of reading the literature and utilizing my experience in clinical practice in the community to guide further investigative reading.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria will be discussed to mark my decision-making process and potential gaps within the literature review. This will be outlined as follows.

Inclusion Areas

Farr et al. (2016) describe a criticism of liberation movements having views of oppression as a singular form. For this reason, the expansion of intersectional issues was

thoroughly investigated. When reviewing the literature, I found that the term *intergenerational trauma* to be associated with *historical trauma*, but upon further investigation I found the paradigms to be distinct domains that may have overlap within family systems (Nutton & Fast, 2015; Reid et al., 2014). I made a deliberate choice to make historical trauma a sub-group of the macro-cultural influences. This was not a distinction clearly defined in the literature.

Understanding the distinctions became important for this review because of the micro-macro paradigm that is being articulated. The term *macro-cultural influences* was chosen to capture the social systems that affect a person. I felt that by merging historical trauma and macro-cultural influences, the risk of washing down the severity of history may be a point of cultural minimization. The need to capture a multicultural perspective within the intergenerational/historical trauma and macro-cultural framework was deliberate to reduce language related to white hegemony within this research.

Exclusion of the Term Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) shifted the activist lens using the term *intersectionality* to describe the multifaceted experience of Black women experiencing racism and sexism. The term in its original use was to illustrate Black women; however, through the expansion of research the original term became a broad definition of the various constructs people experience in general (Carbado, 2013). This has caused an appropriation of Crenshaw's original intent, which I do not want to contribute to within this study. The specific intent to leave out the term intersectionality is to provide honor to its original context. In order to describe the extended construct relationships that occur in human experience, the term *intersection* or *convergence* will be used. This will demonstrate the relationship between family and societal paradigms within this study.

Exclusion for Limited Identity Discussion

Due to the extensive theoretical research on identity formation, I made a decision to keep the literature review narrow in reference to defining *adolescent identity*. The literature is extremely expansive on this topic, with numerous philosophical points of reference that could be explored. The effort of this paper is to keep the focus of having the teen girls define their narrative rather than try to explore the multitude of historical contexts of adolescent psyche development. Identity formation is broadly defined in this study because it is not the specific focus of this paper. The purpose is not to investigate how identity is formed from a scientific standpoint, but rather to investigate the messages that are being absorbed during the time of identity formation.

Theoretical Sources for Research

From a theoretical standpoint, the paradigms of psychology and sociology were included for a well-rounded review of the two defined domains. The decision to include sociological theories within the literature was to highlight the epistemological limitations the field of psychology has produced. The epistemological views of psychology have created reactions and systems that may be contributing to the actual problem. When focusing on the individual as the problem, the environment can be dismissed as the actual catalyst that manifests the symptoms within the individual. The distinction to reconstruct this worldview was to have breadth of critical thinking on how to approach the adolescent population. The following topics of intergenerational trauma, historical trauma, and macro-cultural influences will be explored with sub-themes that explain the intricacies of each domain. These topics were chosen to best describe the vast intersection of person-community experience.

Intergenerational Trauma

Judith Herman (2015) describes how the study of psychological trauma involves coming to terms that evil has taken place in the world. When people experience or witness trauma, there is a loss of power that leaves an imprint on their identity. These events leave a mark on their lives and how they operate in the existing world. These events are classified within the field of psychology as “big T trauma,” which includes serious injury, sexual violence, and life-threatening experiences, and “little t trauma,” including neglect, verbal abuse, and bullying events (Kwon, 2022; Maté, 2022). However, these definitions in the literature do not capture the ambiguous effects of trauma that are transmitted through parenting styles in the next generation. The continued patterns of trauma behavior can unknowingly be passed down through intergenerational trauma (Cromer, 2018; Pederson et al., 2018), which from my literature review appears to be widely over-looked in the field of psychology. However, new research has contributed to an increasing mainstream thought process of acknowledging the effects of intergenerational trauma on mental health (Hubl, 2020; Youssef et al., 2018).

Intergenerational trauma is theoretically captured by biological markers and behavioral traits that have been passed down throughout families (Cromer, 2018; Pederson et al., 2018). The question of nature vs. nurture becomes a key point to how the trauma is actually passed down. The following literature review will describe both nature *and* nurture and how the two combine to create the intergenerational patterns that can be explained as unresolved family trauma in an individual (Maté, 2022). The following theories will attempt to explain this point.

Neuroscience of Epigenetic Theory

The concept of intergenerational trauma expanded the field of psychology to support *epigenetic research*, (Maté, 2022) which suggests that the environment can potentially activate genetic markers for personality formation. *Epigenetics* is defined as “a science which examines

the expression or suppression of genes based on environmental exposures” (Pederson et al., 2018, p. 1020). Through this lens, the home environment with caretakers becomes a catalyst in the process of molding the individual and potentially developing symptomology overtime (Maté, 2022). For example, if the home environment is stable and secure, the genetic marker of anxiety may not be as dominant. The environment is not triggering the anxious gene to be activated. According to epigenetics theories, the repetition of subconscious relational behaviors is inherited, ultimately passing down trauma that was not initially experienced (2018). The environment provides a space for learned behaviors by parents to be encoded, known as a process of transcription (Jiang et al., 2019). Epigenetics explains this through biological reactions.

Biological Reactions

When the body experiences stress, the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis within the limbic system is activated, causing cortisol hormones to be released as a response (Conching & Thayer, 2019; Youssef et al., 2018). Prolonged cortisol responses are associated with effects on physiological and cognitive functions. Cortisol activates the body through increasing blood flow, using energy reserves and suppressing other functions such as digestion (Jiang et al., 2019). Persistent stress causes overaction in the sympathetic nervous system, causing detrimental effects on the body, which has been linked to anxiety, depression, addiction, aggression, antisocial, and avoidance behaviors (Cromer, 2018; Jiang et al., 2019; Mitchell, 2018).

Trauma increases the stress response which affects the central nervous system (specifically limbic system), prompting messages of fear (van der Kolk, 2003). The parasympathetic system initiates hormones to compensate for fear, resulting in fight, flight, or freeze response behaviors. In other words, the body shifts into high alert any time it is reminded

of the original trauma. Someone may not be conscious this is happening but the body is remembering and reacting. One example of this looks like unexpected panic attacks. Jiang et al. (2019) also explain that different types of trauma can alter different brain mechanisms. Psychological trauma can impact memory, decision-making, and emotion regulation, whereas, physical trauma can impact heart rate, blood pressure, and fight-or-flight responses related to aggression. Different parts of the brain are being impacted in order to react to the different environmental stressors. Clinically, this may be seen as attention deficit disorder (ADHD) in children that have difficulty with focusing at school because of their home environment sculpting their brain reactions (Amiri et al., 2020; Maté, 2000).

If the body is continually triggered, over time, it will be conditioned to a heightened stress-response state, causing chronic anxiety and hypervigilance, even when real threats are not detected (van der Kolk, 2013). This is often seen with accompanying physical symptoms (headaches, stomach pain, tightness) because the body is in chronic distress (van der Kolk, 2013). The baseline anxiety becomes a genetic marker that can be passed down to the next generation. These examples are how trauma can create biological reactions and potential gene expression in an individual and may be passed down as inherited biological markers. This then becomes a family history of mental health conditions that may also be passed down

Epigenetics Research

The emerging epigenetic literature is also exploring the link to genetic exposure in fetuses, questioning how some people inherit certain markers while others do not. Youssef et al. (2019) synthesized studies which reflect DNA methylation changes that may be linked to PTSD genetic risk factors. Reviewed studies included methylation of pregnant mothers with effects of trauma, demonstrating that gene expression is modified in utero. This means the effect of trauma

on the mother has an impact on the child's genetic expression. Conching and Thayer (2019) also reviewed the relationship between epigenetic modifications and trauma. A meta-analysis was provided that reflected changes in the methylation that can impact the function of the HPA axis, which is one primary physiological system that manages organismal stress response, resulting in metabolic syndrome and mental health disorders. Transfers of parental experience of trauma can be transmitted through intrauterine signaling, breast milk composition, breastfeeding behavior, and patterns of parental care. Youssef et al. (2019) believe the timing of the trauma during pregnancy and how significant the gene expression can impact human development and would benefit from further research. However, these findings support the biological impact of inherited trauma and how genetics play an important role within intergenerational trauma.

Impact of Epigenetics Towards Deconstructing Pathology

Evidence of epigenetic theory explains the dynamic of *nature vs. nurture* more in depth to *nature and nurture*, which has changed the field of psychology (Maté, 2022). This supports an outlook of person-environment relationship rather than the existing biomedical model that focuses solely on inherited symptoms. "Because the epigenetics of trauma are increasingly becoming clear, questions regarding the traditional individualistic approaches that clinical psychology has privileged in practice have become more pronounced" (Rinker & Lawler, 2018, p. 151). Because the traditional view of psychology has been to focus on symptomology and individual pathology, the person has become the problem.

With the epigenetic perspective, the treatment philosophy can work with changing the environment. This automatically shifts the message of *what's wrong with me?* to *what have I inherited?* or *what unhealthy messages am I receiving?* This suggests that the solutions to wellness are grounded in changing family systems rather than the individual to intercept

intergenerational trauma (Isobel et al., 2019). Having discussions with the family becomes essential in changing the narrative to individual pathology into a holistic perspective of understanding multiple dynamics existing simultaneously. Understanding the attachment patterns and relational messages is a part of intergenerational trauma reformation (Maté, 2022) and rewiring genetic expression. Although the intricacies of genetic expression, gene to gene interactions, and sex differences are extremely complex and do not provide the full context of individual variations, the understanding of epigenetics is the beginning of an interdisciplinary field that is emerging (Jiang et al., 2019).

Vision of Neuroscientific Healing

Conching and Thayer's (2019) meta-analysis supports the idea that this rewiring is possible, highlighting an important concept of *neuroplasticity* as a means of intercepting inherited trauma. Neuroplasticity is the ability for neural paths to rewire into new ways of thinking and behaving. In fact, individuals can make deliberate changes to recondition the models of behavior that have been taught into healthier systems of living. This means the brain can literally be rewired. This concept supports the idea that trauma patterns can be healed. Conching and Thayer (2019) support the bio-ecological lens of intergenerational trauma and the ability to potentially be reversed by neuroplasticity.

Although research has suggested neuroplasticity is possible, it has also revealed the difficulties around making the neural changes. Early childhood trauma in particular can affect the HPA-axis stress response regulator and the BDNF codes of neurotrophin, which is linked to neuroplasticity (Jiang et al., 2019). This suggests that the effects of childhood trauma solidify stress response patterns and make it neurologically more difficult to rewire and potentially adapt to new ways of thinking/behaving. This information is good to know in order to better

understand that people who have experienced trauma may take longer or need more support and reinforcement for a longstanding change to occur. Changing the environment becomes essential to changing the neural brain patterns, and the relationship of nature and nurture must be further explored. The following will explore the attachment styles that can have an impact on human development.

Attachment Theory

According to attachment theory, trauma is passed down through learned behavior by the caregivers (Bowlby, 1973). The transmission of relational patterns becomes engrained in habitual tasks and communication styles of the family. For example, if trauma has not been processed after an event, the withholding of emotions could generate a message of *we don't share our feelings*. This message becomes the inherited trauma, and the children learning this behavior may replicate withholding emotions themselves. The caregivers are the most influential people in a child's life as direct teachers and models for how to behave (Maté, 2022). If the caregiver has been traumatized and has not further processed the trauma, there may be behaviors rooted in trauma patterns that can continue in the child.

The behaviors rooted in trauma responses may look like detached emotions, aloofness, distractibility, severe anger, self-harm, or suicidality; and are usually a way to gain some sort of attachment to a caregiver even if those responses are not healthy (Bowlby, 1973; Maté, 2022). They become ways of protection or attempts to get their emotional needs met by their caregiver, depending on the harmful environment. Bowlby (1973) states that attachment to a caregiver is a child's best means of survival. When the caregiver is not able to reassure the child, the child's needs are not met, ultimately forming an *insecure attachment style*. The attachment with initial caretakers has an impact on biological make-up and cognitive beliefs about the world. The

beliefs become “internal working models” (Beckes et al., 2015, p. 1) or foundational systems for the environmental stressors that are faced in life. If a child is not provided with security and attunement, the insecurity will create an internal working model that they are not safe in the world. A major characteristic of all insecure attachment includes the “tendency to appraise events as threatening” (Ogle et al., 2014 p. 2). Rinker and Lawler (2018) describe this process:

Parents too frightened of rekindling terrifying emotions will say nothing about their experience of trauma, leaving their children to fill in the blanks with their own imaginations. The family is also where core beliefs about the world are overtly or subtly communicated to the children. In traumatized families, the message is frequently that the world is threatening and dangerous, and one must be hypervigilant at all times to scan the world for potential threats...Attachments to caregivers provide subconscious messages of ontological views of the world: will frequently misrecognize the harmless for the menacing. (p. 153)

The threatening beliefs will be the underlying precursor to how the child will see themselves and their place in the world. With a constant sense of mistrust, the person will form underlying anxiety by continually trying to detect threat. According to attachment theory, this mistrustful lens will be the foundation of all life decisions (Bowlby, 1973). The attachment patterns are often times replicated in other relationships they have as adults (Maté, 2022). This became an important aspect within the research study and will be further explored in the final chapter.

Lack of Attunement as an Intergenerational Pattern

There are many behaviors that can be seen as unhealthy, however, they may have been behaviors that were actually used to survive as a means of self-preservation. For example, a child that has a caretaker that was preoccupied emotionally with their own trauma could result in

mental health symptoms from the lack of attuned attachment (Hock et al., 2020). The caregiver may not have the capacity to be emotionally available for their child. The child learns to seek approval and love through molding to whatever the caretaker needs, often times dismissing their own needs; or the alternate reaction is to “act out” to gain their needs (Maté, 2022). From my clinical observations, this can initiate a fixed need for connection later in life where the adult now feels unheard or unappreciated with their partner because they never learned how to express their needs and became conditioned to overly pleasing or acting out for love. The adult may feel unfulfilled and empty within the relationship, but does not know how to attach otherwise. The continued denial of feelings can create a deep sense of depression, feeling stuck in an existential crisis. This is now the model for their children, repeating the generational cycle. As a therapist, the aforementioned example is a pattern I have seen time and time again rooting back to unresolved family trauma.

Many adults and children do not know why they feel sad or anxious until they have explored their feelings through clinical work. Often times mental health professionals will suggest medication to relieve the symptoms, which does not address the underlying attachment issues that will be continued in the next generation. Attachment theory provides a framework for the relational dynamics that directly contribute to inherited family trauma (Rinker & Lawler, 2018). Understanding the subconscious behaviors that lead to attachment patterns is part of intergenerational work.

Integrating Epigenetics and Attachment Theory as a Holistic Theory. The biological and environmental systems are married together to explain the intergenerational trauma pathways (Isobel et al., 2019). This lens explains the reasons why people have symptoms from a micro-standpoint. The family becomes a small world that has a major impact on an individual for

the rest of their lives. The literature also describes how, biologically, humans have the potential to alter the gene expression in order to stop intergenerational trauma (Conching & Thayer, 2019). One example of this is explained by Gabor Maté (2000) who mentions a “child with ADD has been wounded by a disruption in the relationship between the caregiver and the sensitive infant” (p. 145). He provides a real life example of the relationship between attachment and genetics. This does not explain the individual variances of a human being’s experience, but provides some framework of human development (Jiang et al., 2019).

Although the research of intergenerational trauma is relatively new, the findings are significant in defining the epigenetic trends (Youssef et al., 2018). The importance of the bio-environmental relationship is important for my study to show every intersecting level of systems having an influential exchange. The home environment affects the person’s genetic expression, which affects the home environment (Pederson et al., 2018). An example of this is how childhood trauma has been associated with decreased grey matter in the orbitofrontal cortex of the brain, which may be associated with insecure attachment style (Jiang et al., 2019). Experiencing childhood trauma may cause neural patterns of insecure attachment style that may be replicated when raising the next generation. This reciprocal process perpetuates the intergenerational patterns to potentially continue.

The literature describes the need for attachment restoration, trauma-specific interventions with adults, and prevention with children to intercept intergenerational trauma (Isobel et al., 2019). The evidence on intergenerational trauma supports the idea that the environment will activate gene expression and learned responses will reinforce the cycle of family trauma; therefore, environmental influences need to be further investigated (Isobel et al., 2019). In order to effectively treat intergenerational trauma, a long-standing therapeutic alliance of person-

environment interventions in the field of psychology and counseling has to be part of the solution to truly address the complexity of learned behaviors rooted in family trauma (Brown, 2021).

According to upcoming literature, there needs to be an integrated movement that acknowledges the person-community relationship overall (Brown, 2021).

According to other theories within the literature, there are also larger scopes at play influencing human development, which will be explored in the next section. Notably, the literature acknowledges family systems affecting epigenetics but negates larger socio-cultural systems that may have altered genetics over multiple generations. This is where the separate terms and intersectional acknowledgment is necessary in future literature in order to not negate any important aspect of human development. Jiang et al. (2019) attempt to acknowledge one of these hegemonic intersectional systems when they describe the neurological sex/gender differences and how brain functioning is impacted differently under different types of stress in males and females. However, the gap in the literature is potentially exploring how sexism and historical trauma against females has affected neurological patterns throughout time. How has historical trauma potentially created these neurological differences? Involving evolutionary psychology into these conversations may also be a consideration. There are several societal constructs that will be explored through a macro lens throughout this study as an attempt to capture the breadth that the literature may be lacking. The following section will describe the broader environmental constructs and institutional influences that may be affecting young people.

Macro-Cultural Influences Affecting an Individual

The definition of *Macro Cultural Factors*⁵ is described as human culture fundamentally consisting of social environmental factors such as social institutions (government, corporations, educational and health care systems, family structure, religious organizations), artifacts (technology, art, buildings, clothing), and cultural concepts that create and define—time, sex, children, privacy, private property, wealth, sex, a fetus, gender, morality, etc. (Guitart & Ratner, 2013; Esteban-Guitart, 2012). Each factor becomes an influential construct that leads directly to a certain perspective and away from another (Esteban-Guitart, 2012). From this standpoint, the human experience becomes an interrelated web of all these influences.

Social constructs can be one aspect that may directly affect the identity formation of an individual as they learn certain norms in order to adhere to a group. The need to be accepted by a peer group is a basic core trait in human interaction (Nergaard, 2020). The vehicles to gain acceptance through peers becomes an exchange of social conditions and standards. When these standards are not met, the risk of not being validated may become stressful. The process of rejection in social development is also a normal process. However, the impacts of rejection can cause emotional distress in young people's environments and can affect their ability to self-regulate their emotions (Nergaard, 2020). Without having the right tools to navigate social pressures, the messages of rejection from peer environments can have a detrimental effect on their experience. According to this lens, the culture/society provides the basis for psychological phenomena and potential symptomology (Guitart & Ratner, 2013).

Guitart and Ratner (2013) provide examples of cultural messages that are produced by these systems—"Hand in your homework on time," "Stay three car lengths behind the truck in

⁵ As noted prior, the literature uses the term macro-cultural factors, however, following the literature description I will use macro-cultural influences to encapsulate the same concepts beyond this point.

front of you,” “Don’t think women are stupid” (p. 254). If a student does not hand in homework on time, a sense of fear is initiated due to the system that tardiness is punishable and potentially shameful if the requirement is not complete. These messages are embedded within daily practices of our lives and usually go unquestioned in order to conform to society.

According to the definition of *macro cultural factors*, cultural systems will perpetuate messages depending on the culture the individual exists (Esteban-Guitart, 2012). For example, if there is a strong religious context, the individual may not be supportive of abortion rights. If the individual is faced with a choice to have an abortion when they do not want to, this can create a sense of dissonance within themselves that may lead to mental health issues. The internal dilemma may lead to an existential crisis of their conflicting beliefs and feelings, which can manifest as symptoms of anxiety, depression, and potential suicidality. How society handles this dissonance within an individual becomes important to further understand the person-community relationship. The worldviews of a culture contribute to how the individual will see themselves in the world, which could impact the symptomology they experience. During the literature review of *macro-cultural factors*, a distinct sub-domain of—*historical trauma* became relevant in exploring further as it pertained to cultural worldviews of *individualistic*, and *community-based societies*. The following will describe how the historical context has influenced the macro level orientation of cultural standards and their importance to human development.

Historical Trauma and Systemic Oppression: Definition and History

Historical trauma “relates to a collective experience of trauma that is perpetuated against members of a group due to their group membership, and the trauma is within the collective consciousness” (Cromer, 2018, p. 100). For instance, the history of colonization has created groups that are economically, politically, and socially dependent on the colonizing government.

Within the Western-American world, this is demonstrated in white patriarchal systems (Orlowski, 2019).

Prolonged colonized systems can translate to cultural oppression and marginalization for the people who are not in power. This continued oppression has been seen as historical trauma (Cromer, 2018). “Much of the cause for the continuing cycles of all levels of societal conflict is trauma-based” (Rinker & Lawler, 2018, p. 151). Unlike the micro perspective of intergenerational trauma, historical trauma provides a framework for macro-system influences on an individual. The trauma related to sexism, racism, and classism are all a part of an individual’s experience (Harrison, 2017). This construction of an individual’s development cannot be seen through a single lens and requires a multifaceted lens of explanation. Historical trauma will be described through the conceptual framework of post- developmental theory of trauma.

Post-Developmental Theory of Trauma and Historical Trauma

The effects of historical trauma can potentially generate symptoms within individuals because of the day-to-day messages that are reinforced by systemic structures (Cardwell, 2021). Slavery, anti-Black racism and colonialist events characterize a history that continues to affect current-day times (Nummi et al., 2019). Nummi et al. (2019) emphasize that despite Black people actively resisting this system of racial oppression, the “the persisting white-controlled use” (p.1043) of white racial framework has constructed white people as good and virtuous and Black people as bad and villainized. The writers highlight that this has been an intentional organized system of maintaining control through institutional teachings and representations of this dynamic.

The colonist history is embedded in the oppressive behaviors and beliefs that continue to play out in a patriarchal white supremacist society and has contributed to mass BIPOC groups

affected by white supremacy in the United States (Quijano, 2000). Through the historical trauma perspective, the effects of oppression will pass down through behaviors that continue the oppression to the next generation. The idea of intergenerational trauma becomes expanded to a societal dynamic. This can be seen through a post-developmental theory perspective.

Reid et al. (2014) describe *post-developmental theory* as the three stages of historical trauma transmission where 1) mass trauma experiences for marginalized people take place when a dominant group subjugates a population; 2) trauma responses are then elicited in the first generation, and 3) the trauma is ultimately transmitted to the next subsequent generation through learned behaviors and epigenetics. The pathways are created by manifestations of self-concepts transmitted through observed behaviors —loss of self-mastery, loss of autonomous personal dignity, loss of personal adequacy, loss of self-efficacy, negative self-opinion, self-doubt, and fractured identity (Reid et al., 2014). The historical oppression can potentially be transmitted from one generation to the next (Mitchell, 2018), which can then be passed down through behavior or communication styles (Cardwell, 2021). When there has been mass oppression to an oppressed group, the internalized messages in an individual can be reinforced by the community itself. According to post-developmental theory, the oppressed group can influence family systems and beliefs. (2014).

The literature also highlights Black people counter-framing the white dominant story that villainizes Black people by critiquing the white oppression through the Black Lives Matter movement and recreating “a positive assertion of the full humanity of African Americans” (Outley et al., 2019, p. 104). This form of resistance has been shown within the marginalized communities as an uprising to the negative effects of historical trauma. The intersection of family and group oppression and how that has translated to mental health will be further

explored during the study to investigate how oppressive beliefs that have stemmed from historical trauma have influenced adolescent development.

The impact of societal oppression on marginalized people can vary and recent literature has been exploring how this has affected mental health symptoms. According to Conching and Thayer's (2019) reviewed studies, the messages of white supremacy may cause symptoms of anxiety or depression that are embedded in the lifestyle, creating a feedback loop resulting in bio-markers for the next generation. This finding reinforces the epigenetic idea of the environment prompting bio-markers. The findings provide an explanation of this cycle within classism and how low socioeconomic status is associated with immune response bio-markers and amygdala (emotional) reactivity. These genes were responsible for regulating the central nervous system related to stress responses. This suggests that being in a certain social class may impact the neural circuits that affect mental health functioning. The relationship between the culture and the individual represents the sociohistorical dimensions and demonstrate how trauma is transmitted through the effects of collective suffering overtime (Ungar et al., 2013). The literature suggests that epigenetics will ultimately be affected by historical trauma. This is seen in findings indicating that Black people in the United States with histories of oppression showed trauma symptoms at greater rates than U.S. whites (Helms et al., 2012). This suggests that historical trauma has altered genetic components that have been passed down within the individual. The findings reinforce Resmaa Menakem's (2017) discussion that racial injustice does not only live in the minds' of Black people, but in the bodies. He suggests that racial trauma did not end with the abolition of slavery and continues to exist within the genetic components of Black bodies. This is only one example of how historical trauma may be affecting the lives of

young marginalized people today. The relationship between society and its history becomes an essential part of understanding the human experience.

Covid-19, Capitalism and Historical Trauma

This research study was conducted during the covid-19 pandemic and emerging research related to historical events of covid-19 was found within the literature (Carstens & Bozalek, 2021; Subedi, 2020). From my observed perspective, the events that took place during the international shutdown shaped a global narrative of social distancing and separateness during those 2+ years. In my opinion, this seems to be a historical trauma that contributed to individual symptomology and is worth noting as it pertains to the effects of the young people in this study.

A recent study done with adolescents by Djurdjevic et al. (2022) revealed there was a higher depression and anxiety symptomology in youth since the pandemic originated. The data also suggested that the level of poverty increased those symptoms, while the variable of parents having postgraduate degrees decreased the risk of depression and anxiety symptoms in their children. This suggests that the intersection of class may have been contributing and the charged environment may have activated historical trauma bio-markers.

A positive relationship to online gaming with insomnia was found (Djurdjevic et al., 2022) and suggests that young people who were isolated turned to the only social access they could in order to cope. Erliana et. al (2022) also describe how children with ADHD are more susceptible to internet addiction and were forced to engage in online learning which exacerbated their symptoms. The literature reinforces the idea that when an individual feels unsafe in their environment, their mental health symptoms may increase, which further supports the person-community relationship to human experience (Erliana et al., 2022).

Another important observation was the heightened sense of fear, where I noticed many people being in a state of survival, not just marginalized groups. The fear of getting sick from covid-19 may have prompted or heightened an already existing lens that views others as threatening and unsafe. On a macro scale, the pandemic may have revealed a pre-existing mentality many people are living with. The question to be considered is why is there potentially an underlying sense of threat within society? This may be linked to a collective existential insecure attachment lens that may have been activated. The ontological security of the world may have been in jeopardy and understanding how different environments responded to this activation should be further explored in future research.

I was able to experience this historical trauma event unfold in real time during this dissertation process and gain a perspective of how the bigger picture macro-cultural influences presented themselves during the pandemic. On one hand, children and adults became fear-ridden with anxiety and had symptoms of overstimulated central nervous systems. This was verified in the recent literature, which stated that people experienced detrimental effects including heightened anxiety, relationship issues, difficulty focusing, alcohol and drug consumption and suicide attempts (Brenner & Bhugra, 2020). On the other hand, the systemic effects of the lockdown, incessant testing measures, and prolonged isolation management has affected the industrial workings of how the global economy operates. This sense of isolation has created a separateness that supports individualistic mentalities and keeps people from connecting, mimicking other colonialist events that have oppressed large groups of people. The impact affected every realm of mental, emotional, physical and economical spheres within every person on the planet to some degree.

From my personal experience, by isolating and being mandated to keep our distance through the shutdown there have been lasting psychological effects where we have been conditioned to respond from a place of guardedness, skepticism and further hyper-independence. From what I have witnessed, the fearful state of being becomes a normalized practice of keeping people apart and unknowingly can create a mentality of self-preservation. The fear and losses experienced in the pandemic may also have long-term implications on mental health due to the many loved-ones people lost during that time (Brenner & Bhugra, 2020). The long term effects of bio-markers across generations is something that will have to be captured in future research.

The disconnection can have generational effects for years to come (Brenner & Bhugra, 2020). Notably, as in other previous historical trauma events there has been political intervention to create the separateness, with no follow-up intervention to generate social renewal. The covid-19 pandemic has become a macro-cultural influence that has led to instability, uncertainty, and crisis on an individual level (Subedi, 2020) that should be factored into mental health status and diagnostics. Experiencing historical trauma, without any emotional context or follow-up plan for integrating the experience is a chronic pattern that stems back to colonization and perpetuates cultural systems of oppression (Pitlik & Rode, 2017). The idea that children were expected to return to school and integrate normally after such a disruptive time period without emotional debriefing is potentially modern day patriarchal management intending to disorient the masses. This response mimics previous literature on other historical events and will be described in the next section (Pitlik & Rode, 2017).

Effects of Historical Trauma

This literature review tries to capture many terms to depict the complexity of systems integrating and affecting an individual. Structuration theory (Giddens, 1986) describes this

recursive process as the “duality of structure” (Schneidewind et al., 2018, p. 14), where the relationships between micro and macro are not separate but intersect to affect the individual and larger societal roles. The individual becomes part of the larger moving system and cannot be separated by the exchange. This is a direct result of the environmental power structures that exist and previously existed.

Hussein Bulhan (2015) applies the term *metacolonialism* to describe the current day social, economic, legal, and political systems that interfere with individuals that are historically rooted in systems of colonized nations (Mayengo et al., 2018). Under the consideration of metacolonialism, the historical trauma structures of colonialism can impact current day social-structures of how people exist in society. For instance, Subedi (2020) acknowledges capitalism as a power structure that has infiltrated all levels of how individuals have to survive, and yet it is not seen in the medical or mental health fields as a direct influence on people. The idea of metacolonialism begins to shift individual pathology to societal oppression. People can begin to see the interchange of person and community and how promoting a lens of fluid reciprocity can broaden what needs to be changed and re-created.

Colonization, loss of land, and slavery practices are historical markers that have embedded a deeper sense of mistrust and supported individualistic mentalities (Pitlik & Rode, 2017). This can be seen within the larger effects of marginalized groups and may be explored through feelings of betrayal within a person’s cognitive schema. Betrayal trauma theory (Freyd, 1996; Cromer, 2018) suggests that trauma experienced in a dependent dynamic (i.e., caregiver and child) can be more harmful due to the violation of trust that is supposed to be inherent in the relationship. This can cause a sense of confusion within the relationship. The child ultimately questions their worldview of security (Bowlby, 1973). The confusion can contribute to the

dynamic of oppression the individual experiences. If they inherently feel unsafe, they will react in guarded ways. Many of these reactions are unconscious as people avoid addressing these cognitive schemas. This concept can be seen as betrayal blindness.

Betrayal blindness is avoiding in one's consciousness the betrayal of a dependent relationship in order to survive, perpetuating the colonized system (Cromer, 2018). The concept of betrayal blindness in society becomes a collective pathology of oppression. When a marginalized group is dependent on another group, the marginalized people will potentially obey and adhere by avoiding how the power systems are impacting their lives (2018). This conditions the oppressive lifestyle as normal and embeds in the individual a deep mistrust in the world due to the injustice. An example of this as a collective is described concisely by Rinker and Lawler (2018):

A Palestinian youth approaches a checkpoint expecting the Israeli soldier to act abusively. He acts tense and sullen, triggering the soldier's hostile reactions. In reverse, the soldier sees a youth approaching who has no ill intent but misrecognizes him as a threat, assumes a defensive and authoritarian posture, and the youth reacts accordingly.
(p. 154)

Israeli-Palestinian police brutality and anti-Black racism with police brutality are reflections of current day global colonialism (Rinker & Lawler, 2018). The young person obeys in response to being dependent on his oppressor's reactions, despite whether he actually needed to or not. Freire (1970) calls these conditioned responses are self-regulating behaviors that support people in power and disempower the subordinate masses. Betrayal blindness conditions people to uphold certain roles and continues the dynamic of normalized oppression standards.

Just like the Palestinian boy, people who are oppressed may engage in avoidant behaviors in order to continue surviving, which perpetuates the oppression or self-fulfilling cycles of trauma. On the other hand, this may be seen as a resistance towards the oppressive structures. Menakem (2017) discusses the tension between survival behaviors that may be contributing to historical/intergenerational trauma patterns as a form of resilience that can be learned from in order to go forward. He names this as *traumatic retentions* (p. 254) because these behaviors embody both strength and weakness at the same time. Marginalized people had and continue to have to avoid reactionary responses from their oppressors in order to protect themselves from injustice. These survival responses may have been a form of resilience to survive at one point, but it may also be behaviors that are being passed down to the next generation that ultimately keep the cycle of oppression alive throughout time.

According to betrayal blindness, not addressing the trauma becomes an avoidant behavior resulting in feelings of collective shame and victim/aggressor cycles (Cromer, 2018). The identification of the victim role can create feelings of learned helplessness and has been empirically associated with depression, substance use, anger, and guilt (Cromer, 2018). Seligman (1975) describes this concept of internalized learned helplessness as a model that people operate from because of repeated events in their lives that are not in their control. Colonization can potentially create oppressive beliefs that stunt autonomy over a person's life. The collective experience of learned helplessness results in continued stagnation and oppression over marginalized populations. Avoidant responses can be seen as traumatic retentions that have enabled marginalized people to survive in resilience or behaviors that create a sense of learned helplessness and perpetuate cycles of oppression. The two perspectives could also potentially exist at the same time. This will be explored further in the following section. However, without

acknowledging the colonial destruction, the inherited messages again infer to the individual *what is wrong with me?*, without holding the accountability of historical context and considering how it has contributed to the present self-concepts. The need for how historical trauma is impacting marginalized people needs to be incorporated in diagnostic strategies (Subedi, 2020).

Now acknowledging historical trauma can be confusing in the development of children of oppressed or marginalized groups, as there is no clear answer to why they feel the way they do. Parents who are living in chronic stress due to slave-labor oppression and generational poverty are more prone to chronic stress, which limits their emotional availability that they can provide for their children (Bierman et al., 2021). This can potentially affect children of marginalized populations who may be at higher risk because they may not have the secure modeling behavior needed for self-regulation (Bowlby, 1973). The stress of poverty can also prevent parents from modeling the skills needed to emotionally navigate the world (Djurdjevic et al., 2022). However, this may not be the case for all marginalized groups and acknowledging the resilience of those that are trying to reform societal oppression is important to highlight. Anti-oppression resistance frameworks have been identified to address systemic racism and sexism as a black protest tradition (Nummi et al., 2019). This has taken the form of unapologetic black liberation movements that identify journalism and social platforms as a vehicles to connect past and present ongoing effects of historical trauma. The sociological movements to address the intersectional issues of systemic oppression have become the forefront of how Western culture can change. However, Menakem (2019) argues an integration of sociological and personal healing needs to take place in order to disrupt the trauma on all fronts.

Research has identified as a result of chronic stress, there is a neurological impact on the pre-frontal cortex that affects impulse control centers and executive functioning problem solving

skills in the brain (Bierman et al., 2021). This stems into the question of why ADD/ADHD diagnoses have been so prevalent recently and whether this has to do with historical trauma biomarkers being activated by the pandemic. The chronic stress of financial poverty and lack of resources negatively impacts children's mental health (Bierman et al., 2021). Notably, their lack of emotion regulation skills could potentially be seen as defiant behavior (Bierman et al., 2021) rather than the result of historical trauma. The literature reinforces the importance of having discussions about historical trauma as a part of the healing dialogue and interception during mental health treatment (Atallah et al., 2018; Menakem, 2017). Framing this lens for those who are privileged as well as those who are oppressed in a clinical setting can be a part of the collective empowerment. The following section will explore how the literature addresses the concepts further.

Resiliency and Resistance

Resilience has been defined as a construct representing one's ability to adapt and cope with adversity, trauma, and unjust social system (Jordan et al., 2021; Prowell, 2019). The adaptations that a marginalized individual has to endure highlights the inequity within these social structures. The literature explains that recognizing resilience within social sciences becomes necessary, and at the same time, can normalize marginalized people's conformity to survival mechanisms (Jordan et al., 2021). It is important to note that not all people respond to adversity in the same way, and survival mechanisms can be seen as negative coping mechanisms in the eyes of white patriarchal standards. The literature emphasizes that social work has now focused on resilience as protective factors which applauds individuals who have sustained hardship and abuse successfully, and ultimately minimizes the focus on changing the standards of societal oppression (Jordan et al., 2021; Prowell, 2019). Focusing strictly on resilience

perpetuates the idea of “bouncing back from colonialism” (Jordan et al., 2021, p. 2) and may dismiss the severity at hand. It also emphasizes the change within the individual and may negate the needed societal changes.

In an effort to hold both personal/group resilience and societal oppression in the same container, I have chosen to acknowledge both the hardship and adaptation of marginalized people with the need to continue focusing on the responsibility for social systems to change. Harmful resilience strategies in some research could be seen as protective factors in other studies. The literature suggests that holding space for this tension is the underpinnings of resistance theories and frameworks (Jordan et al., 2021). Resistance for survival and resistance for purposeful agency are two ways of reacting to societal oppression. Survival resistance implies that disadvantaged people have done the best they could do to survive (Leach & Livingstone, 2015) and insinuates terms that have traditionally been termed *maladaptive* in the field of psychology, while purposeful resistance shows “various methods by which people resist through self-authorship to assert a self-concept contrary to dominant discourses” (Jordan et al., 2021, p. 3). The sociocultural framework of resistance created by Jordan et al., (2021) describes the reciprocal relationship between critical consciousness and reflection of social inequality and intentional action towards liberatory and transformational power.

Part of the sociocultural resistance can be seen as *cultural revitalization*, or reclaiming cultural identities (Jordan et al., 2021). An example of this could be the history of jazz music within Black communities that have survived slavery (Moffic, 2022), Indigenous drum circle gatherings where different tribes come together to play and listen around the sacred drum, or continuing family couscous dinners on Fridays after Muslim prayer. The literature is beginning to show that *culture as treatment* is effective for substance use and suicide prevention, and

mental illnesses (Gone, 2013; Klingspohn, 2018; Rowan et al., 2014). The tension between conforming into societally oppressive standards in order to survive and remaining authentic to one's cultural origin is a difficult task. Notably, I have taken this into consideration when critically thinking about the co-researchers descriptions and some of the tension between my implicit bias and their will to remain authentic within the last two chapters. This line of thought continues the discussion of how the literature is evolving in these critically thinking conversations and will continue below.

Adjusting Our Ontological Lens. Atallah et al. (2018) describe the need for transdisciplinary mapping of eco-social intergenerational protective pathways. Because of the complex intersectional issues that create human development, multiple disciplines are needed to create a holistic lens. This means stepping out into critical thinking of how we are handling the inherited messages that perpetuate cycles of oppression and individual dissonance. “We know trauma affects both the body and the mind of the individual as a system, but scholars continue to see collective historical traumas on the body politic of societies as an effect rather than a foundational cause” (Rinker & Lawler, 2018, p. 151). Western psychology has pathologized the individual to be *the sick one* that needs treatment and recovery rather than looking systemically to create reform. Kellermann (2007) argues that we should be in an era of *sociatric* methods rather than psychiatric methods, meaning we treat the society as the patient. From a social-ecological theory perspective, we can incorporate an interdisciplinary approach—psychology, sociology, anthropology, economists, and mind-body learnings into a critical lens for healing the collective systems that contribute to individual and collective pathology (Maté, 2022).

Rinker and Lawler (2018) describe this as using a *traumagenic experience lens* in order to override the collective limbic response. Rather than reacting in violence to the oppression,

understanding through activism will deconstruct the aggressor/victim roles. The idea of shifting from a survival state to sustained resiliency can be a focus for the societal norms of marginalized people. Gaining information about individual narratives that contribute to the collective historical narrative in order to create group conscious. The collective healing narrative is generated through resilience and empowerment within the community.

Often times posttraumatic stress disorder is not associated with the effects of historical trauma, but there is research starting to emerge especially with the recent covid-19 pandemic events (Brenner & Bhugra, 2020; Pitlik & Rode, 2017). The literature highlights the importance of a multicultural lens when exploring a person's mental health. This takes expanding our lens from an individualistic mentality to a person-community standpoint. These paradigms will be further explored in the next section.

Deconstructing Binaries

The biological model is primarily the basis of current Western society's way of understanding human development (Fave, 2013), which neglects to acknowledge historical trauma and societal structures that affect individuals and cause distress in marginalized people (Brown, 2021). These constructs can influence peer pressure, family beliefs, and cultural standards that support white supremacy. Fave (2013) calls to challenge the hegemonies of white heteropatriarchy that infiltrate Western-American culture, often seen as "the good soldier" or "the sexy woman" that manifest symptoms of anxiety and depression when constructs are not met (p. 62). Having these social power structures in place continuously imprints messages of conformity and segregation of *the other*. When the imprinted expectations are not met, a dissonance occurs within the individual and that is when symptomology can present (Fave, 2013).

Creating the ideologies within psychology also needs to be meticulous in order to counter the current cultural trend of pathologizing the individual. Mental health professionals are trained to engage in practices that unknowingly help to sustain the cultural distortions, including the practice of treating human behavior as primarily driven by biology (Fave, 2013). Despite having feminist empowerment strategies interwoven into mental health training, the construct of the psychology field as a whole does not have a critical integration (Brown, 2021). The process of therapy itself is an individual healing journey which often times implies that others do not have the same feelings and perpetuates a sense of loneliness. The process of therapy also implies that pain and suffering is abnormal and people need help for something that should not exist.

Focusing on the individual in therapy reinforces the separation of person-community dynamic and perpetuates individualistic mentality. Brown (2021) calls for critical social justice-based practices in the mental health field to become the vehicle for reducing the pathologized individual, “to accept mainstream mental health biomedicalizing discourse and practices is siding with power and inequity” (p. 645). Critical clinical practices allow for people’s narratives to exist within the social contexts of inequalities, while re-evaluating the labels of the biomedical diagnostic model (Maté, 2022). This perspective allows for the person-community relationship to emerge.

Myth of Meritocracy as a Historical Trauma Narrative

Capitalism is a construct that describes the relationships between power, capital, and nature (Subedi, 2020). Pitlik and Rode (2017) describe the individualistic values that support capitalism also support white supremacy. Systems and institutions that have been created to perpetuate the *9-5 Monday-Friday* mentality are rooted in colonized mentalities. These systems do not benefit the lower/middle socio-economic classes who are actually sustaining

these systems, but rather they perpetuate the inequity of those in power (Mitchell, 2018). These undervalued labor structures mimic the slave work-force that have historically kept white heterosexual men in power (Mudgway, 2021).

The Industrial Revolution is rooted in the inequality of labor and trade and has created the normalcy of overworked and underpaid work systems in Western-American culture (Pitlik & Rode, 2017). Rather than creating a community of interwoven equality, the fragmented culture creates the individualistic mentality and promotes personal goals as the most important outcome. The development of neoliberalism began the separation of person-community within the American culture (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism originated in the 1940s and initiated the free market's opposing state intervention within economic systems (Harvey, 2005).

Separating from the state supports the mindset of everyone fending for themselves. Social freedom also creates a capitalist competitiveness. This ontological view perpetuates "an aggressive form of civic competition in the United States" (Westcott, 2015), which causes "many citizens to begrudge investments in the development of others (i.e., affirmative action or secondary education in the prison system) because a particular benefit is not available to them" (p. 274). Not only does this mentality create an inherent separateness, but it also provides a way of living that leads to the myth of meritocracy, or the idea that one can reach success regardless of class origin. The illusion of meritocracy is that "we are the masters of our own fate, not society and its culture. If we fail, it is our own fault" (Fave, 2013, p. 61). This idea discounts the historical narratives that have contributed to traumas, oppression, or privileges that are inherited. Everyone does not start mentally/emotionally/physically from the same starting point and may not have access to the same resources. The individual pursuits of capitalism give a false sense of equity within Western-American culture (Fave, 2013).

The byproduct of meritocracy is the inherent separateness that it creates by *chasing the American dream*. The focus on personal gain creates a psychological separateness, and the capitalistic pursuit of wealth with a hyper-work culture that creates a physical separateness. Bessire (2012) describes this idea further by suggesting that isolation may be a voluntary self-preserving mechanism and byproduct of oppressive violence. This standard of living becomes normal and the greater care for community connection is squeezed out of its importance. This form of *biolegitimacy*, or uneven terms created by a political authority, sets the standard for consumer industries, school systems, and other institutions that affect the individual and family lifestyle (Fassin, 2009). Through this lens, the power structures not only set the tone for the operation of life, but also the meaning and value of life. The capitalist social structures that promote isolation raise the expectation of having to achieve as the primary focus. This supports continuing the colonist mentalities of low-wage work labor systems, supporting historical political violence (Bessire, 20212).

The low-wage work labor systems also create a sub-human social hierarchy that unconsciously perpetuates an inherited sense of devaluation (Bessire, 2012). Always striving to attain success without having the social structures to support that success creates the dissonance of the meritocratic belief. Failing this expectation can affect people's psyches and potentially result in lowered self-worth causing depression. From my observation, avoiding each other has become part of the normalized Western-American culture and the consequences of that trajectory have potentially led to an individualist ontology that influences people's mental health. Capitalistic-driven societies do not see the value in supporting the other, leading to pathologizing the individual as the problem when standards are not up to capitalistic par (Subedi, 2020). The individual may become criminalized as an infection in society, rather than the individual being a

manifestation of systemic oppression (Kellermann, 2007). In order to deconstruct the unhealthy cultural values that contribute to these implicit messages, further understanding of the person-community relationship needs to be explored. The role of the system needs a level of accountability that is not currently in the mental health field (Maté, 2022). There is only new material within the literature that links capitalism as a main contributor to individual symptoms. Capitalism is not recognized within the mental health field (Maté, 2020) and should be a major point of research exploration. There is emerging acknowledgement that there are other interrelated systems at play within individual symptomology, but it is very minimal. The following section will describe the literature on the convergence of family and systemic structures that may be affecting teen girls.

Intersection of Intergenerational Trauma and Macro-cultural Influences:

Macro and Micro Convergence

Farr et al. (2016) describe the importance of transforming the multiple forms of oppression in our society rather than remaining in a one-dimensional liberation movement. The choice to review the literature of intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural influences at length was to work towards a multi-dimensional way of operating in liberation psychology. The layered systems will aim to embody a more thorough picture of the human experience, which will be discussed in detail within this next section.

Existing Bio-ecological Models

Bronfenbrenner's (1994) bio-social-ecological model of human development, Ungar's (2013) social-ecological model of resilience, and Ballou's (2002) feminist ecological model were all examined as pre-existing models of human development. Bronfenbrenner's (1994) model focuses on the multi-layered system of person-community relationship. This includes the

individual; microsystem (family system); mesosystem (school, peers, community); exosystem (interchange between levels) and chronosystem (history). This model became the template to expand with further models to create the final model.

Ungar (2013) further related the concept of resilience in relation to each domain. He describes resilience as a reaction to stress, formed by environmental protective factors. Incorporating resiliency into the research was important when examining how people may react to inheriting a marginalized lifestyle. Unger articulates that exposure to high stress in the environment results in coping strategies that may not be as helpful to the advancement of one's life:

The more a child is exposed to adversity (e.g. exposure to violence, poverty, disability) the more the children's resilience depends on the quality of the environment (rather than individual qualities) and the resources that are available and accessible to nurture and sustain well-being. (p. 350)

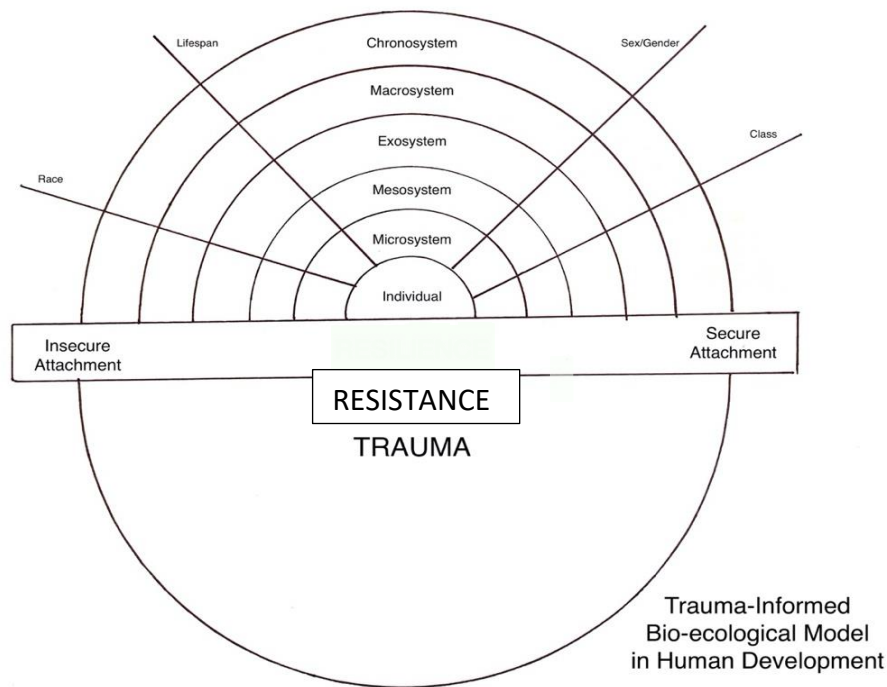
How the environment (caregiver, community) responds to the stress will translate to the child's behaviors. This interchange of family resilience to societal pressures also demonstrates the intersectional layer. This model supports the person-community aspect of overcoming adversity rather than reinforcing societal oppression in a marginalized individual.

The third model integrated into this visual is Ballou's (2002) feminist perspective, including—age, race, sex/gender, and class. The need for integration of these models represents a growing understanding of the person-community relationship. Understanding the hegemonic oppressions that are present in societal norms is important when trying to understand a person's human development and supports the holistic model of examining cultural narratives. In order to capture the essence of all three models, I developed a model incorporating the intersectionality of

intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural influences to better explore the person-community dynamic.

Figure 1

Trauma-Informed Bio-ecological Model of Human Development.



Note. This model was developed as a visual representation of the intersectional relationship between intergenerational trauma, historical trauma, and macro-cultural influences.

The model presented above see Figure 1 is the Trauma-Informed Bio-ecological Model of Human Development. This model attempts to integrate the three previous models discussed within the literature as an expansion of understanding human development. The model is a visual depiction of all the facets in life and how they may intersect or exist adjacent to each other. The basis of the model emphasizes the effects of intergenerational trauma intersecting with historical trauma, and macro-cultural influences. The top half of the circle describes all of the bio-ecological factors that can contribute to human development. Using a strong emphasis on attachment theory, the model emphasizes attachment and resilience as a protective factor from

traumatic experiences. However, there is a wide spectrum of secure attachment and insecure attachment and that spectrum may impact the level of resilience and resistance. This raises the question of where does the secure attachment come from if it is not from caregivers. This raises a larger question of ontological security within society (a potential example was noted prior in my pandemic commentary) and how that can be created to support an individual or community.

With this view, the model becomes an attempt at identifying a potential relationship to insecure attachment and societal hegemonic standards, including capitalism, which will be further explored in chapter 5. The integration of resilience and resistance are important distinct concepts that were outlined in the previous section. These terms within the figure highlight the mechanisms to overcome adversity whether positive or negative in their compensation to environmental/historical effects. Overall, the figure represents the person-family-community perspective as a way of exploring the human experience. This model was helpful in navigating the critical power analysis to deeper explore the social-ecological impact of the co-researchers' experience and may be helpful for future research as a model for human development.

Intersection of Intergenerational Trauma and Macro-cultural Influences in Adolescents

To capture the intersecting relationship within a population, I have chosen to investigate the experience of adolescent females in relation to intergenerational trauma, historical trauma, and macro-cultural influences. “The theoretical distinction between historical trauma and intergenerational transmission of trauma is important because they suggest different pathways to healing” (Cromer, 2018, p. 111). This concept creates a binary between micro and macro systems. By distinguishing the two phenomena as the vertical vs. horizontal planes of trauma, the intersectional connection is lost. However, understanding both is necessary to explore the gaps needed for the hermeneutic process of uncovering the links between person and society:

“Dismantling the one form of oppression demands the dismantling of all” (Farr et al., 2016, p. 474). Addressing one form of oppression within an individual may perpetuate the fragmentation of identity and misrepresent their full human experience.

Macro-cultural influences become important as a second domain to assess with adolescent females because of the societal awareness that happens at the developmental stage. This is not how I was trained within my clinical training and there was not academic literature that reinforced highlighting historical trauma conversations at the time of my studies. However, the social influences that contribute to peer acceptance and historical trauma factors that perpetuate marginalized standards are important within the assessment process of clinical work with young people. This realization became essential when I was considering the critical power analysis findings in chapter 5. Reworking the intersecting messages can be a part of the deconstruction process towards healthier internal working models that create security for young peoples’ identity formation. The following will describe some of the literature aspects of how messages in the environment affect adolescents.

Adolescents and Human Development

Exploring the development of an adolescent can be complex. Harrison (2017) describes the intersection of social identities as layered systems that “mutually constitute, reinforce and naturalize one another” (p. 1025). During my review, it appears the constructs of race, class, and gender are not fully explored and need further research to expand the field. When looking at what impacts an adolescent girl’s experience, focusing on one construct without the rest leads to misinformation. Essentially, the process of looking at one impact of development cannot be observed without seeing the coexisting parts. Notably, the literature on Black adolescent girls has been largely neglected (Harrison, 2017). Kimberly Crenshaw (1991), a major activist of the

Black feminist movement, has ignited a movement bringing awareness to the Black female voice that has been silenced throughout history. This is also reflected in the literature outside of Black feminist scholarship. The neglect of anti-Black racism and sexism as a focus of research in literature reinforces white patriarchy as an overall message in Western-American culture. This perpetuates the sub-human message that marginalized populations do not need to be acknowledged, even within progressive research.

There is a large body of literature on adolescent identity formation called positive youth development literature (Arnold, 2017; Fox, 2016; Mas-Exposito et al., 2022). During the adolescent identity formation, a realization of race, gender and class hegemonies produces questioning of their position in these systems and what that means for them as a person (Arnold, 2017). *Where am I within the world?* When the standards of these macro-cultural influences are not met (i.e., poor grades, issues with weight gain or restriction, androgenous behavior), identity can be questioned (2017). The question of—*Who am I?* can easily lead to thoughts of feeling like an outsider and potential questions of—*what is wrong with me?* In my clinical observation, when identity formation is not emotionally supported, symptoms may present within the individual that may look like depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and suicidal ideations. Positive youth literature is moving towards a framework of creating caring environments rather than focusing on the deficits of young people (Mas-Exposito et al., 2022). This also requires reflection on how a young person's environment may be contributing to highlighting the deficits.

Adolescents and Invalidation from Caregivers

Invalidation becomes a central theme related to adolescent experiences as the adolescents begin to perceive their heightened insecurities as reality. Bennett et al. (2018) describe invalidating responses by a caregiver as “criticism, rejection, and/or punishment of a child's

emotions” (p.210), ultimately dismissing the emotional state a child is experiencing. Any perceived invalidation can reinforce negative thoughts they already had or are forming about themselves. Notably, these negative thoughts were potentially formed at some point by their early environment. Whether the caregiver is actually rejecting the child, or the lack of emotional attunement is suggesting the child is rejected, the child experiences the same feelings of invalidation (Bennett et al., 2018). The lack of attunement supports Bowlby’s (1973) attachment theory, suggesting that the caregiver must be available and emotionally present to provide a sense of secure attachment; otherwise, the child defaults to perceive the environment/caregiver(s) as a threat. This sets the tone for an unavailable caregiver, one that does not have enough time to attune, prompting a deep sense of invalidation. According to this perspective, this becomes important in recognizing symptomology in children and adolescents. The literature is extensive regarding the correlation between psychopathology of adolescents and perceived parental invalidation (McCallum & Goodman, 2019).

Eisenberg et al. (1996) proposed that negative reactions to children’s negative emotions increased their emotional arousal. If a caretaker cannot respond to a child’s needs, this invalidates their sense of security in the world. This would support attachment theory, suggesting that without the emotional attunement of the caregiver the child does not feel secure and becomes emotionally dysregulated. The dysregulation can look like resistance or defiance within the child when in reality the dysregulation becomes a behavior trying to get their emotional needs met. These reactions can include self-injurious behavior, feelings of emptiness, impulsivity, risky sexual behavior, and/or unhealthy eating habits (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Penner et al., 2019). The reaction between person and environment also supports the social ecological lens that the environment is sculpting the individual while the individual has an impact on said

environment. Not understanding the context of why the adolescent is “acting out” can further pathologize the individual; supporting the idea that there is something inherently wrong with them (Maté, 2022). Focusing on symptomology reinforces the idea that an adolescent’s identity is *bad*, rather than drawing explanations from the environment that has originally created their behavior (Maté, 2022).

Notably, the literature that I found only focuses on the mother-daughter dynamic related to invalidation (Eisenberg et al., 1998; McCallum & Goodman, 2019; Penner et al., 2019). This reflects the patriarchal hegemony of mothers having the responsibility of the caretaking, and when something goes wrong, the blame and fault is placed on the mother. The father’s responsibility is never mentioned, except in Gabor Maté’s (2022) recent book, where he emphasizes that the paternal role should be acknowledged in the transmission of intergenerational trauma. The overall neglect in previous literature reinforces how the oppressive patriarchal construct negates accountability from the father figure. This neglect in the literature could also be mimicking the absence of a fathers within marginalized homes, which could also contribute to symptoms within the child that may not be acknowledged during clinical assessments and/or research. Ironically, leaving out the absent father in the literature is mimicking and reinforcing the life events some adolescents may be experiencing. This overall absence is a social paradigm that should be critically considered within societal expectations.

The most recent literature is extending epigenetic research related to invalidation through studies understanding how rats that did not receive nurturance from their parents who also did not provide organic maternal attunement for their offspring (Maté, 2022). This suggests an avenue of how invalidation can be passed down through generations and demonstrates how intergenerationally the attachment to caregivers can become a major concern for mental health in

the next generation. Invalidation from caregivers is one aspect of environmental factors; however, there are other important relational aspects that may affect adolescents.

Adolescents and Invalidation from Peers

Young people developmentally start to break away from their parents and value peer relationships, which can be extremely influential in their development (Arnold, 2017; Nergaard, 2020). The relationships adolescents navigate can be difficult when they do not have a healthy model, and the heartbreak of social rejection when adolescents face invalidation from their peers can be devastating (Nergaard, 2020). The significance of social relations during adolescence is heightened and the need for companionship, intimacy and social and emotional support becomes an important part of development (Eisenberg et al., 1998). Without having this companionship and sense of belonging, research indicates that both boys and girls have difficulty with emotion regulation strategies (Cui et al., 2020). Notably, girls tend to compare themselves more to a social group, which acts as a negative reinforcement of how they perceive themselves (Nergaard, 2020). This comparison puts pressure on the need to please peers, and peers become an active agent for social environment influence.

Barrett and Ballou (2008) state that without having positive peer support, adolescents turn to alternate ways of gaining acceptance through “body size, acquiring trendy clothing, and engaging in multiple sexual encounters” (p. 50). The deprivation of feeling a part of a group creates a heightened sense of searching for it in other ways (Nergaard, 2020), which may lead to riskier behaviors to draw attention. Lack of healthy peer outlets may lead adolescents to seek social relations in gangs or violent crime acts to feel a part of a social group. People will seek validation in whatever ways they can achieve, even if it is not the healthiest form.

The culture can potentially shape the adolescent need and drive to seek acceptance, depending on societal norms. For example, when the cultural emphasis is on body image rather than character, adolescents will strive for the perfect body. This is an evolutionary basis of behavior that humans will go to great lengths to fulfill the internal drive to relate to others and avoid rejection (Nergaard, 2020). They often begin to compare themselves to their peers, or peers will directly point out the fact they do not “fit in” in the form of bullying (Arnold, 2017). When they cannot achieve this ideal, the implicit invalidation turns into feelings of shame or disgust with themselves. The lack of mutual recognition affects their self-esteem (Nergaard, 2020). This can cause extreme measures to occur (i.e., eating disorders) in order to conform to the cultural perception. This literature suggests that peers have a direct effect on the emotional state and potentially on the human development related to mental health symptoms (Eisenberg et al., 1998).

Rejection from peers can prompt individuals to feel less motivated to self-regulate, which present as symptoms of depression (Nergaard, 2020). Within bio-medical model training, the depressive symptomology is likely to be attributed to biological deficiencies rather than seeing peer rejection as the reason for certain disorders that adolescents are being diagnosed with. As a result, I have seen young people often labeled with diagnoses that they may integrate into their identity for the rest of their lives (Maté, 2022). The connection between environment and the adolescent’s depression/anxiety may become lost when the environmental messages adolescents experience are not addressed. The adolescent becomes the problem rather than the environment they are living within, which can ultimately reinforce their invalidated experience of having something inherently wrong with them (Maté, 2022). Capturing the essence of how young

people see themselves and understanding the level of importance of peer validation is essential for treatment (Maté, 2022).

Intersection of Invalidation of Caretakers, Peers, and Individualistic Mentality

The connection between caretakers and peers may be linked to a larger macro-cultural influence rooted in societal expectations. Understanding the intricacies of how each contributes to another becomes important in seeing the holistic lens of an adolescent girl's experience. Eisenberg et al., (1998) explore the intersectional connection of the caretaker and peer invalidation, which suggests there is a bidirectional process between unsupported emotions within the family structure that affect the socialization capabilities with peers. Heuristic models suggest the interactive process between parental characteristics (values, childrearing philosophy, parental regulation, and emotionality) and characteristics of the culture or subculture (e.g., cultural values about the expression of emotion or the role of parental childrearing practices in development) directly influence a young person's development (Eisenberg et al., 1998). This intersectional combination of messages is supported by the overarching cultural views that are supported by invalidating systems. Ungar et al. (2012) also describe this in a cross-cultural study, which identified findings that included seven aspects of a young person's environment that contribute to stress and interfere with daily functions—relationships, a powerful identity, power and control within social justice, access to material resources, a sense of cohesion, belonging and spirituality, and cultural adherence. The broad spectrum of influences supports the need for a holistic system of care between the child-family-community-society.

The idea of the person-family-community-society relationship supports the overall intent of this dissertation study by investigating further the messages of family and macro-cultural influences to understand their convergence. Patriarchal white supremacy becomes a major power

system that supports white male dominance (Mudgway, 2021), and neglecting the intersection of the social hegemonies does a disservice to understanding adolescent girls' experiences.

Multicultural feminist frameworks were created to include all individuals with equity, rather than a hierarchy by separating groups into specific hegemonies (Pech, et al., 2020). The idea that all people can come together as a collective movement is an uprising of resiliency that has been increasing overtime.

The way others see adolescents is important to how adolescents see themselves in the world (Nergaard, 2020). Understanding their environment is essential to understanding the internal conflict occurring in a young person's experience. The literature on the caretaker and peer invalidation is more recent and does not thoroughly address the issue of genetic and environmental effects. The gap within the literature is linking the biological inheritance to parental emotional responses and socialization with peers. One intention of this literature review is to bridge the gap by uncovering intersectional messages adolescents are experiencing for future research. Engaging in this intersectional view of research will potentially begin to dismantle individualistic psychology models that do not address societal influences.

Vision of a Holistic Perspective Through Deconstruction of Pathological Thinking

The idea of breaking away from the bio-medical model and expanding the macro-cultural lens as a cultural movement of empowerment can be the next step for the medical-social-psychological fields. There have been several people that have advanced these shifts throughout the past few decades. With the intention of gaining a holistic vision, re-constructing how Western society views human experiences rather than focusing on symptoms begins to deconstruct individual pathological thinking. The following sections will outline those influential people and movements that have contributed and continue to contribute to this shift.

Integrating Sociology and Psychological Perspectives

Lev Vygotsky (1993), was one of the first to break into a sociological perspective of thinking and began the overarching conversation of how mental health should be viewed from a macro-level integrative perspective. Vygotsky (1993) argued that cross-culturally, humans have nearly identical biology yet varying psychological phenomena, indicating the impact social development has on human consciousness. Ratner (2009) extended Vygotsky's (1993) work by initiating Macro Cultural Psychology, which merges psychology and the social sciences. The aim is to better understand the intersectional relationship of person-community in order to apply transformative practices in the community. Ratner (2009) emphasizes the need to generate strategies for developing collective consciousness within societal structures. This is also seen within the literature as a recent critical theory movement for social work to start practicing social justice-based social work (Brown, 2021). The realization that systemic power structures including anti-Black racism, sexism, agism, ablism, and capitalist work forces, are beginning to be acknowledged as major socio-cultural factors influencing mental health symptoms (Maté, 2020; Mitchell, 2018).

Creating a Sociological Movement

Martín-Baró (1996) advanced the idea that sociological perspectives can be intertwined within a movement with the idea of liberation psychology, which viewed healing trauma on a collective level through enlightenment and dialogic engagement. "Liberation psychology not only focuses on healing community trauma but also on celebrating aspects of strength joy, creativity and resiliency in one's heritage, history, and community" (Gupta, 2019, p. 3). Mayengo et al. (2018) describe liberation psychology as the practice of healing societies with a process of transforming inequalities within communities. This is done utilizing democratic

strategies and involving the community members to liberate themselves (Mayengo et al., 2018). The idea is to recognize the underground history in order to transform the future (Fals-Borda, 2013). Liberation psychology becomes a vessel for historical contexts to become foregrounded into current experience, creating a depth of meaning for the individual's identity.

Uncovering the multifaceted contexts of historical trauma contexts becomes part of social justice awareness. Freire (1970) describes the term *conscientizacao* as a process of awakening our critical consciousness. The objective of liberation psychology research is to use research as a “vehicle for acts of psychological restoration to combat the traumatic psychic effects caused by sociopolitical oppression” (Gupta, 2019, p. 6). In order to accomplish this, the process of awareness through dialogue and action or *praxis*, become the foundation for community empowerment (Freire, 1970). The essence of liberation psychology is utilizing praxis as a transformational tool. The act of the oppressed becoming knowledgeable about the oppression and applying the practice of what is learned for new social constructs is the ultimate goal. Liberation psychology corresponds with Jordan et al.'s (2021) sociocultural framework of resistance, which incorporates the reciprocal relationship of critical consciousness and intentional action. This takes mobilization within the community. Liberation psychology reflects the overall essence of this dissertation study by incorporating the key themes of dialogic engagement, collective collaboration, and active empowerment.

Community Psychology: Active Deconstruction

According to community psychology, when community needs are not being met, personal wellness is affected. Prilleltensky (2008) describes the importance of community psychology exploring how power may be used to enable or inhibit access to resources to promote social change. He emphasizes that the objective of community psychology is to promote

ecological structure of wellness or freedoms, including pursuit of human development, political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantee, and protective security. Obstructing community needs or sociopolitical resources is a concept of distorted power (Prilleltensky, 2008), which then over time results in systems of oppression. Striving for limited resources by those in power can become a social norm instilling repressive cultural codes leading to self-regulating behaviors (Freire, 1970). These “cultural prescriptions” become internalized and create the idea that nothing will change, leaving people to do what they have always done because that is what they are told, ultimately continuing the cycle of oppression (Prilleltensky, 2008, p. 120). In order for people to become free of the cultural codes and perpetuated behaviors, there needs to be action that takes place in the community.

Freedom of cultural codes through community praxis and transformational validity is defined as—“the potential of our actions to promote personal, relational, and collective wellness by reducing power inequalities and increasing political action” (Prilleltensky, 2008, p. 130). This concept of empowerment is described as ways of achieving higher levels of control over an individual’s life. There are many ways of gaining control in order to overcome oppressive systems. Harvey (1996) describes the notion of gaining power and liberation as attaining the best “ecological fit” for the individual. Each person is going to gain empowerment in different ways. This can be seen as engaging in new community practices for collective empowerment—attending town hall meetings as a group, initiating a social justice club, attending local art classes, etc. This fosters social competence and promotes belonging (Harvey, 1996). Similar to liberation psychology, community psychology becomes an active process of understanding power and taking action, rather than just a field of study.

Dialogical Engagement

A thread between all three research sects within this literature review is the notion of creating person-community dialogue. Freire (1970) describes dialogical engagement as a process of dismantling the social messages that promote barriers leading to segregation and oppressive systems. The power differential becomes equalized by having a dialogue of understanding rather than the transactional process of one person hierarchically teaching another within a dialogue. The process of dialogical engagement within research becomes important for deconstructing the oppressive systems within the research process.

Cultural identity is formed through storytelling during healing circle ceremonies and participants become a thread of common identification for each other (Hallett et al., 2017). Individuals share their personal narrative while simultaneously having deeper connections within the community (Hallett et al., 2017). This person-community relationship becomes important in creating collective responsibility for a person's wellness. During the review of psychology literature, I explored decolonizing research and community-based participatory research (CBPR) which emphasize the need to orient research in a dialogical and egalitarian manner.

An anti-colonizing approach to research emphasizes the critical role power plays in research and aims to promote the empowerment of participants rather than observing them as subjects (Cooper et al., 2019). For example, this can be done by incorporating dialogical engagement through Indigenous practices—oral traditions, engagement with elders, healing circles, focusing on body-based awareness, cultivating spiritual practices and traditional community ceremonies of any culture (Mitchell, 2018). These practices integrate the mind-body-spirit concepts that are taught to empower the whole person.

Another attempt at breaking the biomedical model structure within psychology is Muslim Psychology, which takes a more holistic cultural lens to therapy (Ismail, et al., 2021). Western

psychology could not meet the psychospiritual needs of Muslim clients; therefore, Muslim Psychology was designed to take into consideration the spiritual history and practices that are influencing a person (2021). Similarly, Transcultural Psychology attempts to integrate the sacred, ceremonial and spiritual based practices into mental health for Indigenous people (Gone & Kirmayer, 2020). This promotes a sense of sociological influence within the field of psychology. Interaction ritual chain theory (IRC) is another avenue of integrating holistic perspectives to understanding how everyday social interactions outside of formal therapy can facilitate transformative personal change (Clarke & Waring, 2018). Rather than focusing on the individual, a setting of interactive community rituals becomes the vehicle for transformation. Notably, rituals are social interactions with symbolic meanings that are fostered over time and promote a sense of belonging (Clark & Warning, 2018). Rituals generate solidarity, emotional energy, symbols, and a sense of morality, which counter alienation (Clark & Warning, 2018).

Identifying Western-American beliefs and methods as the true way of operating within the mental health field marginalizes Indigenous ways as devalued folklore (Simonds & Christopher, 2013). Aboriginal methodologies for research create a dual purpose of understanding and promoting empowerment of participants (Maygenga et al., 2018; Nuttton & Fast, 2015; Quinn, 2019). This has also been utilized in Black communities within the last two decades through Emotional Emancipation Circles, a way of creating a safe space for discussions around oppressive systems and supporting intra-racial healing (Smith, 2015). Incorporating a multicultural perspective within my literature review and integration of critical analysis was an on-purpose decision for my dissertation as a way of continuing the de-colonizing movement. The need for person-community healing is growing in Western-American society.

The social approach to mental health incorporates therapeutic communities, promoting attachment and belonging. Studies also suggest that supporting healing through collective narratives and rituals can be transformative for the individual and the community (Mayenga et al., 2018; Nuttion & Fast, 2015; Quinn, 2019). Narrative healing practices, healing circles, and Indigenous rituals become main themes within the literature when exploring the intersectional themes of intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural/historical trauma interventions (Hartman & Gone, 2014; Mayenga et al., 2018), which will be outlined further in the cross-cultural empirical findings of this chapter. Further review in the literature explores other ways of deconstructing power. The most notable contribution to this literature review is the commentary on cultural aspects influencing psychological phenomena and questioning society's reaction to automatically fix the individual. The following section demonstrates how the mental health field is beginning to shift into deconstructing power and discusses integrating the social-ecological perspectives that the field of psychology is working towards adopting.

Framing Theory with Social-Ecological Action

The aim for future activism is to create *mana*—a state of being characterized by a community's experience to its own independent authority, control, influence, status, charisma, and spiritual power (Reid et al., 2014). The literature review of social-ecological theory reinforces the interconnected relationships and how narratives of a population can be created through collective oppressed experience (Harvey, 1996). The link between historical trauma, psychological symptoms, and fractured identity demonstrates how the environment contributes to mental health symptoms. Someone that has not necessarily gone through a “traumatic event” may still feel the remnants through skewed identity formation by their environment and biological markers. Through this understanding, the question I am led to is—*what can we do?*

The research of social-ecological perspectives is beginning to shift the field into collective activism. Nutton and Fast (2015) argue that a “deep structure” (p.843) needs to happen in community-based approaches for cultural modifications where community members are fully engaged in their own process. A deep structural change would consist of re-structuring resources and systems that perpetuate white heterosexual patriarchal dominance in society and develop systemic operations that benefit connection, equity and inclusion. This lens is bringing people into community.

Brown (2021) describes some of the structures of neoliberalism that are currently in the mental health field and how they may be perpetuating the subconscious collective narrative of oppression. For example, counselors are trained to teach clients to reframe negative thinking, as if their thinking is the problem. This discounts any acknowledgement that living in a white supremacist heteropatriarchal society should be considered as a contributing catalyst and suggests that any effects of those power structures playing out should be accepted. The responsibility is placed on the individual as an infection that needs to be cured. According to this standard, by *reframing* in order to survive may actually be a form of betrayal blindness.

Rather than diagnosing the symptomology a person presents with, Subedi (2020) states that the field of psychology should be existing within community activism, which would include diagnosing how to treat capitalism and global environmental factors. Educating people and institutions on the effects of colonized systems that are still alive can begin to dismantle the societal oppression that is often labeled as disorders within individuals. This will shift the message from the *diseased-person* to a message that a person is impacted by toxic cultural structures.

Alternative ways of integrating healing and community are surfacing. Dahlgren et al. (2020) also describe the beginning shifts of merging Indigenous ritual practices and Western trauma healing through retreat-based spaces. A recent study was designed for a 5-day intervention retreat to promote healing from trauma symptoms (Dahlgren et al., 2020). Practices included bodywork, energy work, mindfulness, creative movement, outdoor adventure, connection to nature, visual arts and nutritious food (Dahlgren et al., 2020). Creating a community container for healing practices eliminates the sole responsibility of an individual to heal and provides social-emotional support with other people. Herman (2015) states that trauma healing can only occur in relationships that provide emotional safety. The commonality of a group experience can potentially eliminate the idea that people are alone. The sense of connection is an inherent need that becomes fulfilled.

This literature is in its infancy; however, it is growing towards a collective healing. I would also like to make a note of the cultural appropriation in the literature that is using Indigenous holistic practices without tribute or reference to their origins. Without acknowledging the origins of Indigenous practices, the literature can take on a colonized white supremacist ideology, covertly reinforcing what the research is trying to deconstruct. Despite these thoughts, the retreat-based movement is the beginning of altering the traditional office-based therapy session. This progressive stance relates to my dissertation in a way of focusing on the person-community relationship in attempts for an active change for healing generational messages. The following section will demonstrate how this has already transpired in the field.

Literature Review of Empirical Themes

Intergenerational trauma has been investigated through quantitative and qualitative studies, while macro cultural factors have generally been explored through qualitative and

participatory action research. An interesting finding is that the quantitative findings empirically support the qualitative/participatory action research (PAR) social actions (Atallah et al., 2018; Barker et al., 2019; Cooper et al., 2019; Gupta et al., 2019; Hock et al., 2020; Youseff et al., 2018). The consistency of findings is throughout the methodologies.

The information gathered in this review has produced a breadth of information supporting the two paradigms of intergenerational trauma and historical/macro-cultural influences have minimal intersectional review. The lack of research on the intersecting domains is a reflection of how the mental health field continues to view the experiences as separate within the individual. This becomes problematic because neglecting either domain neglects a part of historical context, whether familial or societal, that is contributing to symptomology. Without an explanation, the medical model will continue to reinforce the detached symptomology as a message of *there is something wrong with you* within the individual. Knowing the overlap of familial and cultural messages will deepen the understanding of the human experience.

The adolescent population becomes an important dynamic due to the developmental overlap of identity and attachment formation at the adolescent stage. The adolescent begins to recognize the messages of family and culture, but without context this realization can become detrimental. Minimal research has embodied all major concepts mentioned within this comprehensive literature review and only recent accounts with Thomas Hubl's (2018) Collective Trauma Summit and Gabor Maté's (2022) book have generated a shift within the field. Maté (2022) and Hubl (2018) are the pioneers who are beginning to integrate some of the research that I was able to identify within the gaps of academic literature into mainstream thinking. Major themes that were generated from this review were cross-cultural intersectional findings and the

use of narrative/experiential/holistic practices as interventions for intergenerational and historical trauma. The following will describe the cross-cultural findings in more detail.

Cross-cultural Studies Utilizing Narrative, Ritual and Holistic Processes

The review of qualitative and participatory action studies on intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural influences led to investigating studies involving a person-centered dynamic. Several studies demonstrated the process of deconstructing oppressive research by immersing researchers within the community to explore community needs (Atallah et al., 2018; Hartmann & Gone, 2014; Ungar et al., 2013). Gone and Kirmayer (2020) also note that the difference between Western-American and Indigenous methods in treatment is the elimination of the *spirit* in Western culture. Decolonizing has led to allopathic practices of eliminating the spirit in our daily lives (Gone & Kirmayer, 2020) and this is also replicated within mental health treatment.

The emerging literature is calling for an integral holistic approach that utilizes rituals, narratives, healing circles, music, arts, role play, and spiritual ritual practices as healing modalities within a community context (Maté, 2022; Maygena et al., 2018; Mitchell, 2018). Notably, the only research found involving person-environment ecological approaches involved marginalized populations. This reveals that Indigenous cultures have had the tools all along and the product of colonization has stripped these remedies from current culture. Personally, I hope to bring more recognition for the need of these person-community practices with this research study and pay tribute to the tradition that they hold from generations before.

Multicultural Studies

Hartmann and Gone (2014) conducted a qualitative study interviewing American Indian medicine men for alternate perspectives on historical trauma. This article critiques the medical model that contributes to victim blaming by emphasizing the dysfunction of the individual.

Restorative processes are described with the need for sociopolitical work in order to decolonize clinical practices within the field. The interviews with Indigenous people were conducted as action research where the researchers were submerged within the tribal culture for three months in attempts to grasp deeper narratives. The method of data coding analysis was focused on relationships of community-embedded trauma. The results of the study described ecological community psychology interventions that can be utilized for experiential healing—therapeutic talks, spiritual involvement, ceremonial life, and reestablishing relationships across generations. This study supports the need for holistic restoration processes to rebuild connections as a transformative process to intercept passing emotional wounds to the next generation. The qualitative research becomes a process of narrative discovery that links the person-community dynamic.

Gathering cross-cultural information on intergenerational trauma and systemic structures was also highlighted in Ungar et al.'s (2013) longitudinal studies exploring resilience through *a multi-systemic social-ecological theory*. The article explains that resiliency requires adaptive structures to create security for the individual. This suggests that the need for secure attachment on a societal level is necessary to support family and individual security. The reviewed literature further supports the cross-cultural theme of person-community and the positive outcomes of community interventions rather than individual interventions.

Atallah et al. (2018) did a similar study within the Chilean culture, validating the cross-cultural findings. The researchers utilized critical community resilience praxis (CCRP) a community-based participatory approach to research by building interagency collaboration teams within the Chilean communities. A focus of the teams was building a community of co-learners, emphasizing trust and a shared vision. The community events allowed Atallah and co-

researchers (Atallah et al., 2018) to participate in the culture with food and shared storytelling. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted at the participants' homes. Ethnographic observations were completed in environmental, cultural, and political contexts of participants' lives. The team included participants who reflected on interviews and ethnographic information for the data analysis process, exploring issues of power and colonial dynamics that may be impacting the research. Situational map-making was done creating maps, poster boards, diagrams, tables, and figures to visually see collective information and intersectional patterns. The validity of data analysis increased due to participant voice demonstrated in the active dialogic process of analysis. Results indicated the need for interconnectivity, harmony and bringing culture back to life through intergenerational storytelling, collective routines and rituals. The study became an embodied representation of sharing the culture as a community healing mechanism.

Two other studies supporting the cross-cultural findings were conducted by Atallah (2017) and Atallah et al. (2018), indicating the importance of person-community supports. During a community-based qualitative study at a Palestinian refugee camp, research was conducted to illustrate how community interventions could increase intergenerational resilience (Atallah, 2017). The researchers partnered with an established non-governmental organization that provided community-based services including youth counseling, connecting families to social workers, legal representation, holding international local summer camps, teaching youth media productions, and gardening and ethnic dancing. The study interviewed three generations within the refugee camp. The results reflected resilience passed across generations through two linked processes through verbal (storytelling) and experiential (role playing). The *family tree of resilience* was created as thematic steps towards community healing, weaving traumatic

experiences into a larger story of strength. This bridged the family narrative to historical trauma, while the act of engaging in the community supports deconstructing the oppressive systems.

One of the most poignant studies that was described in the literature was conducted by a Ugandan team of researchers that used primary schoolchildren's perspectives about peace building within their community (Mayenga et al., 2018). The findings described the need for structural changes in the community to change the familial dynamics at home. The students disclosed how the lack of resources including food would affect their communities and translate into anger and violence with their parents, mainly their fathers towards their mothers. The recommendations of this strategy identified needing to educate the students about their oppressive history in order to be liberated from it, while treating the student as a whole person.

The students also expressed how good communication and generational story-telling contribute to unity and peace-building practices (Mayenga et al., 2018). Utilizing cultural practices of "ancestral wisdom" (p. 360) become a safe have and guidance through their Elders. The Elder role became an important concept within the community to provide guidance and mentorship to the next generation (Menakem, 2017). This wisdom was passed down through gatherings, story-telling, rituals and African cosmology spiritual practices. The study also promoted critical participatory action research as a long-term investment to changing communities.

The idea of storytelling and role play as healthy models supports an attachment theory perspective having constructs and behaviors shown to the younger generation as healthy working models. Acknowledging this historical cultural aspect during a community event also supports post-developmental theory by altering the historical trauma of the victim role, restoring power and sending a societal message of community resilience. These studies represent the multifaceted

approach to restructuring person-community narratives. The individual is reciprocally reshaping within the environment.

Western-American Studies

Within my review, the research within Western-American society had more of a pathologized description of individuals and suggested their suffering as an internalized diagnostic flaw. However, the same results of needing community to heal were identified. Clarke and Waring (2018) completed a narrative ethnographic study of two therapeutic communities for individuals diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. Using 4-month field note observations and semi-structured interviews, data analysis and theming were collected. The results indicated that a shared sense of solidarity and trust was crucial to fostering an inclusive environment for clients to disclose and address distress. The shared space and engaging in healing circles through mealtime rituals became a positive experience for feeling a part of the community, which decreased symptomology. “When individuals ‘internalize’ the values of an institution, in this case a therapeutic community, the group’s power is ‘benign’ and facilitates the ‘goal of self-empowerment’” (Clarke & Waring, 2018, p. 1288). The model supports the idea that individuals will tolerate high amounts of negative feelings over a long period of time for the emotional payoff of feeling included. This study supports the sociological view that people want to feel connected, and that creating rituals/traditions holds space for that to naturally evolve.

While the intention of the study appeared to be rooted in empowerment, it did not promote the same sense of agency as the aforementioned multicultural studies. The Western-American concept of borderline personality disorder immediately creates a label and self-concept of the participants. This can have an inherent message of disempowerment. Also, the participants were not generating their own research; the research was being done on them. This model of

research aligns with colonial white patriarchal values that disempower oppressed people. The distinctions between the multicultural studies and the borderline personality disorder study represent the breach within the field of psychology. I hope to continue to highlight the traditional dynamic of research and how it reinforces the idea of pathology, disorder, and disease rather than holistic perspectives that highlight resilience in order to support the dismantling process within the field.

Empirical Studies Including the Intersection of Intergenerational Trauma and Macro-cultural Influences with Adolescent Girls

The complexity of intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural influences is represented in the adolescent population within this dissertation; therefore, specific empirical studies were reviewed related to adolescent developmental time period. Cooper et al. (2019) conducted a 7-week participatory activity series of workshops using an Indigenous partnership model with generations of Indigenous females. The strength-based methodology focused on envisioning change rather than deficits that the women were facing. The three workshops attended aimed to create a platform for intergenerational programming and relationship-building activities for girls and their caregivers exploring health and happiness, providing skill building activities related to public health messaging, and providing a support space for personal growth.

Participatory activities such as “ball-toss game naming phrases ‘I like’ or ‘I want’” helped to identify the needs of the community, resulting in creating self-care nights, family nights, and neighborhood safety nights (Cooper et al., 2019, p. 141). The activities also included written activities, storytelling, scavenger hunting, arts-based activities, and oral health games to promote a sense of community as a part of the data collection. The arts-based activities were based on participants’ needs that were developed for empowerment building (empowerment

bracelet; pride charm bracelet). Participants were able to create meaning as a group, and ultimately through generations.

A key concept was knowing that the support of the family provided a sense of security to face challenges, providing a harm reduction approach to historical trauma. The dialogic process enabled the deconstruction of unhealthy intergenerational messages, allowing for positive reframing when further discussed. The importance of what words were chosen showed that the narratives of family trauma can be passed without recognition. Traditional teachings were also central to many of the discussions, reflecting the collective resilience needed by community practices.

The study describes an example of intersectional links between intergenerational trauma, historical trauma, and cultural factors, utilizing a praxis approach for transformative action. The research provided information that may be useful for the field while also generating family/community healing as an intervention. Aligning with liberation psychology, the aforementioned study is an example of the research aim for this dissertation process. This study represents my motivations for working with adolescent girls and their empowerment process. Although there is minimal research capturing all domains, the realm of transformative research utilizing experiential and holistic practices is beginning to surface within the field of psychology.

Notably, the literature has little research on the intersectional themes of race and gender related to suicidality in adolescents. Historically, suicidality is seen as a Caucasian male issue due to the lack of attention to non-dominant groups (Assari et al., 2021). Using a critical lens to understand the psychology field helps understand why the literature is geared towards a white patriarchal population, signaling that marginalized genders do not have issues. This dismissing undertone reinforces the notion of sun-human oppression. One aspect that is well stressed in the

literature is the fact that early interventions are more effective than reactive services (Mayenga et al., 2018).

Empirical Photovoice Study with Narrative Analysis

Gupta et al. (2019) provided a prime example of the narrative process through an arts-based approach. The researchers developed a therapeutic photovoice program to empower Black children to use digital photography as a sense of creative personal empowerment and sociopolitical healing. The use of digital photography can create a social platform that embodies the idea that “photos can raise critical consciousness across society—even to the point of influencing public policy” (Ratner, 2001, p. 1). The attached narratives to the photographs allowed participants to share a therapeutic safe space with one another, creating a small community for open narrative and voice. The process became a multifaceted approach that combined personal empowerment, research, and social justice (Gupta et al., 2019). This reference became a major example of how to incorporate my liberation psychology values into research methodological practice.

Summary of Empirical Studies

This empirical review addressed cross-cultural perspectives by investigating multicultural studies to gain a broader concept of how the field is handling the intersectional themes of intergenerational trauma, historical trauma, and macro-cultural influences. Multiple studies embodied the community praxis by engaging in dialogue around family messages and being active in altering community structures for empowerment (Atallah et al., 2018; Barker et al., 2019; Cooper et al., 2019; Gupta et al., 2019; Hock et al., 2020; Ungar et al., 2013; Youseff et al., 2018). A common thread throughout the literature highlighted the importance of changing structural systems to support people’s needs within the community as essential for sustained

stability. Many of the studies used holistic or Indigenous practices to create the person-community healing platform (Hartmann & Gone, 2014). The community healing platforms are the agents of structural change. Healing circles became the bridge between individual, family, and community trauma. Utilizing experiential interventions and dialogue promoted active healing and deeper reflection and moves towards de-pathologizing individuals. The participants were engaged in their own healing process. This embodies the essence of supporting intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural restoration processes through narrative healing which will be showcased within this dissertation research project. The following will explore the methodological design trends within the literature that support or inhibit the deconstruction of power.

Trends in Methodological Designs

From my methodological review, there appears to be a major duality of traditional research *on people* versus action-based research *with people* (Brown, 2021) that suggests a shift in critical thinking within the field of psychology and counseling. The traditional forms of research consist of quantitative instrument-based methods and the qualitative case studies which are closely aligned with the medicalization of research (Creswell, 2007). Quantitative research aims at finding the empirical truth, while qualitative interviews draw out information from the participants (Creswell, 2007). However, more recent research focuses on facilitating transformation with the participants themselves, which also includes a social justice aspect of making a lasting change from the action-based research (Creswell, 2007).

The emergence of critical theory has shifted research methodology towards taking a closer look at the impact of methodological design (Carspecken, 1996; Call-Cummings et al., 2020; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). This shift manifests in the literature related to the expert-

subject dynamic (Orlowski, 2019) and the trends in traditional methodological approaches are shifting to a social-justice based research model with participatory action research as one avenue (Fine, 2006). As discussed previously in this chapter, the trends of methodological design with multicultural research highlighted the use of researchers being immersed within the community and culture to do the fieldwork studies (Atallah et al., 2018; Hartmann & Gone, 2014; Ungar et al., 2013; Youseff et al., 2018). Being integrated in the culture reduces researcher bias and can potentially eliminate the hierarchy of participants being removed from their environment and studied. From my review, the trends in the methodological design seem to be leaning towards more of an organic, less invasive approach that focuses on the aforementioned idea of community embedded trauma (Hartmann & Gone, 2014). The culturally immersive approach supports viewing the person-community relationship (Harvey, 1996) within research, rather than the biomedical model diagnostic surveying and interview styles of traditional research. Through a critical lens, the social-justice based research may be a reflection of reducing individualistic dynamics that support capitalism within more traditional methods.

Mayor (2022) describes how utilizing reflexivity with creative approaches are also becoming another avenue of reducing the expert-subject dynamic. Within the literature, arts-based data collection methods are becoming more popular in recent times (Atallah, 2018; Gupta et al., 2019). According to Brooks et al. (2020), some researchers question whether creative methods can actually disrupt the power relation. Although the “intrusive presence” (p. 3) is not as overt with creative methodologies, the cultural norms for skill-based and art making standards can still have an influence. However, creative methods as a data collection technique may be a reflection of understanding research through a multi-dimensional space for uncovering information outside of traditional surveys (Brooks et al., 2020), which captures the multi-faceted

holistic experience of human development (Mayor, 2022). Utilizing an arts-based reflexive approach is working towards anti-racist research (Mayor, 2022). This trend in the literature becomes important because it signifies the acknowledgment of historical trauma dynamics that have infiltrated the field of psychology and counseling. These methodological shifts are beginning to incorporate a socio-ecological lens.

The incorporation of researcher reflexivity and member checking with participants as part of the process of understanding data analysis has also been highlighted in the upcoming literature as a means of breaking away from the white patriarchal dynamic that may be inherent in traditional research (Mayor, 2022). The shift in power assumptions was noticeably different when reviewing the past several decades of research literature. This anti-racist research practice is becoming a movement to dismantle any status quo standards that may be reinforced by the expert-subject power dynamic (Mayor, 2022). Through a critical lens, the creative approaches may also be shifting the methodological trends into a heuristic epistemology view of truth assumptions which strays away from a hierarchical perspective of knowledge. This type of research is newly emerging. These methodological approaches are an aim to de-colonize psychological research and not continue the hierarchical power dynamic that is inherent in traditional research, which was found more often used in the Western-American studies. The following section will capture an overview summary of what was discussed in this chapter as a means of synthesizing and understanding the literature to be incorporated within the final chapter.

Chapter Summary

This literature review puts into context how intergenerational trauma, historical trauma, and macro-cultural influences have an influence on human development and how it is

traditionally framed as pathology rather than societal oppression impacting an individual/family. Intergenerational trauma is supported by environmental attachment styles and biological theories of epigenetics that explain unresolved trauma being passed down from one generation to the next (Bowlby, 1973; Ogle et al., 2014; Pederson et al., 2018). The next generation is usually not aware of the origin of symptoms, which often times results in a sense of deep inadequacy. The literature reveals that family work is necessary for micro-level interceptions. On the other hand, historical trauma has created communities that perpetuate cycles of systemic oppression by functioning within capitalistic/patriarchal/white supremacist structures and have been researched in a community social-justice based view. The theories that support navigating both of these structures are socio-ecological models to promote dialogic engagement and empowerment as a collective liberation (Harvey, 1996).

The importance of understanding cultural views becomes essential in understanding the person, and the need to support system changes rather than individual changes is beginning to cultivate within contemporary psychology. Notably, the use of narrative, rituals/traditions and holistic practices became a common theme throughout the literature to promote the person-community perspective (Cooper et al., 2019; Dutta et al., 2014).

Although there are some multicultural empirical studies that are working towards holistic community-based research interventions, there is still a pathologizing undertone in Western-American society research. The literature is just beginning to reflect this shift in thinking within the field of psychology. The literature findings are a mirrored reflection of our society and with an ontological shift in the mental health field, there will also be a shift in the way individuals view themselves. The hope is for continued research to uncover what is needed for a person-community alignment for the essence of healing family and systemic wounds. The following

chapter will provide the details of the methodological design of my study and how I integrated the social-ecological perspectives discovered in this literature review.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Thus far, chapter 1 has described the research purpose and intent of this study, while chapter 2 provided a thorough literature review related to intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural understandings. Chapter 3 will now describe the methodology of critical youth participatory action research (CYPAR) utilizing photovoice as a vehicle to better understand the daily lives of teen girls. Shaped through the critical theory view of power systems, this study aims to capture the phenomenological experience of adolescent females. The epistemological framework to examine power systems includes critical theory and a phenomenological philosophy⁶ as a means of exploring power, knowledge, and truth claims. The details of this epistemological approach will be broken down into sub-sections in attempts to view adolescent female development. This chapter will also outline the methodological process of recruiting co-researchers, the step-by-step process of utilizing photovoice as a data generation method, and the overall validity constructs that were considered. The co-researchers' narratives were collected as data information that formed a larger systemic narrative analysis, which will be described in the remaining two chapters.

Epistemological Framework

The epistemological framework within this study is based in critical theory with a phenomenological perspective in order to address assumptions of power, knowledge, and truth paradigms while capturing the co-researchers' full experience. The framework is the foundation for the critical analysis lens that will be discussed in chapter 5, exploring the intersectional

⁶ The term phenomenological philosophy was chosen as an integrative concept into the critical theory analysis in order to ensure that the holistic vision of exploring human development was utilized. This distinction is highlighted from the word phenomenology as a methodology.

findings through a systemic power analysis. The following theories will address my epistemological framework related to critical theory and phenomenological perspective.

Assumptions of Power

There are varying stances on the assumptions of power and how it is related to society. Marxist views of power are constructed through classist standards, which follow the notion that society as a whole is driven by the dominant economic class (Stoddart, 2007). Critical theories of race and gender have destabilized this view, expanding on the essence of power through dominant racial and gender standards (Stoddart, 2007). This research study takes into consideration all three hegemonies of class, race, and gender. The dominant standardization of these hegemonies in Western-American society has been depicted through a lens of white upper-middle class heteronormative standards (Fleming 2015). This standard becomes an assumption of power within society and impacts anyone outside of the that standard, creating a hierarchy within sociocultural norms.

Understanding the hierarchical standard of power assumption becomes important in this study when interpreting interactions of non-white adolescent girls and the sociocultural standard that is inherently placed on them. Taking into consideration the environmental standards reinforces the social-ecological person-community model that was previously described in chapter 2, which reinforces the notion that macro-cultural messages have an impact on adolescent development (Harvey, 1996; Hoskins, 2020). The relationship between society and individual becomes a central theme related to the standardized power assumption that Western-American culture has normalized. Zhao et al. (2021) describe this interchange as the conceptualization of power levels through macro-level study (economic, legal, or political

institutions), micro-level study (individual behavior, motivations and attitudes) and their relationship to each other:

The lifeworld is the sphere where we carry out everyday activities, socialize with others, and develop as individuals and as groups and cultures, whereas system manifests itself as industry, money market, and legal and financial institutions, bureaucracy, political governance, physical and technological infrastructure. (p. 383)

This study attempts to further understand the interface of micro and macro influences that affect adolescent girls. For this reason, the epistemological framework includes critical theory for a lens of power relations and phenomenology as a philosophy for capturing the individual experience. The following will describe how power assumptions will be considered within critical theory in more detail.

Critical Theory and Power De-construction

Critical theory aims to acknowledge the power structures within institutional systems and demonstrates how research can prompt an active transformation by questioning these power roles (Call-Cummings et al., 2020; Carspecken, 1996; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). Power cannot only be gained by physical force, but also psychologically, by institutions (media, schools, family, the church) to co-construct dynamics of disempowerment. Kincheloe and McLaren (2011) have a definition of critical theory that aligns with the macro-cultural definition that was previously described in chapter 2:

A critical social theory is concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion, and other social institutions, and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system. (p. 288)

Because one major focus of my research intent was to better understand how intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural influences intersect, the epistemological framework of critical theory captures how the major societal hegemonies may be affecting adolescent females as individuals. Capturing the intersecting dynamics of societal power supports the multi-dimensional way of operating in liberation psychology, as mentioned in chapter 2 (Farr et al., 2016). I aim to acknowledge all systems of power and how they may intersect rather than focusing on one. Through the critical theory lens, the complex relationship of society and individual can be further investigated.

Dominant and subordinate ideologies of power are considered in critical theory to investigate cultural productions, including propaganda, media, social media, language, politics and education (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). The hegemonies of power production and oppression are questioned within critical theory in order to dismantle power systems that continue dynamics of marginalization (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). In order to counter hegemonic cultural power in research, the “ability to link the production of representations, images, and signs of hyperreality to power in the political economy” (Kincheloe, & McLaren, 2011, p. 292) becomes necessary. This means seeing how everyday influences (i.e. news reels, billboards, book topics, etc.) are creating a societal norm. Critical theorists aim to not only describe social structure, power, and culture, but to transform these constructs through positive social change (Carspecken, 1996). This reinforces my choice of CYPAR with my intention to support and encourage co-researchers’ expressing their voices. Also, by choosing a photovoice method of research, the research group was able to question societal representations through dialogue, which became a natural critical theory investigative tool.

Understanding the dominant power assumptions in Western-American society sculpted the awareness of a critical theory lens to better understand what the co-researchers were saying (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). One paradigm of power that influences young people is the theme of *adultism*, which represents the hierarchical relationship between adults and young people (Call-Cummings, 2019). The awareness of adultism became important when considering the co-researchers' voices within this study and how I was utilizing an assumed power position.

I chose CYPAR as a methodology to reinforce the dismantling of hierarchical social systems that inherently support adultism, which will later be described in chapter 5 in more depth. By doing the research *with* the co-researchers rather than *on* them, we were able to create the data together, which supports the notion that the co-researchers have their own power to produce information. The co-generated information dismantles the notion of power assumption that is inherent in adultism and aligns with knowledge production rooted in liberation psychology (Fals-Borda, 2013; Freire, 1979), which will be further discussed below.

Assumptions of Knowledge Production

Knowledge production is another major assumption of critical epistemology, which takes into consideration who decides what and how we learn information (Freire, 1979; 1982). As mentioned in chapter 2, liberation psychology believes that knowledge is not objective and the liberation psychology movement questions the student-teacher dynamic as an authoritarian normative construct (Call-Cummings et al., 2020; Creswell et al., 2007; 2019; Orlowski). Traditionally, the teacher-to-student knowledge promotes the adultism power dynamic that can be silencing for young people (Orlowski, 2019). Generally, teachers and adult administration standards are the ones who decide what is important to learn without any participation from young people. This uni-directional relationship creates disempowerment.

Students that experience negative interactions from teachers generally do not perform well academically and have a negative association with school overall (Legette et al., 2022). Hart (1992) describes the *ladder of participation model* that children/young people and adults normally operate under. The bottom of the ladder has adult-driven operations, while the top rung promotes child-initiated directives. Involving youth as co-generators of their own experience reduces the risk of the *cultural invasion* (Lohmeyer, 2020) that has created standards for the ladder of participation to occur. Rather than teachers producing the knowledge for students in rigid curriculums, the students can be active participants in co-generating knowledge (Bronner, 2011).

In order to broaden the assumption of knowledge further, the investigation of meaning making and knowledge assumption that I am adhering to in this study also involves multiple disciplines. According to Fals-Borda (2013), the production of meaning making should involve inter-disciplinary fields, including sociologists, anthropologists, economists, theologians, artists, farmers, and social workers that question systemic power production. Rather than the narrow view of psychology that has depicted an individual with the bio-medical model which inherently pathologizes them, the inter-disciplinary lens promotes a broader scope of understanding how an individual understands the world (Brown, 2021).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the biomedical model assumes knowledge production through an expert-subject dynamic where the patient is being told what is wrong with them, supporting an oppressive hierarchical way of treatment (Brown, 2021). This assumption of knowledge dismisses any individual self-awareness and assumes the subject as a victim (Cromer, 2018) and supports the learned helplessness theory (Seligman, 1975) that may contribute to intergenerational trauma behaviors. The biomedical model defaults the all-knowing

expert/teacher into a position of power with an insinuated requirement that the patient is obedient (Stoddart, 2007). Within traditional research, the biomedical hierarchical model can be replicated as the expert/subject dynamic. These dynamics replicate what young people may feel from other adult relationships (i.e. teachers, parents) and ultimately can reinforce the standard of subordination. One way to disrupt this is by utilizing critical analysis and highlighting themes of resilience and integrating young people in the conversations.

As described in chapter 2, CYPAR is part of a liberation psychology movement that aims to dismantle these assumptions of knowledge (Fals-Borda, 2013). This means each participant holds their own understanding of the world, placing value on what they can uncover within themselves. The co-construction of knowledge becomes a shared experience of learning in order to uncover a shared reality to promote change and ultimately contributes to deconstructing the hierarchical notion of knowledge production (George & Selimos, 2019). The deconstruction of oppressive knowledge production systems may birth new normative standards in existence. Alternatively, the hierarchical way of knowledge production not only promotes young adults to be silenced, but also infers there is a universal understanding of truth about how individuals experience the world.

Assumptions of Truth

Another consideration that became important during the data analysis was the assumption of truth and how that relates to a critical theory perspective. The standards of society can be generated by the dominant culture, and these standards are seen as the truth about how society should operate (Stoddart, 2007). A critical theory perspective does not adhere to any specific truth and tends to leave room for speculation within final claims (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). The idea is that the human experience can never fully be grasped and there is always room for

continued understanding (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). This allows for exploring multiple possibilities and moves away from the positivist idea of universal truths (Orlowski, 2019). Ongoing investigation of the human experience also dismantles the idea of categorizing human experience into disorders or other pathologized boxes. The ongoing investigation of truth promotes seeing each individual as a unique whole person rather than young people existing all the same. This approach can be further explained through phenomenological philosophy.

Phenomenology as a Philosophy

The philosophy of phenomenology is also considered to promote the human experience of how adolescents experience the world (Wertz, 2005). Through a phenomenological philosophy perspective, the investigative process into the human experience is subjective and multifaceted. There is no defined assumption of truth that explains the experience of being human, which in phenomenological terms is captured by the “lived world” (Wertz, 2005, p. 169). Understanding the space between person and environment for each individual person is a part of investigating this lived world. The intentionality of human mental life is not an isolated ray illuminating a single object; intentionality includes its relational context as it illuminates a “world” (p. 169). Phenomenology hopes to capture the human experience and essence in the *life-world*.

Phenomenological philosophy counters the biomedical model perspective that human experience can be defined. The phenomenological lens expands the field of psychology by attempting to capture a person’s individual experience rather than categorizing their symptomology. Rather than *I have anxiety*, phenomenology would consider *we are living a human experience where I need help navigating these anxious feelings I am experiencing*. This philosophy is worth mentioning in relation to this study by trying to thoroughly understand the

human experience of being an adolescent female receiving environmental messages that impact their human experience.

According to phenomenological philosophy, human experience has a “sign structure” that traces moments of pure presence (Carspecken, 1996, p. 14). The repetition of signs and symbols reflects our way of thinking of the intrapsychic world. In order to capture a person’s intrapsychic world, understanding their relationship with the signs and symbols becomes a part of the analysis. One way to better understand this relationship is through the process of dialoguing to better understand and reflect on one’s outer/inner world. This ongoing dialogue of experience supports the idea that there is no one truth and we all may be experiencing life in different ways.

Understanding environmental messages can potentially promote social change by seeing how societal power systems may cause an individual to experience mental health symptoms. Continued dialogue and social action could potentially reverse the cyclical power loop from

systems influencing → individual -to- individual influencing → systems

In order to make the shift from systems influencing individuals to individuals influencing systems, the field of psychology must see a person as a whole. Collaborating with the adolescent girls as co-researchers while they explore their human experience through participatory action research de-pathologizes the notion that they are the problem and normalizes their human experience and empowerment. This process naturally happened through the narratives and stories that were described in the photovoice discussions and will be further described in the next chapter. Phenomenological philosophy helped create the framework of this study in conjunction with critical theory analysis to better understand the co-researchers.

Integrating a Critical Phenomenological Framework. Power, knowledge, and truth assumptions are considered major paradigms within critical theory as a means of moving away

from oppressive systems that continue dominant culture injustice (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). Within this study, power, knowledge, and truth were taken into consideration to align with critical youth participatory action research values. The idea that the co-researchers hold knowledge and truth about themselves promotes equitable power relations. Producing the data analysis together promoted a resilience and empowerment perspective of human experience and highlights a liberation psychology movement (Fals-Borda, 2013; Freire, 1970). Through this movement, the phenomenological perspective of seeing someone as a whole individual can be established and reciprocally supported multi-dimensional assumptions of knowledge and truth can exist.

Notably, there is a natural tension between the relational aspect of CYPAR and exploring the individual experience of phenomenological philosophy. I believe both are needed in order to capture the full breadth of human development. Utilizing critical theory to understand the reciprocal nature of the person-environment relationship can be an organic way to bridge the relational process of CYPAR while acknowledging phenomenological philosophy. Understanding the individual lived world in relation to family/societal influences is an attempt at trying to grasp the complexity of our existence.

Through this critical phenomenological perspective, the co-researchers in this study were considered experts of their own lives who have the power to create and produce the knowledge of their unique experience. Although critical theory and phenomenology are compatible in multiple ways, the essence of understanding an intersubjective narrative of an adolescent experience can be meticulously investigated through phenomenological perspectives. Deconstructing power, knowledge, and truth assumptions supports the idea of de-pathologizing the human experience, which is a central theme to this researcher's design.

Research Design

The research design I chose for this study is a critical youth participatory action research design utilizing photovoice method. The research design was specifically chosen to align with the power, knowledge, and truth assumptions that were outlined in the previous section. The following section will describe the difference between participatory action research (PAR), critical participatory action research (CPAR), and critical youth participatory action research (CYPAR). The following sections will also discuss why I chose CYPAR specifically to investigate intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural influences.

Participatory Action Research

Within traditional research, the researcher extracts information from participants which is similar to a parasitic process, taking information about their lives for the benefit of research, while potentially lacking support or change for the actual human being that is involved in the study (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Although this is not always the case and there can be fruitful information that comes out of qualitative and quantitative research, the relationship between the expert and subject can have a high degree of power differential. The natural hierarchy of traditional research can infer that something is being taken from the participants rather than created collaboratively.

An essential viewpoint of PAR is captured by immersing within the culture or population that is being researched, rather than infringing as an outside observer. The researcher is able to grasp the participants' worldview in their saturated experience of daily life through the collaboration and understanding of the environmental social practices. This means researchers are immersed in the participants' environment with them to better understand an organic interaction. This can diffuse the pressure of saying the right thing in a clinical setting, which

allows for more of an exploratory space to reflect and uncover information (Gustafson et al., 2019). Notably, some scholars believe PAR was founded in practices of Indigenous communities of Africa, the Americas, and the South Pacific before Western-American paradigms of Paulo Freire (1970) incorporated transformative change (Caraballo, 2017). Another sect of research that stems from PAR is critical participatory action research.

Critical Participatory Action Research

CPAR unites participatory action and critical theory, bridging the self-reflective process of inquiry with understanding power dynamics (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). This means the researcher is required to analyze their power position and how that may be affecting the study. This also focuses on deconstructing the embedded hegemonic accounts of power, knowledge, and truth by acting in the co-creation of data with participants (George & Selimos, 2019; Gustafson et al., 2019). This interactive process produces the information together. Engaging in CPAR to co-generate information aligns with disrupting the expert-subject power dynamic that has been historically enacted in research studies and promotes collaboration for knowledge production. The collaborative process sifts through the design, data collection, and analysis. The overall aim of CPAR is to create a spiral of self-reflection through the process of collaborative dialogue in order to promote social change. Understanding these findings can potentially implement a social change within culture, economy, or sociopolitical realms. Another sect of research that stems from CPAR focuses specifically on youth, which will be explained further.

Critical Youth Participatory Action Research

CYPAR projects specifically engage youth in research by encouraging their own autonomy within the study while simultaneously learning about themselves through personal identity development (Caraballo et al., 2017). This reflects critical theory as a framework to

support young people with their own sense of agency while re-evaluating the idea of dismantling power assumptions related to teacher-student knowledge production (Call-Cummings, 2020). This process “often functions as a pedagogical intervention” (p. 173) just by exploring the research with them and rejects deficit-models that have historically mimicked taking or extracting information (Pech et al., 2020). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, *adulthood*, or inequitable assumptions about youth by adults, creates a power relation that promotes inferiority (Pech et al., 2020; Wright, 2019). CYPAR becomes an inherent intervention against these power assumptions by reducing the risk of infantilization (Lohmeyer, 2020). An interesting tension within CYPAR is disrupting oppressive power dynamics while acknowledging the researchers’ inherent power as an adult. Understanding this tension with a critical lens is important for the validity of the study.

The epistemological standpoint of CYPAR aligns with the philosophy of liberation psychology—attempting to align with individuals to transform their own lives. This concept parallels with Martín-Baró’s (1996) vision of healing trauma on a collective level. The process teaches young people that “conditions of injustice are produced, not natural” (Carballo et al., 2017, p. 315), meaning the current sociocultural standards do not have to be accepted and can be changed. The critical-epistemological framework challenges the agency in current inequality within society and research itself (Carballo et al., 2017).

Currently there are progressive movements attempting to initiate this shift in power dynamics. The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (Commonwealth PAYE) is a global strategy focusing on youth empowerment (Kessi, 2010). Under their guidelines, youth take responsibility for their decisions and endure the consequences. By including youth as active observers of their own lives within research, the process provides a

container for their sense of liberation and empowerment. This sense of empowerment may occur during CYPAR studies, but there are also considerations that should be looked at when attempting to initiate empowerment.

Empowerment—Inherent Power Relations. The intention of empowerment within research projects aims to promote change *for* others. The problem with this aim is that the idea of empowerment may insinuate that the participant is disempowered and inferior to the researcher, who has inherently more power. This runs the risk of reinforcing the oppressive dynamic. The suggestibility of empowerment reinforces the maintenance of oppressive systems, which are the oppressive systems themselves that are trying to be dismantled. When this counter-intuitive notion is not acknowledged, the intent of empowerment can become a hypocritical concept.

Avoiding processes of “*helper-helpee*” (Kessi, 2010, p. 59) will move away from the top-down relationship model. The risk of epistemological violence can be cultivated when using statements of *empowering others*, and the verbiage around this should be carefully considered (Lohmeyer, 2020; Zhao et al. 2021). Shifting towards project aims to promote change *with* others can better align with liberation movement thinking. The value of research is providing a potential platform for youth to tell their stories and whatever transformative process they choose to engage. The importance of their stories also fuels a reciprocal process for the researcher to reflect on the overarching research questions, becoming a shared experience. The essence of this study aims to support mutual influence of the process and the language chosen to describe every aspect of this study was meticulously considered.

Applying Critical Youth Participatory Action Research

This study is rooted within CYPAR with an intention of being a potential process of liberation from the constraints adolescent girls face with family and societal messages (Call-

Cummings, 2020; Hart 1992). I chose the CYPAR research method due to the self-reflective process of co-generating information with young people. By collaborating with youth, the values of co-creating power, knowledge and truth assumptions could be implemented in the data collection and narrative analysis with their participation. The limitations of attempting this process will be further outlined in the last chapter. However, I tried to make sure that I was critically assessing these assumptions throughout the research process and aiming towards looking at the co-researchers to fulfill their own empowerment needs.

Sampling Strategy

I applied the *purpose sampling* strategy, which is a method of selecting the participants for a specific purpose in order to recruit the co-researchers. The specific purpose was aimed at identifying diverse adolescent females within an age range. Having a diverse population captures a more thorough understanding of a collective experience and what may be needed to begin deconstructing power structures to become more reciprocal within society.

I was able to connect with an all-girls school in Massachusetts and the dean of students helped distribute the recruitment fliers (see Appendix A: Recruitment Flier) in order to see who might be interested in attending the voluntary study. The all-girls school is a local school that accepts girls from low-income families in the surrounding urban area. I was able to go to the school in-person and share with the 8th grade class that I was a doctoral student wanting to work with adolescents to explore how they experience their lives. I noted that this was a voluntary process and anyone could discontinue throughout the 12-weeks of the study. Those who were interested notified the dean of students and informed consent forms were completed by participating students (see Appendix B: Participant/Co-Researcher Informed Consent) and their parents (see Appendix B: Parent/Guardian Informed Consent).

I chose to work with 13–17 year-old females that attend a low-income all-girls school to potentially support a harmonious group, increasing emotional safety for deeper sharing. The 13-17 year old age group was chosen because of the prime identity development during this stage of growth. Through my clinical experience, adolescents are old enough to learn intellectual insight into themselves and generate potentially helpful information and at the same time are young enough to make lasting changes that could transform the trajectory of their own lives. Coordinating with the local school to select participants was an intentional decision due to the idea that a school embodies a macro-institutional setting and allows for my social justice agenda to infiltrate current societal power systems. The idea that people can make changes within the system rather than removed from them is something that I believe promotes inspiration for active change.

I specifically chose a small sample size of (5-8) participants to be able to produce deeper narratives capturing the essence of each adolescent experience, which aligns with phenomenological philosophy (Wertz, 2005). The small group size created a safe space and deeper intimacy to reveal core narratives the participants are experiencing. Rather than an individual case study where the relationship is fixated on researcher-participant, the peer relationships could also be a source of personal reflection to reduce feelings of isolation within their narrative, and ultimately normalizing their human experience. Table 1 Demographic Data Generation below describes the demographics of the co-researchers as they wrote down on the first day of the research study. Notably, all participants identified as cisgender female.

Table 1

Demographic Data Generation

Age	Race	Sexual Orientation
-----	------	--------------------

13	Bi-racial (Puerto Rican & Black)	“Unlabeled”
13	El Salvadorian	Queer
14	Bi-racial	Identified as heterosexual but discussed having gay partner
14	Black	Heterosexual
13	African American/Black	Heterosexual
13	White	Heterosexual
13	African American	Heterosexual

Note. This table illustrates the demographic data collection during the first CYPAR meeting of the study.

Data Generation

During the 12-week study, CYPAR meetings were held in-person one hour per week in the library of the co-researchers' school. The discussions of the co-researchers' photos were audio-recorded and transcribed to later evaluate as a group. The length of collecting data was three months to track shifts or consistency of environmental messages overtime. The following format was presented as an outline for the study; however, alternating the schedule was considered with the youth co-researchers depending on the needs of the group (see Appendix D: Interview Protocol). The initial week included collecting demographic information, discussing intent and co-participation, and providing psychoeducation on the definitions of the terms intergenerational trauma and historical trauma/macro-cultural influences (see Figure 2

Intergenerational Trauma and Macro-cultural Message Diagram). The following five weeks explored the photos during photovoice discussions. The following five weeks after that analyzed the transcribed discussions. Finally, the last week reviewed all data gathered in order to create a social justice community action plan.

I periodically asked the co-researchers if they wanted to change the format and/or length of the study in order to preserve the intent of collaboration and disrupt any normative power. I invited participants/co-researchers to share their thoughts of what the study may need depending on the information that we were finding; however, they wanted to continue with the format. Further details of the initial six weeks of the study will be outlined below, which included psycho-education and the photovoice methodological process.

First Week of Data Generation: Psycho-education and Co-Construction

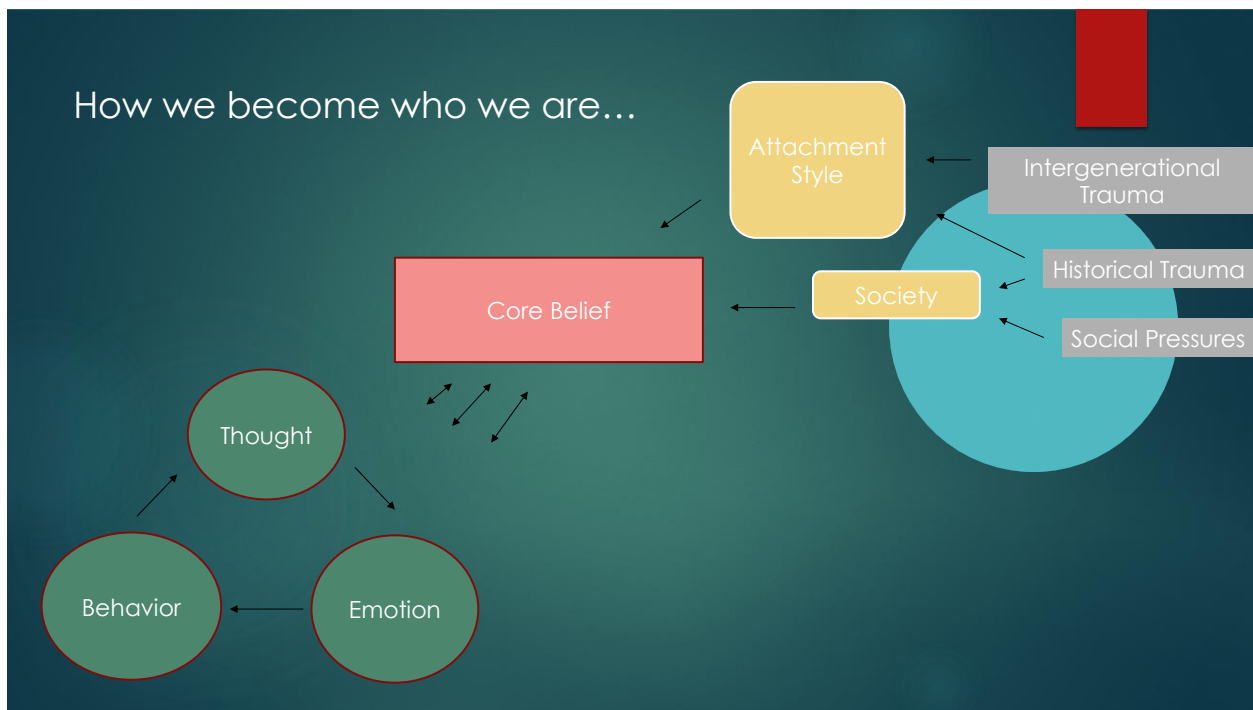
During the first PAR meeting, I provided psycho-education and context for the intention of the study. I explained that my intention was to better understand how adolescent girls experience environmental messages and how that relates to family and societal trauma. I also asked for feedback of what the co-researchers wanted out of the study in order to revisit and rework the research question to ensure the questions were co-created. The co-researchers did not want to change the context of the research question, but did say they wanted to learn more about themselves and share how they felt during the research process. The demographics of the first meeting were collected to better understand how they identify their race, sexual orientation, and gender (see Table 1). This not only provided data information for the study, but allowed me to better personally understand how they want to be viewed in the conversations.

During this initial week, the psycho-educational information about intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural influences was printed and shared as a visual representation of how

environmental messages affect thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (see Figure 2: Intergenerational Trauma & Macro-cultural Influences Diagram). Co-researchers asked for life examples of these terms, which I was able to explain in more detail. The visual became a reference tool that was later used in the thematic coding analysis phase of the research.

Figure 2

Intergenerational Trauma & Macro-cultural Influences Diagram



Note. This figure is a diagram depicting the influence of past/current environmental factors affecting identity and behavior.

Figure 2 is a diagram that I created to illustrate the person-family-community intersecting relationship. I wanted to emphasize to the co-researchers that we were looking at their whole experience in life in order to capture the phenomenological philosophy. I did not go into detailed about definitions of hegemonies and trauma terms that were discussed earlier in the chapter 2

literature review. This decision was made in order to allow an organic process of information finding to occur rather than influencing what topics or symptoms they should be discussing.

However, as mentioned in chapter 2, the environmental influences can have an effect on epigenetic gene expressions and how the physiological aspects of trauma come to exist. This was not integrated in the original diagram, but should be something to consider for future research.

This diagram became something the co-researchers chose to reference throughout the discussions as a tool to frame their conversations. The initial meeting provided a foundation for the photovoice method discussions to be explored through a deeper lens.

Weeks 2-5: Narrative Data Generation Utilizing Photovoice Method

The narratives captured in this study were generated through four means of information gathering— photovoice images, photovoice discussions, co-researcher field notes, and a commonplace book. As described in chapter 2, photovoice is a participatory action research method whose theoretical underpinnings lie in Paulo Freire's (1970) framework of liberation pedagogy for raising critical consciousness. Utilizing arts-based practices opens an analytic space for participants to step back and physically look at what is happening to them (Wright, 2019). The photovoice method became a creative way to investigate the co-researchers' lives.

The weeks 2-6 of the study utilized photovoice method as an information gathering tool to explore their adolescent experience as a group. During the first week of explaining the study, I shared that the photovoice method is a way of exploring moments of time that are captured throughout their day-to-day lives. I asked them to start taking snapshot photos of their day in order to share with the group each week. This guided a reference point throughout their day of *the self* in relation to their phenomenological experience of their *lived-world*. They had questions about what they should be taking photos of and I encouraged them to take whatever

photo they felt that they wanted to share about their lives. I explained this process was an investigative tool to explore how the co-researchers were seeing/thinking about that particular moment.

The co-researchers shared the pictures they took of their lives with the group each week on a projector within the school library. This process naturally allowed a deeper reflection to occur as a group. Each co-researcher had time to share about what the picture was, why they chose it, and any other natural dialogue that came out of the visual. This prompted other conversation within the group when other co-researchers identified or asked questions about the photo or the presenting co-researcher's experience. Wertz (2005) describes this phenomenological process of data collection as a heuristic guide to capture data that transcends even what the participants themselves think or know about the topic, revealing notions about themselves that may have not been revealed otherwise.

The co-researchers were very consistent about making sure they had their photos to share each week. In one case, one co-researcher had her phone taken away that week as a punishment and she brought in a book she had been reading and wanted to share why that had been impacting her. In another instance, a co-researcher did not have her phone for similar reasons and decided to bring in a piece of artwork she had been working on. This showed their level of dedication to the process and also highlighted the resilient talents they had learned in order to process their feelings on their own.

The co-researchers mentioned several times throughout the study that the pictures made it much easier to talk about themselves, which I believe brought out more organic reflection. Through this dialogical process, individuals become active agents for understanding their reality. Photovoice has the potential to enable participants to depict people and places that are important

to them in “the context of their land, home, education and wider community” (Datta et al., 2015, p. 589). This framework places the voices of oppressed groups at the center of research and theory and assumes that marginalized community members are the experts of their own lives (Gupta, 2019).

Co-researchers were also encouraged to take notes throughout the week on their reflections to review in discussions; however, they did not provide notes aside from the discussion and did not provide an explanation of why they did not. For my own reflective process, I documented reflections in a *commonplace* book, which is a type of journal that is helpful for collecting personal experiences, feelings, ongoing interaction among the co-researchers and other participants, and any other information related to traditional culture (e. g. poems, photographs, drawings, etc.) (Datta et al., 2015). During the discussion of their photos I made personal notes that I thought may reflect deeper insights into sub-themes. I was able to share these notations with the co-researchers during the narrative analysis process in order to minimize the expert-subject bias. By this iterative process, the researcher/co-researchers uncovered information that would not have been generated without the shared dialogue. Following the initial 6-week phase of data generation, the data analysis portion of the study continued, which will be described below.

Data Analysis

The narrative analysis process provides a space for co-researchers to explore rich layered sources of meaning-making (George & Selimos, 2019) and promotes the use of their own voice as an empowered tool for gathering information (Cooper et al., 2019). The narrative approach supports the natural process of bonding with people rather than being interrogated through surveys or transactional interviews. The organic conversation can alleviate the pressure of overthinking the

“right answers” and allows participants to gain control over their stories as a source of self-discovery and empowerment (Maffini & Pham, 2016). This creates a co-learning experience. The process of analyzing data has typically been conducted solely by the researcher. Within the critical youth participatory action research process, data analysis includes the co-researchers’ findings in order to ensure the narrative meaning being identified. There were two aspects of data analysis within this study, which included analysis with the co-researchers about our shared dialogues and a critical power analysis. The following will describe this in more detail.

Weeks 6-11: Co-Creating Data Analysis

The first process of analyzing the data was through a gradual uncovering of themes during a 5-week dialogue with the co-researchers. The transcripts of the photovoice conversations were printed out and re-read as a group in order to gain a deeper understanding of themes. This process was aimed at considering the perspective of the co-researchers within the data analysis, which supports the critical theory perspective of reducing assumptions of power, knowledge, and truth. The co-researchers were involved in the narrative analysis by reading through transcripts of the photovoice discussions and highlighting themes, clarifying assumed content, and further elaborating on certain points. The co-researchers were also asked to highlight themes related to intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural messages by using color coded highlighters in order to better understand how they considered aspects of their life to be linked to those terms. The importance of my position during the photovoice analysis was to gain clarification of what themes were identified and whether the information in the analysis was accurate according to their perspective.

At the end of the data analysis phase, I reviewed the themes that I had noted in my commonplace book to better understand if these were overarching concepts that resonated with

their life experience. This will be discussed further in chapter 4 of the findings section where major themes were outlined from the data analysis dialogues, which provided an outline for the community action plan.

The second phase of the data analysis was an iterative process that I went through of trying to understand the major themes generated with the co-researchers and integrating them into a larger social-ecological framework discussion. The paradigms of intergenerational trauma, historical trauma, and macro-cultural influences were explored in chapter 5 in relation to the major themes identified. The multi-leveled analysis takes on the critical phenomenological epistemological framework by attempting to analyze and integrate all aspects of the co-researchers' human experience. This part of the analysis was done without the co-researchers and in hindsight should have been considered in relation to the CYPAR process. This limitation to the validity and CYPAR values will be explored in the final chapter. The use of narrative analysis and how that set the stage for creating the community action plan will be described below.

Final Week: Community Action Plan

With the information gathered from their narratives, the participants were asked how they wanted to present the generated data to create an overall narrative within the group (shared artwork, role plays, picture formations). How would they bring their individual experiences into a collective narrative? The justification of this engaged process supports the praxis-oriented process of meaning-making and dialogic knowledge assumptions that are valued in this study. The aim was ultimately to create a process of self-empowerment while promoting change in society.

The final action plan meeting was used as a tool to bridge the individual information the co-researchers gathered from their reflections in the study to a larger change in their community. I was able to ask certain questions to prompt the action plan conversation (see Appendix D): “What do adolescent girls need to change family trauma? What do you and adolescent girls need in society? What do you and adolescent girls need to feel empowered?” The co-researchers were then asked how they wanted to present the information to the community through a final action planning stage. The intention was to generate awareness surrounding their needs to further shape a macro-level change (Creswell et al., 2007). These descriptions can potentially prompt policy or institutional changes that can support intervening intergenerational trauma and social pressures. The researchers decided that they wanted me to share the findings and suggestions they had to improve mental health support for adolescent girls with the school administration. The details of the findings and action plan will be further discussed in chapter 4. The validity considerations of the study will be discussed in the next section.

Validity Considerations

The validity considerations within this study are supported by the critical theory values of co-creating power, knowledge, and truth assumptions to reduce hierarchical ideas implemented on youth. These values were taken into consideration with specific cited validity concepts that will be described below. The validity concepts considered in this study are: within the group, the individual, between researcher-participant, collectively, and the institutional social-justice paradigms. The following section will describe in more detail how the critical theory values were implemented with multiple validity considerations.

Transactional Validity-Reducing Researcher Bias

Cho and Trent (2006) describe the term *transactional validity* as an iterative process between researcher and participant that aims at a “higher level of consensus by means of revisiting facts, feelings, experiences, and values or beliefs collected and interpreted” (p. 321). This process of understanding meaning with participants is a technique called *member-checking*. Member checking uses the thick description of information gathered by the research and then “played-back” (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 321) to participants to analyze their reality at a deeper level. This allows the assurance that the data information gathered is what they actually meant.

Through the process of photovoice discussions, the co-researchers captured their realities and shared their interpretations of their day-to-day lives. By involving the co-researchers in the data analysis portion of the study, transactional validity was able to be demonstrated by reducing researcher bias. This power-relation process was taken into careful consideration with deep reflection during the data analysis meetings. I asked clarifying questions throughout the narrative analysis to ensure the member checking process. My intention was not to craft discussion to get answers I was looking for, but to explore information with the young teens during the study. I also did not want to misinterpret something they were trying to share. Member checking allowed the assumptions of power, knowledge, and truth to be monitored by reducing my inference and focusing on how they experience their lives. This supports transactional validity and aligns with the overall intention of co-creating empowerment in the CYPAR study, which overlaps with the next validity consideration.

Catalytic Validity-Initiating Individual Change

The social justice aspect of this research is to promote a collective awareness and support youth empowerment. This begins with the co-researchers’ experiences within themselves. *Catalytic validity* is the notion that the researchers initiate introspective transformation by the

process of research (Cho & Trent, 2006; Lather, 1986). The degree to which research moves those it studies requires understanding the world and the interactive process it takes to create transformation within people's lives (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2020). *What is this information doing to make a difference within myself?* Research can become the vehicle for individuals to explore their own self-empowerment. Co-researchers have to generate the results by being in constant reflexivity with the data, which can be a transformative process. The catalytic validity was shown in the comments and reflective analysis described in conversations, where they commented on feeling gratitude for having a space to share their feelings. The reflexivity that the co-researchers learned to practice was captured in remarks throughout the study, which will be described further in chapter 4 findings. Catalytic validity aims to capture the personal change; however, there are other validity considerations of collective change which are outlined in the next three sections.

Impact Validity-Collective Social Change

Another important concept is *impact validity*, the “extent to which research has the potential to play a role in social and political change or is useful as a tool for advocacy or activism” (Massey & Barreras, 2013, p. 616). *What are we going to do with this information we gathered to make a difference?* The link between the co-researchers' personal reflections could be bridged to the larger picture of adolescent females through the community action plan process. We reviewed the themes of their findings, and they were able to come up with interventions that could support navigating these themes in the future. Through the community action plan process, their lens had to shift from their reflective photovoice dialogue towards expanding their thoughts about the collective needs of young girls. This supports an impact validity consideration by expanding from the personal to collective change.

Pragmatic Validity-Social Justice Research

Pragmatic validity raises the issue of power and the findings of the study (Cho & Trent, 2006). Shedding light on their individual process of understanding themselves is an important aspect of evaluating power relations that pre-exist within youth experience. Making assumptions about the information gathered reinforces the oppressive notion that the researcher knows best. The concern for a school setting in general is the risk of mimicking the student/teacher power dynamic (Call-Cummings et al., 2020). Collaborating with participants as co-researchers throughout the entire process and having them identify what needs to happen with the results of the information gathered reduces the risk of oppression reinforcement within research and supports the notion of liberation psychology (Fals-Borda, 2013). The shared knowledge investigation can potentially dismantle the adultism power dynamic that is inherent in traditional research.

I also chose not to use diagnostic instruments within this study in order to promote deeper reflection and conversation that may have been missed with scripted instrument answers. The choice to eliminate diagnostic instruments within this study reduces the risk of having the co-researchers “scientifically mislabeled” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 8), which commonly occurs in mainstream inquiry due to the categorical inferences data instruments imply. I wanted to create a more natural conversation setting to reflect the dialogic values of CYPAR, which reflect pragmatic validity.

The critique of the narrative photovoice methodology is that it can blur the line of research and group therapy (Gupta et al., 2019). This could influence the validity if the lines become too blurred, and keeping the distinct analysis investigator role was important. I had to consider my role as a researcher rather than a therapist. My role was not to further process the

co-researchers' emotions, however, but to attempt to understand information they were trying to reveal. Taking into consideration the mental impact of the dialogues and any safety concerns was a balance between my clinical mind and researcher role. This self-monitoring was important to continue being reflective of any inferred power relations.

Taking all these aspects into consideration was important for a social-justice lens. The degree that research upholds advocacy has traditionally been lost and not thought of as a priority. This ultimately promotes marginalization and expert-subject power dynamics (Orlowski, 2019). By utilizing a methodology that supports power reduction, the field of psychological research can potentially become a social justice vehicle in and of itself.

Psychopolitical Validity-Socio-Ecological Impact

Prilleltensky (2008) described the term *psychopolitical validity*, referring to how a study addresses oppression and how well the study facilitates psychological liberation. The interchange of power between the political (macro) and psychological (micro-individual) can be examined through the process of liberation. This person-community restoration process becomes essential for sustained transformation. When an individualistic culture pathologizes the individual, this does not support fixing the interactive systems. Intervening at each level requires investigation and interventions to promote liberation (Harvey, 1996).

The critical phenomenological framework that I used to analyze the co-researchers' findings supports the socio-ecological perspective of reducing oppression. The analysis in chapter 5 attempts to increase the psychopolitical validity of this study by investigating the multi-faceted hegemonic processes that may be contributing to intergenerational trauma and historical trauma. However, the hindsight limitations of this will be explored in the final chapter.

Validity Summary

Prilleltensky (2008) questions how a study can promote personal, relational, and collective wellness by reducing power inequalities. This CYPAR study aimed to capture each aspect of individual, relational, and collective impact. The catalytic validity was measured by self-reports during the study in order to gauge whether the study itself was having an impact on the co-researchers. The transactional validity was monitored by the member checking conversation style within the CYPAR study in order to validate the thematic findings that will be discussed in chapter 4. The impact validity explores the collective need related to the action plan that was devised by the co-researchers, while the pragmatic validity takes into consideration the power assumptions that align with the critical phenomenological epistemological framework mentioned earlier in the chapter. By encompassing all facets of validity within this study, the social-ecological model is ultimately reflected to explore personal and collective accounts to change as psychopolitical validity. The importance of combining personal empowerment, research, and social justice was essential to this study; therefore, the validity considerations attempt to reflect all said facets. Through this process, there were also ethical considerations that were taken into account to ensure the wellbeing of the co-researchers, which will be described below.

Ethical Considerations

Despite being so strategic about the impact of how the research will be received by co-researchers, there are ethical considerations taken into account throughout the study. Cull-Cummings et al. (2020) state participatory action research endorses an ideal process for shared ownership. However, the risk of vulnerability by engaging in such a deep self-reflexive process needs to be handled with care. Critically thinking about their lives and the multiple layers of family/societal impact that they have to navigate can be emotionally triggering. The unprocessed

feelings could potentially create more tension within themselves. I was able to reiterate after every meeting that if the co-researchers needed further grounding before going home with the adjustment counselor or teachers that it was always an option.

Reciprocity becomes a priority within the researcher/co-researcher exchange as a mechanism for shared safety, creating conditions for children to participate while also protecting them with safety limits (Call-Cummings et al., 2020). Having accessible resources for participants to further process in a therapeutic setting during and/or after the research was provided for children and parents (see Appendix B: Parent/Guardian Informed Consent & Appendix C: Participant/Co-Researcher Informed Consent). Utilizing my clinical assessment to monitor the co-researchers' mental health throughout the experience supported the reciprocity process without disempowering the co-researchers. Also, coordinating with the adjustment counselor and dean of students at the school and notifying any marked safety concerns was necessary throughout the project.

Considering safety and privacy, alias names of the participants were implemented in the documentation. The photovoice pictures were also not integrated into this document because of such personal imagery of the co-researchers' lives. The co-researchers were reminded throughout the study that they always had the choice to discontinue the research process at any time, understanding that the research is a voluntary process. These ethical considerations were outlined to parents and co-researchers within the informed consent (see Appendix B: Parent/Guardian Informed Consent & Appendix C: Participant/Co-Researcher Informed Consent). I also let the co-researchers know that the discussions within the study group were confidential and should not be discussed outside of the study in order to maintain emotional safety. I explained that the only way that their confidentiality was breached was if there was a safety risk and we needed to find

extra support from their school counselor. I tried to take into account the co-researchers' privacy and emotional wellbeing as best I could throughout the study in order to ensure the safety of the co-researchers.

Chapter Summary

This 12-week critical youth participatory action research study done at a low-income school was designed to investigate the personal experience of seven teen girls in order to create a community action plan aimed to support interventions for adolescent girls. The epistemological framework that supports this study is based on a critical theory and phenomenological philosophy foundation, which takes into consideration the assumptions of power, knowledge, and truth productions while capturing the essence of the whole human experience (Carspecken, 1996; Fals-Borda, 2013; Freire, 1970; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011; Stoddart, 2007). CYPAR is utilized to collaboratively explore the human experience with the participants/co-researchers as a shared knowledge production. The co-researchers are the experts of their lives through this process of group dialogue, which minimizes the power dynamic that may be inherent in traditional research.

The first week provided context to the study by briefly explaining psycho-education of intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural terms and collecting demographic information and each co-researcher. The data generation method that was used to investigate and capture the essence of the co-researchers' day-to-day lives was the photovoice method, a process of discussing snapshot photos that they took throughout the week. Photovoice became a creative platform to understand each co-researcher's unique human experience and minimized the traditional use of pathologizing behavior.

Together, we were able to have deep discussions to explore the complex environmental messages the young teens experienced in their daily lives. Understanding these environmental messages provided context for personal reflection and critical analysis to create a community action plan potentially linking their experiences to those of other adolescent girls. There were two parts of data analysis which included the co-researchers reading the transcribed discussions and highlighting themes discussed in chapter 4, and my systemic critical analysis, which will be explored in chapter 5. The validity of this study took into account personal, collective, and social justice research considerations. This study has the potential for future research to expand on the intersectional findings that could potentially prevent mental health symptoms and alter the lives of young people. The narrative stories of these seven young teens and the thematic findings will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This critical youth participatory action research study explored two major themes of intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural influences that are affecting the lives of adolescent girls. The aim was to better understand how adolescent girls see themselves in the world and how that has a lasting effect on who they become. Through the process of using the photovoice method, the co-researchers and I had discussions about snapshots they took in their day-to-day lives. As a group, we were able to critically examine the photovoice discussions in order to better understand the daily messages affecting teen girls' experiences, and explored how their family and community may be able to better support their needs. The following section will provide contextualized portraits of the co-researchers in order to capture the participatory experience and amplify the adolescent voices in this study.⁷ I tried to capture the essence of each co-researcher within these portraits, however, in hindsight I wish they had been a part of reading their own portraits to ensure this is an accurate description of themselves and their experience. There will be a description and direct quotes from each co-researcher attempting to illustrate how each girl contributed to the collaborative process.

Co-Researcher Portraits

Sandra

“Yah, it’s hard for me to open up to any degree, and I was kind of taught not to. Because you don’t want to be that vulnerable because somebody could walk out and it could be used against you...”

Sandra is a 13-year-old bi-racial “unlabeled female” currently in eighth grade. She identifies as Puerto Rican and Black, which she mentions as a major part of her identity. She

⁴ Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of all co-researchers

lives with her parents and siblings. She describes the relationship with her father as strained and he was “not around” and “always working” at one point in her life but their relationship has been improving recently. She was hesitant to describe the details, as she expressed the privacy of emotions was important in her family. “I don’t feel comfortable talking about why we weren’t close before.” Spending time with her father is important to her and she values quality time and connection with him, which is limited due to his busy schedule. His busy schedule made her value the time she did share with him. She did explain that her family went through a time where her father was not really around, but now things are better. She alluded to family discord, but did not want to share details.

Sandra remained mostly quiet unless intentionally acknowledged or given space by myself or other members within the group. The uncomfortability around sharing her feelings made her mostly withdrawn during discussion, but she was able to vocalize where she learned the need to restrict her expressiveness. She mentioned she has been taught to not emotionally open up, because information could be used against her later, which is something she learned as a family value. Sandra stated that her family does not talk about feelings or anything that may be awkward to bring up. She explained the value of remaining silent is to protect oneself but did not know where that family value came from. She mentioned, “sometimes I don’t feel comfortable emotionally in my house...I still don’t feel comfortable about telling them how I feel.” Talking about feelings was not a normal practice for her family and this was shown in her hesitance within the research group.

The guardedness she has learned has also become a macro-cultural rule for her by experiencing the need to be emotionally guarded with her peers. She shared that because of certain incidents of betrayal by peers, she applies the same family value to every environment.

Her general withdrawn demeanor in the group mimicked the guardedness she described. She did not want to disclose anything personal and was hesitant to share her feelings on emotional topics. This guardedness was described as a mistrust of others and became a major theme within the study, which will later be discussed.

She did share on larger topics of social justice and racial/sexist views that she has seen within her day-to-day interactions. She was very articulate about social norms and awareness related to racial identity. She described incidents of racial microaggression during the group's conversations of white privilege. Her awareness around racial inequity brought light to the normalcy of racism that still exists in Western-American culture. Sandra's intellectual articulation of cultural standards and social activism was a strong asset she brought to the group. She is proud of her heritage and was able to discuss the effects of Black/Hispanic racism and sexism that she currently faces.

Although she wanted to be guarded with her feelings, her heritage was more of an outward representation. She described how drinking coffee is a Puerto Rican tradition that is done throughout the day as a way of spending time and socializing with family, which is something she enjoys. It was a pastime and also a way to connect with other people. She enjoyed drinking coffee as a cultural tradition with her father when he had time on his days off from work. The moments she explained that meant the most to her were the quality time moments she has with people she cares about.

Amelia

“I think I kind of just gave up, because I've let so many people in and they've just walked out. So what's the point of it if they are just going to hurt you again?...I kind of crave that comfort. I don't get it, but I want it and my dog is kind of that replacement. And it's like my

mom—she tries but I know she’s faking it, and whenever she does, it’s around other people. Like when we are around people at a party she’s all comforting and sweet and then when we are at home it’s like nothing ever happened.”

Amelia is a 13-year-old El Salvadorian queer female currently in seventh grade. She primarily lives with her mother and younger sister and visits her father and step-mother every other weekend. She expresses a sense of rejection and invalidation from both households, which inflicts a sense of deep loneliness. She shared that she has experienced emotional rejection at home, as well as in the macro-cultural environments at school. Amelia described this emotional rejection as “never feeling good enough” for people around her including her mother and peers. She also described her previous school setting as dismissive of her gender identity.

She attended a Catholic school prior to attending her current school, where she felt judged for her sexual orientation. The judgment left an imprint of shame and has disrupted any sense of religious or spiritual growth. She stated that the demonization of homosexuality made her question the religious beliefs the Catholic school taught, which translated into confusion and mistrust. “If God is forgiving, why is gender important?” The shame generated by the religious institution prevented her from having a personal relationship with God or her spiritual-self. She also feels an overall sense of judgment by her mother related to her orientation.

“My mother is a very toxic person” which she mentioned several times throughout the discussions. Amelia described her “toxic” mother as someone that is not emotionally consistent. She described constantly feeling like a disappointment because of the perceived criticism by her mother and feels emotionally guarded with telling her how she feels. Her rooted rejection has led her to be guarded emotionally, lashing out when feeling stressed, and historically feeling suicidal. “I keep everything down until I explode.” She also mentioned looking forward to

experimenting with drugs and alcohol when she has the chance to in the future. Although she stressed she did not currently feel suicidal, I was able to connect with the dean of students who followed up with her mother related to the risk of her statements. They were able to collaboratively work to secure a therapist for Amelia early in this process. She was extremely grateful that she was able to get a therapist and begin processing things deeper with someone.

Without having avenues to process these feelings with an outside source, she has had behavioral difficulties and interpersonal conflicts at home. Despite these difficulties navigating her emotions, she continued to show a level of resiliency throughout the study by expressing her feelings and search for answers to her problems. She has learned to use drawing, running, and spending time with her pet as ways to calm herself; however, she expressed no plans or dreams for the future. She expressed a deep sense of apathy towards life in general, “I feel like nobody cares...like there’s people a little bit older than us they are really sensitive even about like stupid things...and our generation doesn’t care.” Amelia became a big part of uncovering an overarching narrative within the analysis that may be generalizable in the future and will be explained further in chapter 5.

Despite feeling like a disappointment, Amelia has found other ways of connecting with female teachers as a substitute for not having the validation at home. She shared instances of teachers that have been able to provide emotional support to replace the feelings of rejection and have given her a safe place to share about herself. “It helps me on a deeper level and helps me get my feelings out.” Wanting a role model and mentor guidance became a major theme the co-researchers described, which stemmed from Amelia’s anecdotes of finding ways to emotionally get her needs met. She would inherently look to and attach to other positive adults in her life in

order to compensate what her environment was not providing. This sense of resiliency countered her statements of not caring.

Amelia was extremely vocal throughout the group, expressing herself in detail and supporting others with their remarks. Although she expressed not caring about her future, she was always attentive and willing to explore her emotions with feedback from other co-researchers. She showed up excited to participate each week. Amelia stated she really just wanted the chance to be heard without judgement and felt that she was receiving that from the group study itself.

Ava

“Sometimes I feel like I have to be in control. People say—oh you’re so mature for your age. And it’s like...because I had to.”

Ava is a 14-year-old bi-racial heterosexual female currently in eighth grade. She lives with her mother, brother, and sister and maintains a relationship with her father who lives outside the home. She does well academically and has taken on roles within the school community. She stated her orientation as heterosexual, while having a girlfriend as a significant other. This contradiction was further explained as the study continued. She expressed several times she has immense fear of judgment related to her parents and peers due to her gay orientation. When she revealed a picture of her female significant other, she explained that showing the picture to the research group was a big risk. She explained that not knowing how people feel about sex/gender identity prompts an underlying fear that causes her to be silent. This fear of judgment leads her to protect her identity and prevents her from expressing who she feels she really is. This emotional withholding was a major pattern within the study, which she later identified as overall mistrust.

Ava's sense of character was strongly demonstrated more in her articulate awareness related to social issues of poverty, racism, and sexism. She expressed poverty as a major influence on her day-to-day life, feeling the pressure and guilt of her parents' needing to care for her and her siblings. "My dad does seasonal work, so now he doesn't have a job and my mom is working, but it isn't like enough and they now have a new bill to cover." The greater responsibility of needing to become independent has prompted her to mature quicker, "I feel bad asking for stuff." Her role as the oldest sibling has matured her demeanor and has prompted her peers to turn to her for emotional stability, which she feels she cannot always provide. The pressure of poverty has also promoted an overall sense of inflated independence and created internal mantras surrounding this pressure—"we will handle it ourselves." She has learned that relying on herself is necessary in order to not be a burden to others.

Her reflection on the fact that her mother was pregnant with her at 15 years old has prompted her to further her education. She views her mother's struggle to gain any success while raising three children as a path she does not want to recreate for herself. However, she feels that she needs to start making money right away to gain financial freedom, and the pressure for financial stability that she and others discussed ultimately led to discussions uncovering larger systemic parameters. Ava described the importance of breaking out of the socioeconomic poverty that she was born into. Her resilience to wanting to end poverty within her family drives her towards her academic success. Knowing how much her mom struggled as a young mother is giving her motivation to break the cycle. Ava acknowledged the opportunities she has now and wants to take advantage of raising her socioeconomic status by educating and empowering herself.

On a positive note, she also expressed instances of family discord with conflict resolution and the ability to still enjoy family time despite hardship. Although her view of the world has been shaped by poverty, she values spending quality time with her parents and siblings. She describes her acceptance, “I think I’ve been able to adapt to that, like I don’t even really think about it anymore because I still have good moments with my family. Like we might be able to go drive somewhere but we might not be able to like go [on vacation] and go on rides.” She shared photovoice images of her family having dinner together or at her birthday celebration. The contentment she felt was solidified by secure attachments despite the macro-cultural difficulties of poverty and marginalized classism that her family faces. This was a reflection of the family’s resilience in overcoming adversity.

The healthy attachments were able to give her a sense of security that was noticeable in Ava’s verbal confidence. She described how her family unit was able to get through difficulties “yah, the food was good and it was like comforting because everyone was just sitting there together and like before that they were like screaming at each other and my brother was being cute so it was like a dysfunctional cute family.” Although “screaming at each other” may not be a healthy way of communicating, she felt that the idea her family could get through difficult things together was a comforting thought.

Ava was well spoken when she did contribute and was able to reflect back critically through the analysis process. She understood themes at a deeper level and was able to bridge her experience to the larger collective youth experience. Her poised demeanor revealed her ingrained maturity level, but she was also able to laugh and make jokes within the group space.

Jasmine

“My mom doesn’t want [my sister] to sleep in her room so she sleeps in my room. My mom has a king size bed and I have a twin so every week we kind of switch off to sleep and also having to get my sister ready and washing her up...it’s very annoying.”

Jasmine is a 14-year-old Black heterosexual female currently in the eighth grade. She lives with her mother, twin sister, and younger half sibling for whom she is a primary caretaker. She describes having a lot of responsibility in the household, having to share her bed with her younger sister, washing her at night, and watching her when their mother is busy. This has impacted her freedom to be a child, and she feels she has had to mature faster than usual. Jasmine feels resentful that she has to care for her sibling, but she has also become accustomed to the routine. Her sharing reinforced the idea of the unavailable caregiver due to systemic pressures related to poverty. She did not mention her father and his role in her life.

Notably, Jasmine mentioned police brutality as experiences her family has endured and the severe poverty that her mom has lived through. “Like my mom grew up low income and her mom wasn’t like the best mom and so like when she was younger she didn’t know what she would eat for that day... Her dad was a fisherman and that’s what they would eat and sometimes it was hard and my mom never wanted to raise me and my sister that way.” The issue of intergenerational trauma was prevalent in her family descriptions. She explained that despite her mother wanting different, the cycle of poverty has continued from her mother’s experience to her own. She was brief in her description but made it a point to express that she has been through hardships. “My mom has a bunch of siblings and they didn’t have the best life and her parents weren’t the best either.” Jasmine’s mother has also struggled to provide a stable home environment in the past. She said, “We were in a shelter.” Her mother’s experience of poverty has regenerated in Jasmine and her siblings’ generation, affecting their experience of not having

a stable home at points in her life. Jasmine did not go into detail of how emotionally this has impacted her and spoke of these events in a casual, somewhat detached tone.

Although there were multiple levels of family and systemic oppression co-existing, Jasmine rarely shared her actual feelings. She was quiet and spoke mainly when she had her turn to describe her pictures. She did not go into detail very often in general. When she did speak, she made salient points of how her family has been affected by poverty. The importance of her mom wanting more for her children showed a level of awareness about her family that had been passed down from her mother and their will to survive despite marginalization. Jasmine is hesitant and her soft-spoken demeanor may have been a reflection of the hardships she has faced as a marginalized individual. For this reason, I intentionally tried to give her more space for her voice, as she recoiled when others had their thoughts to share, but she often became shy and withdrawn. When she had space to share, she tried her best to contribute in a gentle way.

Theresa

“I don’t like being home. ...I feel like if I talk to my dad about something he might flip out or he won’t like really listen to me...just like with my family, they kind of make me feel like they don’t want me...yah I try to do my best, but I feel like they don’t realize that, but I try. They expect me to be perfect.”

Theresa is a 13-year-old African American/Black heterosexual female currently in seventh grade. She lives with her father and brothers in a household where she is primarily responsible for the caretaking chores. Because Theresa is the only female in her household, her father expects her to be the primary participant in cleaning and cooking. She explained having these responsibilities interferes and overrides having to focus on her academics and self-care. She explained there is a lot of chaos with people in-and-out of the home, saying “People are in

and out of my house all the time.” She shared a photo of a sunset behind her home and described focusing on nature in order to center herself and self-regulate from her household. This form of centered meditation is a way she has learned to cope with circumstances.

Theresa described how her father’s anger also makes her feel emotionally on edge. “I don’t like being home. My dad yells a lot, I can’t take it sometimes.” She expressed wanting to share her feelings with him, but “my dad just talks over me,” she explained. Her mother has been addicted to substances and is minimally in her life. She shared her mother not being in her life is very painful for her, but she has learned to live without it. She finds salvation at school, her grandmother’s house with her baby cousins, and social media posts. However, not having the connection with her parents has left her feeling isolated, lonely and sad. “Just like with my family, they kind of make me feel like they don’t want me.” Not being noticed or validated also became major themes that will be explored in the next chapter.

Theresa remained quiet and distracted during the initial meetings. She was always prepared with her pictures, and over time started to express herself more during the discussion groups. She shared feelings of being unwanted and dismissed by her family members and a deep desire to be heard by her father. She also described feeling guarded and not trusting her peers because she has been hurt in the past by her friends not being emotionally sensitive to her feelings. The lack of emotional support has also given her an overall sense of apathy towards life. However, she said that she has a strong conviction to have a relationship with God and wants to explore that further but does not know how. “I kind of want to be spiritual...I really want to know God.” Her longing to be accepted by her absent mother, her emotionally-unavailable father, and her peers has prompted her to search for something more. Her curiosity to have a cultural/religious connection is a sign of working through immense adversity. Notably,

her love for babies led to a remark by a group member that she will be a teen mom, at which she laughed. Theresa slowly opened up emotionally throughout the course of the study and identified that having a safe sharing space is something she really wants.

Rachael

“I mean like about the whole stress thing, my mom gets really mad sometimes and takes it out on me because of the fact that my sister has gone to college and she wants to transfer and she’s mad about it and my mom gets stressed and acts out and is annoying and sometimes I feel like it’s partially my fault.”

Sarah is a 13-year-old white heterosexual female currently in eighth grade. She is the only white participant in the study and is a minority by number within the whole school. She lives with her mom, while her older sister just moved away to college. Her father died when she was 3 years old and her mother’s boyfriend became an influential “father figure” when she was very young. “My dad died when I was 3 so he’s (mom’s boyfriend) been there...he like knows.” She feels supported by his patience and his integration within the family is something she values. Sarah still honors her father’s memory and feels that his presence is with her by spiritual signs in her day-to-day life. Her ability to work through her grief with faith is an attribute that has allowed her to feel safe and stable.

Throughout the group Sarah was vocal and expressive with her reflections. Her images reflected primarily on family outings she had throughout the week, her pets, and signs she received as connections to her late father. She had an overall positive outlook on life and was able to express looking forward to things in the future. She expressed feeling supported by her older sister as a positive role model despite her mother having mixed emotional communication at times. She also expressed her feeling white privilege and the guilt related to feeling sorry for

Black oppression. There was a point during conversation about racism that she gave permission to the Black members to describe how white people have unjustly treated the Black community. “It’s okay, it doesn’t bother me”. She described being aware of racism and the parameters of white guilt and wanting to abide by social activist standards but in the moment had difficulty navigating them. The awkward negotiation is an example of how difficult the identity of privilege and oppression may be affecting the teen girls.

Rachael was overall very optimistic and positive with her photovoice narratives, often laughing and making jokes about her dog. She spent a lot of time with her family and referenced her father’s memory several times. She feels that she has been able to navigate her grief in a healthy way, supported by spiritual beliefs that are helping her in daily life. She often identified and commented on other co-researchers sharing in a supportive way. She was very vocal with her opinions and expressed how she felt without hesitation within the group.

Taisha

“In [a Southern state] they kind of just viewed me as the diverse group part because I was one of the only ones that was diverse in the whole school and that’s what I feel like they saw me as...”

Taisha is a 13-year-old African American female currently in seventh grade. She documented that she is unsure of her sexual orientation. Taisha lives with her mother, grandmother, and younger half siblings. Her father and older half siblings live in a Southern state. She moved from a Southern state recently because her mother felt that she was experiencing racism within the Southern state school systems. Her mother was able to provide her needs to overcome the racial bullying and support her daughter’s growth. She has extended family that she is connected with in Massachusetts, and her pictures reflected her siblings and

grandmother's dog, with which she feels a close connection; "he's my baby." Her extended family is her and her mother's major supports and helped with the transition from the South to Massachusetts.

Taisha was very outspoken and sarcastic in the group. She wanted others to know her opinion and was not afraid to say how she felt. She did not participate in highlighting themes during data analysis because she did not want to; however, she participated in the discussions. She was able to critically reflect on others sharing and linked the group experience to larger themes. She feels that her mother made major decisions in her best interest to protect her from experiencing racial oppression. Taisha feels supported by her family system and expressed empathy for others who had financial worries or did not have the same emotional support.

Her communication style is sarcastic with subtle put-downs as a way of connecting, which conflicts with teachers within her current school. "We are really mean to each other and the teachers get mad but that's just how we joke around...every time I say something she thinks I'm being rude and she just like yells at us." She feels that joking around makes light of situations and did not see it as an evasive mechanism for discussing deeper emotions. Taisha often gets in trouble and engages in power dynamics with the teachers. She explained that her teachers not understanding her affects her asking for help academically.

Taisha also shared she felt that making racial remarks with memes and pictures towards other Black friends was not a sign of hostility, but fun and laughter. "We are the same color," she described when referring to her friend that made a remark, "She said I act and look like a monkey." The other participants also felt this was a healthy way of expressing herself and saw no racist undertone. "If we think we are taking it too far we talk about it."

Black racism was a major part of Taisha's photovoice sharing. She described how she felt being a minority in the Southern state, experiencing racism herself, and having family members that have experienced police brutality. She sparked multiple conversations that led to topics of systemic oppression related to historical trauma and provided valuable insight into what marginalized Black adolescent girls may experience. The fact that she felt supported by her mother made her feel secure to express herself and she feels that people generally want to hear what she has to say. Taisha was a great communicator within the group and felt that her voice mattered. She easily engaged with me throughout dialogue and used humor as a way of navigating some difficult topics, while simultaneously expressing her emotions.

Summary of Portraits

The CYPAR group was mainly comprised of Black, Hispanic and bi-racial students with one white adolescent. The collection of personalities ranged from withdrawn to outspoken and created a dynamic that I had to be aware of in order to not recreate silencing dynamics within the group. The narratives of family trauma and reflections of the co-researchers' environment at school, peers, social media, and community provided key themes throughout the dialogue. The themes of the data analysis that were done with the co-researchers will be described below.

Findings

This section reviews the findings of the photovoice discussions that were analyzed with the co-researchers and myself as described in chapter 3. The teen group became vulnerable enough to reveal their insecurities and inner thoughts in order to help us all to search for answers of what young girls might need. Taking the time to analyze the data with them was a privilege that will be described in greater depth in this section. Their thoughtfulness and consistency for

showing up within these discussions highlights the resilience they have as a desire to overcome their difficult family histories and current socioeconomic circumstances.

The following themes that are outlined below were identified with the co-researchers throughout the analysis discussions. Through the discussions of the data analysis, we discussed and physically highlighted the intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural influences in the transcription. Through the highlighting process, we discussed overarching themes that might be taking place. I wrote down these themes in my commonplace book and asked if they also wanted to write other themes down. There were no co-researchers that wrote down themes, but at the end I was able to summarize and review with them the themes we had discussed to ensure they were accurate findings to their experience. The two major themes of intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural factors will be explored with sub-group themes in the following table. Each sub-group will be identified and discussed with thick description from the co-researchers in order to bridge to larger societal structures that influence adolescent girls in the final conclusion. Table 2 Major Themes below provides a visual context of the data findings and the themes will then be discussed further in each sub-theme section.

Table 2

Major Themes

Intergenerational Trauma	Macro-cultural Factors
Invalidation: Not feeling cared for, heard or supported; not feeling wanted; shame for feeling judged by family members	Lack of support or safe space: no place to process emotions
Perfectionism: Fear of being a disappointment, judged, or rejected	Desire for role models: compensated for at school, through social media, pets, television shows, books; intersection of sexism within culture

Adulthood: Authority figures impose beliefs and power; silencing teens	Classism: leads to guilt, feeling like a burden and pressure to become financially independent
Absence of parental figures: strain of caretaking for siblings; becomes the other parent; matures faster; lack of childhood; accepting blame; carrying the stress of parents	Racism: affecting family and peer groups—feeling not heard or seen—oppression
Emotional Avoidance/ Dysregulated Reactions: difficulty with conflict resolution at home and school; attachment to dogs/pets to compensate; emotional outbursts	Racist patriarchy: police brutality within the community, Black Lives Matter movement, racial literature
Sexism: “female roles” placed by family members; pressure to be perfect and not make mistakes	Lack of spiritual connection; shame related to gender identity issues and religion. Covid-19 pandemic: detachment, general sense of not caring; apathy
Mistrust of others: taught to be guarded by family beliefs	Mistrust of others; betrayal of emotions by teachers and peers; assume others do not like; results of low self-esteem
Family Survival & Resilience ⁸	

Note. This table illustrates the findings of intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural influences that were identified with the co-researchers during the data analysis phase. Each column has sub-themes that were identified during discussions.

Intergenerational Trauma

Intergenerational trauma incorporates the family beliefs, behavioral patterns with genetic predisposition that are being passed down within the adolescent girls’ lives (Conching & Thayer,

⁸ Notably, this was inputted following the research study after my reflection of the study. This theme does not reflect what was shared with the co-researchers

2019; Jiang et al., 2019). The concept was repeatedly described and defined throughout the study in order to search for deeper meaning about what is impacting the girls on a daily basis. I reiterated what the intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural definitions were in order for the co-researchers to have in mind what concepts were being analyzed. The co-researchers took the initiative to make color keys on their transcriptions in order to color code intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural influences, which they then turned in after we analyzed the photovoice discussions.

Through the findings, the sub-themes of invalidation, perfectionism, adultism, absence of parental figures, emotional avoidance/dysregulated reactions, and sexism were overarching constructs that were related to intergenerational trauma. The patterns from the analyzed findings provided a framework for reoccurring sub-themes that surfaced throughout the process, which will be explored below.

Invalidation

The sub-theme of invalidation was described in many instances of family interactions. Many of the co-researchers had pictures of their family gatherings including food or coffee that brought them together. These pictures led to descriptions of feeling unheard, with no support by family members. There were some instances that the co-researchers' family is there but the "support is conditional." In one instance, Amelia described a story she had been reading of parents sitting down at the table for dinner with their children and listening to their day and described her reaction as, "It made me a little jealous." The emotional closeness and attunement is something that many co-researchers desperately desire but feel that it is unavailable. Although Taisha had validation by her mother and supportive extended family, she still felt invalidated at school by her white teachers. This is something she spoke about that impacted her learning

ability. On the other hand, Amelia did not get the validation at home she wanted, and was able to compensate at school with the same white teachers.

The desire to have validation and acceptance from the teens' parents was very apparent during the conversations. Because the support is conditional or depending on their caregivers' mood at the time, there is hesitation to express how they feel. Ava described keeping her sexual orientation a secret because of the fear of disapproval; "My mom accidentally found out that it was a girl...I didn't want her to say something like—'are you just confused?' and she did ask me if I was confused... don't ask me if I'm confused because that's just like invalidating." Young people often feeling judged for gender or sexual orientation choices that cause feelings of shame. The feelings of shame create withholding behaviors that result in suppressing emotions out of fear of being rejected. Although Ava recognized that her family was very good at working through conflict together, she was still hesitant to engage in their disapproval related to her identity.

Notably, Sandra's family belief of not sharing emotions may also be a form of invalidation. The opposite of this suppressed emotional reaction were the descriptions of explosive emotions. Many narratives described the co-researchers' parents being angry with them most of the time. They felt that the anger was misplaced, originating from their parents' stress and being transmitted onto them. Rachel describes, "I mean like about the whole stress thing, my mom gets really mad sometimes and takes it out on me." The unprocessed emotions of the co-researchers' parents were being passed on through invalidating messages. Where the unprocessed anger originates may be different for each parent. However, through their own unresolved issues, the caretakers of the co-researchers are unknowingly affecting their children's

self-esteem. The anger was translating to messages that the co-researchers are not good enough and many of the co-researchers felt guilt for the amount of stress their parents were under.

Despite the co-researchers knowing intellectually that the transfer of anger is unrelated to them emotionally, it still affected how they see themselves and the desire for their parents' approval (Maté, 2022; McCallum & Goodman, 2019). Theresa described how her father yelling at her caused her to act out, "I'd cry, I broke my closet door because I was so mad." The invalidation of the co-researchers' caregivers has led to the behaviors of intergenerational trauma to repeat. The invalidation affects their self-esteem and causes added pressure to please their parents, making them feel unwanted as described in Amelia's quote, "I have a step-mother that makes me feel like crap sometimes and she treats my brother differently." The need to overcompensate to gain parents' acceptance leads to the idea of perfectionism, which will be described in the second sub-theme.

Perfectionism

Because of the invalidation from some of the parents, the pressure that is placed on them to uphold a certain standard may become high with little room to make mistakes. Although there were acts from parents that were validating, such as, Sandra's father spending time with her and Taisha's mother standing up for her when she was being bullied, there was mostly discussion of how invalidated the co-researchers felt. The statements that followed these feelings described their need to prove themselves with overcompensated behavior. Perfectionism can potentially become an attempt at gaining love and approval. This takes away any sense of humanity or playfulness about being a child. There were many remarks of feeling unworthy and being a disappointment for not doing things right on a day-to-day basis. Without the encouragement, recognition or support by their parents, there was a general sense of not feeling motivated for the

future. There was also a major discussion that revealed seeing how other people also going through pain provided the validation they needed to feel better about themselves. Amelia stated, “This might sound mean but I like seeing other people suffer it makes me feel better about myself” (laughter).

Because of the perceived rejection at home, some of the co-researchers may carry behaviors of inevitably rejecting others. Although Amelia shared that her mother was a “very toxic person,” she may be taking on some of her toxic traits. Amelia shared:

She does this thing where she doesn't want me because I'm not the perfect daughter that she describes on the phone with her friends. I'm not that daughter that helps her around the house when really my sister is the one that's on her tablet and I'm the one that's not helping out and not the perfect daughter? It makes me feel like crap because every time I go home she always has something to say that I'm doing wrong.

She shared that she tries to do everything right in order to gain the acceptance of her mother, but feels like it's never enough. The competitive nature of “every man for themselves,” as Amelia described, is reflected through her reaction to not having emotional needs met at home.

According to these linked themes, the invalidation ultimately leads to mistrusting emotions and perfectionistic behaviors. This emotional disconnect may potentially set the stage for mental health issues. Co-researchers explained that feeling like a disappointment made them simultaneously “not care” and try harder. Emotionally they have trained themselves to shut down, while their perfectionistic behavior drives them to do more outwardly for acceptance.

Adultism

Many of the narratives described family members or teachers imposing beliefs and judgment that conflicted with youths' growing identities. The fact that authority figures do not

give a reciprocal process of communication disempowers their voice and the courage for the teens to be heard. Taisha shared that a teacher in the school dismissed the sarcastic communication style that she has with her friends and is continually reprimanded for the way she speaks. “I didn’t say anything, I get in trouble for talking back for how I feel.” The teacher views this form of communicating as disrespectful. However, Taisha says that this is the way she has learned how to talk with peers. Making jokes at one another is something that her family does and she does not see anything wrong with making fun of each other with healthy boundaries. She feels that sometimes teachers will impose their beliefs, which causes her to not say anything at all. Taisha shared, “I feel like that’s why most of the time it doesn’t feel like she’s (the teacher) listening and she always feels like she is right.”

The silence that adultism promotes creates a sense of apathy and a feeling that the co-researchers’ voices do not matter. Without the reciprocal communication process, the idea is that the adult has authority and the last say. Amelia explained, “My mom’s a single mom so I feel like she takes all her stress out on me.” Eventually, they succumb and give up trying to seek the approval of their parents or teachers, and may take on an inherited belief that they are not capable. Instances of parents or teachers taking the time to listen were few and far between during the conversations. When those instances were shared, the co-researchers experienced feelings of validation and security that allowed them to feel safe and emotionally regulated. Without these feelings of safety, the emotional guardedness was present.

Absence of Parental Figures

The co-researchers described the pictures of family time as important and valuable, feeling that they were good memories even if there was conflict within the gatherings. Due to the stress of single-parenting and having to work long hours in order to support the family’s social-

economic status, there was a general sense of lack of parental figures. Sandra described how her father was always working and how much she valued the time she did share: “I was really happy because I don’t get to spend a lot of time with my dad.” Having the time to spend with her father, who lives in the same home, felt like a special occasion rather than the normalcy of having available attunement. She was able to keep a sense of her Puerto Rican culture that she identifies with despite the distance with her father, which shows the cultural adversity she has within her family. Ava said that all she really wants is “support, lovingness and parents to be there” and that her mother “makes an effort for us to eat together because she hates when we don’t,” which she valued and appreciated about her mother. Amelia described a book she was reading about a family: “And I was like imagine what it’s like to have a perfect family? Because I don’t have that...in the book, like at dinner they sat every night with a ritual talking about how they feel and how their week was and I was imagining having that and getting so jealous because I’ve never had that.” Having physically and emotionally present parental figures was very important to the co-researchers.

Whether it was an absent father or mother, the single-parent households were described as very strained. “I feel like nobody cares,” was a comment Amelia came back to over and over again. This strain forces the girls to compensate for their parents’ stress. This was seen as their taking on the anxiety and anger of parents and transferring it to others, including their siblings and peers. Ava described family dinner: “We were sitting down and I think someone was supposed to cook and then someone was supposed to order out and no one ordered out and my parents got all mad. And my parents were like—you were supposed to order, no you were, but the kids didn’t know what they wanted.” The fact that her parents were pre-occupied with work and other life responsibilities were added pressure on her as the oldest to figure out day-today

home obligations. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, she explained the normalcy of the dysfunctional event where her parents were screaming at each other and then carrying on from the conflict. She described that the dysfunction of screaming during family quality time has become familiar and did not appear emotionally phased by the descriptions. This may be a sign of resilience that has adapted from trauma or their quick ability to resolve conflict. The positive to this interaction is that her parents are available in some physical capacity.

The co-researchers also mentioned that they would blame themselves and take on a sense of guilt related to feeling like a burden, promoting their parents' stress. According to them, this sense of guilt limits their ability to be playful and has forced them to mature quicker. They begin taking on their parents' roles at a very young age. In many instances the girls were not only caring for themselves, but becoming a second parent for their younger siblings. Often times the responsibility of cleaning, feeding, bathing, and putting siblings to bed interfered not only with their own self-care but also academic responsibilities. Jasmine described taking care of her sister as an expected obligation: "Whenever I get home from school because I'm here for mad long, and sometimes I want to do my homework and then I go do other stuff later. And then for [sister's name] we have to alternate weeks and wash her up and give her baths and all that." The co-researchers' needs were described as being placed on the back burner, along with their feelings of annoyance and resentment that they had to carry these burdens. Jasmine described the duties of having to care for her younger sister and becoming a second mom: "It's very annoying, ever since she has been born it's been like that." The need to take care of siblings has shifted the co-researchers' mentality into needing independence, which in their eyes was either going to college or working to earn money to have their own freedom in order to break away from this strain.

In instances where there was support, the motivation to make positive changes for themselves was evident. This highlights the power of influence that adult figures have over developing adolescents. Theresa stated that she turns to watching tv in her room alone a lot because “my family, they kind of make me feel like they don’t want me.” Rachel was the only participant that described having two consistent parental figures and an older sister that supported her in her life. Her father had died when she was 3 years old, and her mother’s boyfriend has been a supplemental father figure since. She shared many instances of how she misses her father, but feels he communicates through spiritual messages throughout her day. She also feels that her mother’s boyfriend has provided security for her to work through the grief and loss of her father. Having this family unit was noticeable in her pictures, which reflected family outings every weekend. “I feel like my family has been getting a lot closer.” Spending time together allowed her to feel safe and she overall had an optimistic outlook on life.

In most instances, there were pets that replaced the lack of attachment the co-researchers were receiving. The pictures of their dogs dominated the photovoice process, and they admitted that the ability to rely on something for unconditional love and affection was providing them a sense of security that was not found in family members. Sandra said, “I feel like it’s affection as well, they can replace that...they can sense that they might give you that comfort you might not get with other people.” Amelia followed this thought with, “I kind of crave that comfort. I don’t get it, but I want it and my dog is kind of that replacement.” Rachael commented on the unconditional love that pets provide which freed her of any judgment or shame: “You can talk to them but they won’t say anything back.” Rachael’s ability to replace her grief from the loss of her father with faith or a pet shows her resilience towards working through a very deep wound.

Every co-researcher had at least one share about how their pet or a pet they know has positively impacted their life.

Whether they replaced the caretaker or not, the idea that not being wanted or feeling like a burden became a major part of the discussion. By not having available parents, the young teen girls become self-sufficient with life skills, but were hindered in emotional regulation without having a healthy model. “Nobody knows how to express themselves,” said Ava. The absent caretaker theme became a major point in the critical analysis related to social cultural structures and intersectional discussion surrounding poverty, capitalism, and the idea of postcolonial structures that perpetuate insecure attachment styles, which will be further discussed in the last chapter.

Emotional Avoidance/Dysregulated Reactions

The conditions of disempowerment led the young girls’ feelings to be withdrawn or shutdown. Even if they were outspoken and forthcoming within the group, they spoke about usually feeling emotionally shutdown in life. There was a lot of commentary indicating that they have feelings they shut off and cannot process because there is no parental figure emotionally available to provide that space. Sandra described how her father was at one time estranged from her but has been taught not to share personal family business. The emotional disconnect that she is experiencing from her family is being reinforced by teaching her not to express herself. This form of modeling can be directly seen as intergenerational trauma.

Within the group there was a desperate desire to have emotional communication to feel cared for and heard. Without the attunement from caregivers, the co-researchers explained different emotional avoidance ways of handling their feelings or the opposite reaction of being dysregulated and having no idea what to do about it. Amelia states, “We lash out.” The lack of

emotional processing has led to the co-researchers admitting their difficulty with conflict resolution skills. Ava described the underlying reason for peer conflict as “we don’t know how to communicate about our problems.” Amelia was most vocal about how suppressing her feelings has turned into avoiding the original conflict by describing how she acts at home or school, which may have been influenced by what she sees at her father’s home. “When I’m at my dad’s, they’re always fighting, my step-mom and my dad.” She mentioned lashing out by punching walls, having panic attacks at school, or impulsively saying things that may be hurtful to others. In one photovoice picture of a drawing Amelia drew, her image of her stomach with butterflies in it revealed how she normally feels when there is tension in her home, “I drew this because at the time I felt like I had butterflies in my stomach.” In her own incredible way she was able to articulate and release through her artistic expression, but she still felt she had no one to talk about her experiences with. She did mention positive coping skills that she had adopted for herself including running, drawing, and connecting with teachers. She has been able to continue to get her needs met in multiple ways, which is a sign of immense resiliency. However, for some reason she focused on the ways she not manage correctly.

On the other hand, the inability to emotionally process has translated over to the co-researchers’ peers and overall sense of avoidance when uncomfortable feelings arise. Amelia stated, “It’s not just at home, people are surprised because usually I’m like giggly and make jokes and stuff like that but really I just do that to cover up things that are happening at home.” Co-researchers explained that they either overshare with peers because they do not have an emotional outlet at home or they do not share anything at all. They find other ways to compensate with technology as a distraction and avoidant behavior, “technology takes over our lives,” says Ava. Technology has taken over as a source of distraction and comfort due to the

lack of guidance with emotional processing. Co-researchers mentioned watching *Shameless*, a show depicting a marginalized family using substances and sex to cope in a Western society, as a form of learning how to handle conflict resolutions in families. My knowledge of watching this show provides insight into the model they are identifying. The dysfunctional family in the show breaks morals and values that are threaded with sexual and explicit content. Explaining that a Netflix television series is where they turn to for understanding how to handle their feelings shows the deprivation of avenues these young people have to learn emotional awareness skills. Without having healthy role models at home, the co-researchers turn to social media and pop-culture television or music as substitutes and models to navigate their emotions.

Sexism/“Female Roles”

Often times household responsibilities were placed on the young girls by their family members solely because they were the females in the household. This responsibility defined the inequality between the adolescents and older male siblings. Despite knowing that these constraints are wrong, the teen girls did not have any power in their household. Their roles were determined for the co-researchers and they feared being reprimanded if household obligations were not carried out. Theresa mentioned that because she was the only female in her home, her father has placed cleaning the house and cooking as her responsibilities. "They [father and older brother] treat me different than my other siblings and like I have a lot of siblings. So like for me I have to do everything around the house. I have to go to school for what 8 hours? And then I come home and all I do is clean, so I feel like when they put that pressure on me that's how it feels." She described how this impacted her ability to complete homework and the lack of motivation to finish school was obvious in her sharing. Her overall mood seemed heavy and down.

The idea that cleaning and cooking is more important than completing education could potentially affect the trajectory of life. If education does not seem valuable then she could run the risk of continuing the cycle of poverty. Notably, she mentioned several times that she loves babies and looks forward to taking care of her young cousins. The question becomes whether she has taken on this maternal role because she enjoys it or if it has been placed on her through messages of sexism. As mentioned prior, one co-researcher jokingly stated, “Yah, you’re going to have a kid by seventeen” (laughter). The sexist roles that have been imprinted in family and cultural messages could potentially be steering Theresa into early pregnancy because other avenues of life do not seem important or attainable. The message she has is that this is what she is meant to do. Being a woman has marginalized her in a certain category at home.

Amelia described how her parents’ judgment of certain roles has made her withdrawn from being who she really is around them: “My parents aren’t very supportive, they think the generation now is stupid and everything isn’t real. Like the LGBTQ is dumb and like God made you a male and a female...like how anxiety and depression isn’t real and just like get over it you’ll be okay.” The family beliefs that she has been taught are based on sexist roles that she feels silenced by. The co-researchers acknowledge that the gender/sex roles that are placed on them by family or heteronormative cultural standards are unacceptable, but they still have the emotional repercussions of experiencing them. Notably, sexism became an important intersectional theme related to classism throughout the discussions and will be explained further in the final chapter.

Intergenerational Findings Overview. The re-occurring themes related to the co-researchers’ family/family trauma that were identified in the data analysis describe their feelings of the child-adult dynamics that they face at home. The themes of adultism, absence of

caretakers, and expectation of gender/female roles all have an effect on how they handle their home experiences. The child-adult dynamics that the co-researchers described resulted in their feelings of invalidation and have caused them to have perfectionistic expectations of themselves for fear of disappointment. Their sharing described that the lack of having a caretaker in some of the co-researchers has caused them to have emotional avoidance and dysregulated reactions. On one hand, the expectations of having more responsibility because their caretakers are not physically or emotionally available contradicts the adultism dynamic that silence how the co-researchers feel. Theresa explained it well: “My dad says I’m growing up too fast and then he tells me –don’t grow up too fast, and he’s literally making me grow up too fast.” The findings revealed that the homelife themes may be linked to intergenerational trauma patterns repeated in the co-researchers’ family history.

Family Survival and Resilience

The initial review of themes within the CPYAR study did not include this theme and the co-researchers did not get a chance to verify this as part of their analysis. This theme came upon review of writing this dissertation and reflecting on the idea that there may have been a deficit model perspective related to identifying these themes. My bias towards looking for what is wrong with society may have influenced our discussions and negated what is actually working within the families of these co-researchers to survive. The narratives within the study display multiple examples of survival and/or resilience.

The simple idea that the families are unavailable because they have to work highlights their efforts to survive in a challenging socioeconomic constraint. Even the idea that Sandra’s father went through family discord, but has chosen to return and keep working to provide for his family. Acknowledging Taisha’s will to move across the country to protect her daughter’s

emotional wellbeing is a source of major change. Ava's mother working as a teen mom, getting her degree and setting an example for Ava to break the socioeconomic standards for herself is an immense accomplishment. Jasmine's mother's ability to get out of the shelter despite the limitations of classism that she was born into is an act that is too quickly overshadowed in our society. The ability for Sarah's mother to move on after the tragedy of Sarah's father passing and find a healthy male role model for her daughter has potentially changed the trajectory of her daughter's secure attachment. Amelia's mother working with the school during this research study to obtain a therapist for the emotional support she may not know how to provide is her validation of Amelia's feelings. These are all examples that need to be recognized. The very fact these parents were willing to allow their children in a study that may identify family trauma in hopes of their children getting something out of the experience shows their open-mindedness to change.

These acknowledgements of resilience circle back to the prior discussion in chapter 2 exploring the idea of resilience and resistance. These families are faced with struggling against the myth of meritocracy, having to fight the embedded social structures that may create trauma retentions and learned helplessness. The means of surviving these systems is in and of itself an act of resistance. This is why it is important to add this thought, in order to override the cultural response to look for the deficit and problems. The influence of historical trauma and how that may have affected the co-researchers' family narratives will be discussed further in chapter 5; however, the social systems and surrounding community environment that they identified in the data analysis will be discussed further below.

Macro-cultural Influences

Macro-cultural influences are described as societal influences within one's experiences. The concept of this term was defined throughout the study in order to identify what was influencing the adolescent girls within their environment outside of the family structure. This included interactions outside of the home related to the school system, teachers, peers, social media, billboards, etc. (Guitart & Ratner, 2013). Macro-cultural influences also take into account for larger structural issues of racism, heteronormative standards, sexism, and capitalism (Esteban-Guitart, 2012; Subedi, 2020). Essentially, the community environment that the co-researchers are living in was further looked at within this study by analyzing the transcribed photovoice discussions. The identified patterns in the analysis produced a framework for reoccurring sub-themes that surfaced throughout the process, which will be explored further below.

Lack of Support or Safe Space

Because of the mistrust of others, the girls expressed not having anywhere to put deeper feelings. There was much discussion around needing a safe space to explore their emotions and process them deeper. This was described by Amelia as “not having spaces to filter out emotions.” The comments related to having a safe space were described in terms of having a physical location and relationally with others. The co-researchers used the words “safe space” interchangeably when describing their emotional needs. They felt there was not a place or person to process their emotions. Theresa's search for wanting to know God could be a reach for a metaphorical safe space that she does not have at home and shows that she continues to have hope or the will to overcome her situation.

The co-researchers really want to be able to reach deeper emotional connections with themselves and others, and without a safe emotional space or guidance on how to navigate

heavier emotions, they have to compensate in other ways. Without having this space at home or school, the girls described looking for an outlet through social media. As mentioned prior, Sandra does not feel comfortable emotionally in her own home. Theresa also agreed on this point: “I don’t like being home, my dad yells a lot...my grandmother just listens but my dad talks over me. I don’t want to argue; I just want you to listen.” The importance of having a safe space to explore emotions without judgment was consistently described throughout the study.

The co-researchers that felt they do not have guidance from their parents said they turn to social media and television shows as a reference point for interpersonal skills. They seek validation and identification through memes, quotes, and TikTok videos that mimic the same feelings they are having just to feel that someone else also feels the same way they do. The co-researchers described this as their attempt at not feeling alone in the world. Amelia stated that social media as a way of receiving emotional connection has caused issues with relating to others: “I feel like our generation doesn’t care.” The co-researchers mentioned social media is still a superficial connection that has many conditions of conforming to others just to gain acceptance.

Their insight to what they are doing revealed that they want a deeper connection and a space to explore what is happening in their lives. Co-researchers were also able to find outlets at school as a vehicle for safe spaces to be playful. Amelia continued to reiterate how the participatory action dialogue space was, in fact, providing what she needed: “I kind of get excited when it’s time for this thing because I get to talk about how I feel. It makes me feel better.” The co-researchers continued to show their courage each week by showing up and describing how they feel. The study itself became the safe intervention the co-researchers have been craving.

Desire for Role Models

In many instances there were female role models that were compensating for the absent parental figures with—teachers, grandmothers, or older female siblings. Amelia described instances where she felt validation from teachers in school and when she saw them in the community. Amelia referred to a panic attack episode she was having in class and her teacher was able to intervene, saying, “she sat me down and I felt like I couldn’t breathe and everything was closing on me and when I lash out I yell and kick and she calmed me down and I talked.” The teacher provided secure attachment by allowing Amelia to feel her feelings. She attuned to Amelia’s emotional needs and taught her how to self-regulate. As mentioned prior, Amelia stated, “She [her teacher] helps me on a deeper level and helps me get my feelings out.” This appeared to be immensely pivotal for Amelia. In another instance, Amelia saw a teacher in the community when getting feminine products: “She said honey it’s okay—you don’t have to be ashamed you got your period—it’s normal.” Amelia explained that her mother did not provide emotional support during the process of going through puberty, but this caring interaction at the store by her teacher is something that meant a lot to her. She described not feeling judged. Ultimately, the school community is supplementing what she was not getting at home. Amelia herself had to stay open in order for her to receive support and her ability to get her emotional needs provided for shows her working through difficult situations.

There was a strong sense of needing guidance and direction that the co-researchers were not getting otherwise. As their identities are developing there is no reference point on how to steer through their emotions, but the co-researchers did express wanting to learn and navigate how to break cycles of family and societal trauma. Ava discussed the point of becoming overly self-reliant at a young age: “We will handle it ourselves.” Because of the lack of role models, the

young teens become emotionally withdrawn and hyper independent. Having a support person was a major consistent desire that was expressed in order to fill a vacancy in their lives and may potentially be a reason why they feel like they have to handle everything themselves. Rachael, who reflected on having secure attachment with a sense of ease and pictures of her enjoying her life, described having her older sister as a role model, “I had a fun time with my sister.” The importance of having a consistent role model rippled through her attitude towards life.

Classism

A requirement of the school is that students come from a low social-economic background. There is an income cut-off point to who qualifies for attending the school. Each co-researcher has experienced some kind of financial hardship, whether current or when they were younger. Ava simply stated, “low income affects us.” The stories were reflected in the narratives of their family gatherings. Amelia described feeling envious of others that have nice cars and clothes: “It just makes me think about when I was a baby and how poor we were and how low income we were, and I think sometimes I wish I had a childhood [not in poverty].” Amelia acknowledged how she compares herself to people that are socio-economically in a higher ranking and often feels jealous. She explained that the comparison to being in poverty and not meeting up to others contributes to her self-esteem and how she sees herself in the world.

The concept of classism becomes an important topic for understanding how the inherited privilege of wealth or poverty continues to imprint on the identity of young people. Kendall (2020) describes scarcity of food is viewed as shameful or a personal fault for not being able to provide basic needs. Co-researchers shared memories related to poverty, which often prompted other co-researchers to follow with similar stories. Ava shared a memory of how she used all the eggs to bake for her family but what she was trying to make did not bake right:

There's always memories that come back, because my dad was trying to hang out with me and stuff and I was baking and there wasn't a lot of eggs in the house...and I did what my dad said and my mom threw it in the garbage and said we couldn't eat.

She was trying to do something nice while spending quality time with her dad. However, the quality time got disrupted when her mother reacted in an abrupt way because she was focusing on the scarcity of not having enough food to eat. The reality of financial deprivation stripped any good intention Ava had with baking for her family. Recalling this memory for Ava was an instance she felt like she let her family down. She was not able to make a mistake and explore creativity through baking like other kids might be able to. Ava mentioned that her mom was a struggling teen mom and realizes that she does not want to be in the same position. Her awareness and academic success is a sign that she wants to resist the intergenerational trauma socioeconomic difficulties that has been handed to her and her family. The strain of classism and having parents that are in lower socio-economic brackets have shaped the co-researchers' perceived obligations and their place within the family system.

The main emotion that was described by the co-researchers was a sense of guilt and not being able to enjoy materialistic things that are given to them by their family members. There was an expression of feeling like a burden. Ava stated: "My parents have a lot of financial stuff for me to cover and my dad does seasonal work so now he doesn't have a job and my mom is working but it isn't like enough...I feel bad asking for stuff." Jasmine also shared: "If I get financial aid I would just help my mom". Amelia shared this thought: "I feel like when I ask for stuff from my mom we get into an argument because she's really stressed out and her stress stresses me out." As mentioned in the portrait quotes, Rachael also described feelings of being a burden because her mother works to provide. With the commonality of attending a low-income

school, the co-researchers shared an experience of poverty with similar expressed feelings and cognitive imprints. The pressure of feeling like a burden was a consistent theme throughout the narratives, and financial poverty was the main contributor.

The guilt of feeling like a burden also gave more of an urgency that money is the priority as the co-researchers grow older. Ava stated: “I feel like I have to be in control. People say—‘oh you’re so mature for your age.’” The girls expressed wanting to make money immediately to gain freedom and independence. The thought of working right away may potentially distract them from reaching higher goals. This mentality perpetuates their work in low-income jobs without achieving higher education. As mentioned prior, Jasmine described how the cycle of poverty has been passed down from generation to generation in her family: “My mom has a bunch of siblings and they didn’t have the best life and her parents weren’t the best either and we were in a shelter.” Jasmine understands the impact living in a shelter has had on her and her family. This awareness showcases the chance that she has to rise above her conditions.

The awareness the co-researchers had did not extinguish their harsh feelings about their situations. The feelings of being a burden were described through the negative core beliefs of not doing enough: “I hate disappointing her, but I do it all the time.” Because of poverty, the co-researchers described that their stressed and overwhelmed parents were not able to provide secure emotional attachment. Notably, there was no sharing about whether their parents were immigrants and if that had an impact on their socio-economic status. The macro-cultural effects of classism on teen girls were clearly defined within the study narratives and will be further outlined in chapter 5 regarding how the effects may potentially be related to power systemics and previous literature.

Racism

The BIPOC group demographics provided context for a racially expressive group. Amelia, who identifies as bi-racial/Hispanic said: “I have no idea what that must feel like,” when Taisha described her “last school was racist.” Amelia was able to validate how hard Taisha’s experience was. However, discussions around racism were somewhat strained and Black co-researchers did not want to offend the one white person within the group. At one point, Taisha checked with the only white co-researcher for permission to fully disclose her true feelings. “I don’t know—I just don’t want to offend anybody.” This instance is a microcosm of white supremacy continuing in our culture. The idea that the Black community has to silence or filter their voice in order to accommodate white people is a result of the colonial oppression still present in our day-to-day life. The group did not acknowledge the emotional fragility that was taking place around Rachel’s white position. I did not point this out in the moment or ask them to elaborate on why the Black co-researchers felt bad about raising these topics. Rachel also mentioned a story about someone she knew whose family experienced police brutality: “I feel sorry for her.” Her inference of pity may be innocent but could also be contributing to the dynamics of Black people being seen as victims. There is an unspoken hierarchy that needs continued examination. I could also feel a sense of awkwardness that Rachael was trying to grapple with from being the only white participant. She had the willingness to try and be accommodating, but just did not know exactly what would be best for the racial dynamic.

Racism was also described as a personal experience with instances of feeling segregated and not a part of the white dominant culture. As mentioned in her portrait quote earlier, this was seen in Taisha’s reflections on feeling like a Black specimen at her Southern school. She felt she was seen as a BIPOC representation or token because the school said they had a diverse population by her being a student there. Taisha explained: “The school was just racist...I was

one of the only ones that was diverse in the whole school and that's what I feel like they saw me as." The discussions of family racism were also prevalent in Taisha's family: "People in my family have experienced police brutality." She described these unjust experiences as normal occurrences, "just real things that have happened in the Black community." Police brutality can reinforce the institutional racial systems that perpetuates intergenerational trauma and Taisha was able to identify that was happening in her family. She was also able to identify ways her family is overcoming racial oppression.

By moving to Massachusetts, Taisha's mother helped her feel liberated and her ability to overcome racism was supported. "My mom wanted me to try a new school...I feel like she was being a good mom." Taisha views Massachusetts as a more liberal state where she does not experience the separateness of the BIPOC community in her current school. She also spoke of the social movements that give her a sense of awareness and optimistic social narrative related to the Black Lives Matter movement: "It just gives me hope that things are happening and people do care." The co-researchers expressed hope for a changing social justice world. The Black and bi-racial participants, however, did express the continued prevalence of racism despite the macro-cultural awareness. The macro-cultural messages of institutionalized racism were blurred. How can the Black Lives Matter exist in a society with institutions that continue to demonstrate "the otherness?" How can we be so aware that societal oppression exists and still have the negative effects continue? The narratives provided context for how much racial oppression needs to be highlighted.

There were also instances of potential intra-Black microaggression within the conversations that were seen as Black empowerment. David et al. (2019) describes this as internalized racial oppression, where the individual unknowingly takes on the racist stereotypes

that have been perpetuated by white dominant culture. Internalized racial oppression can lead to disrespecting oneself or one's own race without intention by insinuating inferiority. As described earlier in Taisha's portrait, Taisha's friend had sent to her the monkey picture as a joke, stating that she looked and acted like a monkey. Taisha stated: "No we were just joking around." Sandra followed with: "I think if [Taisha's friend] was white and sent it to her it would make things more racist." Taisha responded: "Yah, we are the same color." I asked to see if there was a deeper level of influence happening; "But does it even matter? Sometimes we get really used to things in our culture and then we get really used to acting them out as if they are normal." Taisha responded: "That's not what we were trying to do." The co-researcher insisted that the communication exchange did not have any sort of racial undertone and thought of it as a funny remark that made her happy to joke with her friend.

When I tried to suggest there might be subconscious racial undertones, there was complete dismissal by the co-researcher and the group that there was anything wrong with the monkey joke. Because the fact that the co-researcher and her friend that sent the picture to her are both Black, any racial inference was eliminated according to the teens. The co-researcher did not believe her friend was being derogatory. Notably, the biracial co-researchers also felt that because she and her friend were both Black, the remarks were justified. When I asked where they learned how to communicate in that way, Taisha responded "social media." The co-researcher emphasized that people they watch on television shows or TikTok videos have the same sense of sarcastic put down humor. They defended this communication style as a sense of humor and nothing more. I was able to reflect on this conversation and recognize my positionality within the group during our group narrative analysis. The discussion of intra-racial dynamics and communication styles led to critical analysis of marginalized population communication styles

and whether it is a form of empowerment or recreating the Western-American culture narrative that BIPOC are sub-human, which will be critically analyzed in a societal power discussion in the final chapter.

Racist Patriarchy

There were also narratives surrounding family racism that were indirectly affecting the coresearchers, which became a reflection of institutional power systems that may be influencing the young teens. *Concrete Rose* by Black author Angie Thomas (2021) describes a young Black man's life of family poverty, drug dealing, and the "weaponization of toxic masculinity" that Black men are entrapped in to stay alive (Natera, 2021). The image of the book was taken as a photovoice discussion point describing the acknowledgement of Black community within present day culture. The cover photo was thoughtfully looked at during the photovoice discussion as a representation of Black voice and activism. The Black co-researchers reflected on instances of police brutality and racism that have affected their families. When describing these occurrences, the co-researchers' remarks were casual statements that a family member had been victim of police brutality. The nonchalant description gave the sense that this was a normal occurrence in their community.

During the group discussion, there were positive reflections that *Concrete Rose* (2021) was a required book at school and is an avenue for Black voice social justice. The Black co-researchers were proud that there was a bigger movement happening in order to promote social justice, with attention and awareness being brought to the public. The Black Lives Matter movement helped promote a sense of awareness within higher institutions (media, industrial movements, literature) that may be unknowingly perpetuating colonialism (Cornelius, 2021). Because the co-researchers' school was supporting the education and acknowledgement of the

Black community, there was some sense of hope and comfort that something was being done about racism on a cultural level.

Lack of Spiritual Connection

There was one instance during the data analysis conversations that explored the concept of God, religion, and spirituality. There were strong reactions by the group on this topic, with a general sense of confusion. This was revealed in Taisha's quote: "I just pray to God, I don't know." A meaning and understanding of prayer, ritual, and spiritual gathering was completely lost for each co-researcher. Without a meaning behind the religious rituals, the co-researchers shared that the religious acts have become generic or disingenuous and not something that was going to be a longstanding part of their lives.

Some co-researchers had prior experiences of feeling judged, shamed, and disconnected from Catholic/Christian churches. Others believed in God, but there was no affinity or connection to it in their lives. As described earlier, Amelia felt the dramatic confusion between a loving God and being judged in Catholic school. She described how being taught she was going to be punished for her homosexual orientation has dissuaded her from believing in anything. This was another macro-cultural message of being rejected; "I was told you're going to hell... "my cousin said I could burn in hell." She explained that she was forced to go to church and the inorganic relationship with church and God has left her questioning why it is even important. Attending a Catholic church became an obligation that did not provide a sense of spiritual connection. Amelia explained that she was "forced to go to church," but that she "never understood [the religion]." She was not taught that spirituality can be utilized as a coping skill but is seen rather as a way of strict obedient-driven beliefs reflecting patriarchal norms. This belief system only reinforced the insecure attachment Amelia felt at home with her "toxic"

judgmental mother. The religious teachings have become a negative macro-cultural influence that reinforces her negative self-concept.

When co-researchers were asked whether spiritual beliefs could be a source of coping for emotions there was no acknowledgement or affirmation to the possibility. Notably, all co-researchers expressed wanting to explore a deeper connection due to this general sense of confusion around the topic. Although they had no interest in continuing the religious acts that they were taught, they seemed to have a sense of spiritual-self that they wanted to explore. Theresa's curiosity of religion and spirituality was strong during this discussion as she mentioned several times, "I kind of want to be spiritual...I do want a stronger conviction with God...I really want to know God." The longing for spiritual meaning was still there, but there was no idea by co-researchers on how to attain it.

Macro-cultural Findings Review. The major social structures described by the co-researchers were racism, racial patriarchy and poverty, which left imprints on their self-esteem. The themes of wanting a role model and safe space to share their feelings may be a result of these overarching social structures. They described how social media has affected their communication style and how they use humor as a way to interact. Many instances were shared of how they wanted to have better ways of expressing their emotions in their community but do not know how to go about gaining that. The final theme that was revealed in the findings shows the cognitive undertone that links the home and cultural environments together and will be discussed below.

Intersection of Family and Macro-cultural Influences

The one overarching theme that was consistently shared by all co-researchers throughout the study was mistrust of others. The overlap of family beliefs and peer interactions that has

contributed to this cognitive schema has imprinted the co-researchers and how they relate in the world. The following will describe the thread between the two intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural influences, including peers and teacher interactions.

Mistrust of Others

The mistrust of others became a major theme throughout the study and was reiterated time and time again. The girls described an overall guardedness and sense of hurt from past experiences with peers. This mistrust of others that has been learned in some of their family belief systems was also reinforced by society. Sandra explained this in her photovoice narrative of her and her father spending time together. As mentioned prior in her portrait quote she explained the difficulty of being emotionally vulnerable was something she was taught by her family beliefs. Although the learned belief came from her family, the passed down mentality of mistrust may have originated from a larger historical perspective. Sandra's Black and Puerto Rican marginalized ethnic background may contribute to the mistrust of others. The oppression that her ancestors have experienced as a group could have perpetuated the family belief systems. This is an example of a reciprocal process of macro-cultural influences and intergenerational trauma, which will be explored in detail in chapter 5.

Another salient point that was described in this theme was the relationship between mistrust of others and insecure attachment style. Throughout the study, Amelia explained the emotional invalidation she felt from her parents and, in particular, her mother. The narratives of feeling like a disappointment threaded through her struggle to feel safe in the world. As mentioned in her quotes earlier in her portrait section, she described this as an overall guardedness related to all people she meets. Having this mistrustful mentality has created isolative behaviors for herself.

The insecure attachment style paints a lens of the world as threatening and unsafe (Ainsworth, 1964; Beckes et al., 2015; Bowlby, 1973; Choate et al., 2020). Seeing the world through this lens will create barriers to forming new relationships, taking risks, and potentially causing further depressive/anxious symptoms. The noticeable difference in attachment was seen when Rachael was describing a scene of her and her family at the beach. They had enjoyed making memories over the weekend and she viewed this as a positive experience. Although she had lost her father early in her life, the secure attachment with her mom and her mother's boyfriend allowed her to feel safe enough to enjoy the beach. Amelia, on the other hand, immediately described how much she did not like the beach: "It's scary, only 2% of the ocean has been discovered." Rachel and Amelia had two different lenses of the same scene. Amelia stated, "I used to play around a lot but now I stay to myself". The mistrustful belief system has affected Amelia's ability to enjoy life and may potentially become a core belief that her identity stems from in the future.

Noticeably, when the girls' environment reinforced the mistrustful belief systems through their peers, the belief solidified and was seen as more permanent. During invalidating peer experiences, they learned that being vulnerable ended poorly. Being vulnerable at one point in their life was now seen as a mistake. Whether it was the co-researchers' peers using information and their emotions against them, or feeling close to someone and then that person leaving, they learned that they need to protect themselves. This protection has not only cut them off from deeper genuine bonds with others, which they expressed truly wanting, but it has also shaped their lens to perceive everyone as a potential threat.

Ava reflected on this outlook with a good sense of awareness, "it's going to affect our relationships." However, despite having the awareness, the co-researchers' belief systems will

continue without learning how to intercept them. This lens of the world perpetuates withdrawal and avoidance behaviors that can cause further feelings of isolation and loneliness. The mistrust of others appears to be a blueprint for mental health symptoms that may present in later adulthood and will be explored further in chapter 5 related to insecure attachment style and historical trauma within the literature.

Community Action Plan

The final meeting consisted of gathering with the group of co-researchers to review the themes constructed in Table 3: Community Action Plan for a final review of the findings. I asked whether the information was accurate or if there were considerations that may need to be added. The initial group response was very quiet and we had to sit with the overview results for a few minutes as the co-researchers digested the information they had produced. They mentioned how sad it was to see things on paper so bluntly, and despite the fact that the information originally came from them, it seemed a bit foreign and may have ultimately been a consciousness-raising moment for them. Despite prompting, there was little processing on their feelings of sadness and the group wanted to shift into problem solving for each topic. This may be a reflection of continued emotional shutdown by not processing their feelings further, or it may be the resilience that they have within them to keep fighting for a solution and not settle into defeat.

I asked them to answer three questions related to the findings to shift into a problem-solving plan. I let them know that reflecting on their lives could potentially support answers that would help other teen girls. They were eager to generate answers to the problem-solving phase.

The three questions asked were:

- 1) What do you and adolescent girls need to change family trauma?
- 2) What do you and adolescent girls need in society?

3) What do you and adolescent girls need to feel empowered?

Each co-researcher had a chance to express their ideas. Reoccurring answers led to deeper conversations about what interventions would help in preventing or alleviating these findings. Discussing these answers led to more concrete ideas that could be implemented into action within the community one day. The inspiring conversation shifted the energy in the room and the group started to identify open-minded possibilities. The results of the Action Plan are mapped in Table 3 Community Action Plan below. These are the direct quotes that the co-researchers wrote down to describe their suggestions. The written feedback was shared and discussed as a group in order to create suggestions for the community action plan.

Table 3

Community Action Plan

Question 1: What do you and adolescent girls need to do to change family trauma?	Question 2: What do you and adolescent girls need in society?	Question 3: What do you and adolescent girls need to feel empowered?
“Telling me I’m loved, listening, having fun with me”	“Listen, don’t spread my secrets. Hang out with me, don’t talk about me behind my back”	“Girls supporting girls, listening, no sexism”

“Examples of others [working through it]. It’s hard to start change when you don’t have others who have also found ways to stop family trauma Trust from adults. Sometimes I do things just cuz. My parents don’t trust me for no reason so I’ll give them a reason to not trust me, comfort. Our whole family just does their own thing—no one knows each other well. There’s also no warranted physical comfort. Understanding/attention. Adults don’t pick [up] on certain signs of trouble like my friends do, which makes me feel unwanted/not cared for”

“Strong women who stick up for themselves and others. Role models of all sizes, identities, race, sexual orientation, etc. Less sexualization—no one feels safe being confident in their bodies without getting dogged on Safer apps. A lot of girls get unwarranted images that they don’t want or someone online that they think is some nice guy who’s their age and then some old dude kills them”

“I feel like seeing more women everywhere [in power]—movies, sports, politics. Most of the time you see women in society, they’re being sexualized or are just some love interest. There aren’t many powerful women leads without sexualization. Outlets to express whenever a woman complains it’s always “must be the time of the month” or they get pushed down or called liars. There’s no trust and it’s scary. Trust. When women or men come out as being victims of sexual assault or rape there aren’t real consequences for their oppressor and they aren’t believed. Less pressure More role models for women and an uplift to them like women in sports”

“A person to talk to
Emotional comfort
A place to feel safe
An escape to leave whatever they feel at home”

“People not making beauty a main priority
A role model,
People who will love and accept you no matter what
Less of making people feel like they have to be a certain way”

“Social empowerment
Time to let loose and have fun. Have groups for people who relate to you
More opportunities, role models”

"A positive and supportive family system-model
A stable home
Safe environment
Understanding
Someone at home you can talk to”

“Not [being] discriminated against for race, sexuality, living conditions, etc.
A community that enforces positive messages
equality, role model”

“Reminders that we are all here for each other, and for women to come together despite our differences. No conflict between each other (consensus)!”

<p>“A safe place where if we need advice or just someone to talk to we have that whether it’s at home or school or even with friends, families to be understanding”</p>	<p>“People who care about others’ feelings and for more people who want to do good for the world. **sense of security”</p>	<p>“ Women who relate. Having a positive mentor of sorts who can relate feels very supportive and empowering (gives good advice to adolescence) Groups like this feel good”</p>
<p>“Stability-Support from role models, family, etc. Knowledge/resources to know the difference between healthy vs. toxic love vs. abusive etc. resources to act on it and acquire knowledge Acceptance To end generational trauma, these are needed to help break cycles: Healthy coping mechanisms, somebody to support, role models etc.”</p>	<p>“Society needs to be more accepting (lack of judgment; better understanding) Positive changes (there’s bad stereotypes/stigmas around trauma)—it’s romanticized on the internet. Be less tolerant of blatant oppression (ex. Racism)—give resources for education to combat Representation in media/life (POC; LGBTQ; etc.”</p>	<p>Note one of the participants did not answer this question</p>

Note. This table illustrates direct quotes of the action plan co-researchers wrote down and shared verbally.

The consistent answers revealed that needing a safe space and a role model for guidance and emotional support is necessary to break cycles of family and societal trauma. We were able to talk about this as a group and how much it meant to them to have this change. Ava emphasized this notion with her feedback: “I feel like seeing more women everywhere [in power]—movies, sports, politics”. They want woman “who relate” and can be examples of how to process emotions, be supportive, and take leadership. They want their parents to be available, as Taisha explained, where she knows “I’m loved.” The emotional attunement at home or in the community was a baseline plan for how they want to feel empowered. Acknowledging them and

providing support reduces the silencing and adultism dynamics that they feel on a daily basis in order to tackle larger systemic issues of racism, sexism, and poverty. The empowerment of adolescent girls requires a platform for their voice to be heard and their ideas validated. The study in itself became one of the interventions they said they just wanted, to be heard and validated for how they feel. The co-researchers identified four major points of thinking that came out of this deeper discussion: 1) having emotional education classes on healthy vs. unhealthy relationships; 2) emotional support groups in school by an outside professional to provide a safe space for reflection and emotional intimacy with peers to build trust; 3) mentors as role models for emotional attunement, guidance, and support; and 4) having a platform (i.e. tv show, radio station, podcast, YouTube video, newsletter) by teen girls to share their ideas to diminish adultism and power dynamics that recreate oppressive paradigms representing “real life” issues (racism, poverty, sexism). These four major points will be expanded on in chapter 5 with a critical power analysis.

When trying to generate the ideas to involve family members, there was a strong consensus that involving family was not something the teen girls wanted. The fear that they would not be understood or may have emotional repercussions at home prevented any idea that the healing could be done with their parental figures. The teens opted for interventions that could be done on their own. The reasoning of why they decided not to tell their parents could have been further explored.

Member Checking

As described in chapter 3, member checking is a method used in research to better clarify the researcher’s interpretation in order to reduce bias within the data analysis (Cho & Trent, 2006). Because the co-researchers are involved in the data analysis, member checking becomes a

natural process within the participatory action research. I was able to express my understandings of their experience during the data analysis phase and see whether this was the case or rather just an assumption. During the racial discussion about Taisha's monkey picture, the co-researchers explained that it was not a microaggressive act that her friend told her she looked and acted like a monkey. This was a turning point during the data analysis because I was able to recognize in the transcribed discussion that my tone and forcefulness was my own angle. In this case, recognizing my forcefulness with them prompted them to share more about how *adulthood* as a category is prevalent in their lives and the discussion from that member-checking instance opened up salient points that contributed to the final chapter of critical societal power analysis. The co-researchers were able to either correct or validate what I had been thinking to further increase the validity of the data.

Although, reflecting back on the experience I wish I had thought to ask for their participation in member checking the final chapter of systemic power analysis. However, member checking did happen on several occasions where I was able to shift the power dynamic from imposing my beliefs on their experience. The intention behind the member checking method was to support introspective transformation that would promote inquiry and investigation into the data analysis process (Cho & Trent, 2006; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011; Lather, 1986). This will be further explored in the next chapter identifying larger paradigms of intersectional structures and power dynamics.

Participatory Action Research as an Intervention

The difference between therapy and transformative research exists on a very thin line. Although the aim of the study was to explore more information about the needs of adolescent girls, there is a byproduct of intervention through the CYPAR research process. As time went on,

the co-researchers expressed how they “wished this did not have to end” and that they “look forward to it every week.” Their expressed desire for a safe space to explore their emotions without any reprimand or restriction was happening during the CYPAR research. The study itself became what they had been looking for, which was evident in the way they shared each week. They also started letting teachers know the impact the group was having on them. The teachers took notice and thanked me for bringing the study to the school. Through the process of research, the school community was recognizing the students’ needs. The Action Plan became a guide to what further interventions could take place following the study. The co-researchers allowed me to share the recommendations with the head of school to potentially execute their findings. Although they chose not to share the results themselves, they did want the follow-up interventions to be heard by the school.

A limitation of the study is not being able to follow through with the long-term CYPAR plan which would have been seeing the co-researchers suggestions take shape as a praxis into their community. Through the restrictions of the dissertation process, the essence of CYPAR becomes somewhat lost to make longstanding community changes. As mentioned in chapter 3, participatory action research involves taking action with the information that is gathered within the research (Massey & Barreras, 2013). Cammarota and Fine (2008) emphasize that changing the world does not mean only studying it, but integrating the results must be part of the process. In hindsight I would have tried to make an agreement with the school prior to the research that part of the process would be me following up about collaborating and implementing some or all of the co-researchers suggestions. Because I did not have direct contact with the co-researchers initially during the recruitment process, I was not able to follow-up when the study was finished at the school. Without the long-term investment, the study loses some of the participatory merit

that was intended. These limitations may be inhibiting the true spirit of participatory action research and should be a consideration for future dissertations.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented findings in relation to the research topic of how adolescent girls experience themselves and the world. Through 12 weeks of gathering and analyzing data, information was gathered for a community action plan. These findings will provide information for what an adolescent girl may need in order to develop and evolve into a whole person. This means having rounded and integrated support systems within the family and community dynamics. The results of better understanding the family and the community needs allows the relationships between the two to be seen as a fluid interchange of experience.

In this chapter I attempted to capture the essence of each co-researcher within their portraits. I also discussed our process and explorative discussions around the co-researchers' direct experience of this interchange. By starting with the original categories of intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural influences, the discussions led to subthemes that were identified as more specific paradigms that are affecting their daily experience. These specific influences were explored further to find the potential needs as an action plan for the community in order to improve the co-researchers mental and emotional wellness.

We learned that at times, one system of their environment may be lacking while other environments or methods can compensate. We also learned that if both family and societal systems are lacking, this potentially jeopardizes their mental wellness and can create an inherent belief of disempowerment. We also learned that the co-researchers and their family are reacting to their environment in ways to get their needs met, whether they are healthy or just reactions to survive. These themes will be seen through a critical theory lens in the next chapter, exploring

how the themes that surfaced from the co-researchers' findings are related to macro social structures. Through critical power analysis, chapter 5 will connect the historical trauma context to current social structures that may be influencing the co-researchers' experience. I will also provide potential recommendations on what can be implemented or further researched as a result of this study.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study explores the experiences of adolescent girls and their relationships to themselves, their families, and the world. The literature on intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural influences is very broad and all-encompassing because of the many sub-domains included in the overarching themes, including epigenetics and environmental considerations related to current/historical societal structures (Beckes et al., 2015; Bowlby, 1973; Cardwell, 2021; Conching and Thayer, 2019; Cromer, 2018; Esteban-Guitart, 2012; Guitart & Ratner, 2013; Jiang et. al., 2019; Ogle et al., 2014; Pederson et al., 2018; Reid et al., 2014; Subedi, 2020; van der Kolk, 2003;). However, as stated in chapter 2, the psychology and counseling literature has minimal research that captures the holistic multi-faceted nature of teenage experience with all of these considerations (Hoskins, 2020; Rinker & Lawler, 2018; Schneidewind et al., 2018).

Through this critical youth participatory action research study, the co-researchers were invited to reflect and create a plan of interventions that may contribute to changes that support the mental health of adolescent girls in the future. A major aim of this study was to view human experience as a reciprocal person-environment relationship. Unpacking the individual, family, community and various cultural hegemonies requires a critical lens, incorporating a social-ecological perspective that takes into consideration all aspects of life (Harvey, 1996; Hoskins, 2020).

The themes the co-researchers identified in the previous chapter will be integrated in a critical analysis of societal power structures within this chapter. As mentioned prior, critical analysis includes considering social-justice-based implications including the historical trauma and social structures that may be contributing to the teenage experience (Brown, 2021). The critical analysis will be viewed through a social-ecological lens that includes paradigms of race,

gender, sex, socio-economic status, and overarching social structures that may be impacting those paradigms, such as colonialism and capitalism. Critical analysis done in this way may start to bridge the fields of psychology and sociology (Hoskins, 2020; Ratner, 2009). As mentioned in chapter 2, rather than focusing on *psychiatric* mental health symptoms teenagers may experience, this study aimed to explore a *sociatric* lens (Kellerman, 2007) emphasizing the that the problems exist within society and are potentially affecting mental health in adolescents.

Within this chapter, the summary of findings will forecast the overarching narrative that was generated from this study. The narratives the co-researchers shared will be critically analyzed through deeper concepts of capitalism and colonialism. The social-ecological theory (Harvey, 1996) approach will be further analyzed expanding on the idea of the person-community relationship and how to navigate systemic oppression related to mental health symptoms in young people (Prilleltensky, 2008; Hoskins, 2020). I will also provide my feedback as a researcher on potential recommendations that may be generated from the results.

Summary of Findings

The co-researchers in this study showed critical consciousness or *conscientizacao* as a way of critically thinking about their lives and reflecting on the greater collective needs of adolescent girls (Freire, 1970). This 12 week study included powerful discussions and revealed reoccurring themes of how the co-researchers see themselves in the world. According to the co-researchers, the overarching narrative was described as feeling emotionally neglected. They believe their generation has become numb and accustomed to being detached. Through an undertone of apathy and mistrust, many of the co-researchers described not caring about themselves, others, or the future. Through the co-researchers' eyes, there are many difficulties that stem from how they are interacting with their day-to-day environment, including their low

socio-economic status at home, their progressive school environment, and the social media/pop culture that they experience. Through this experience they had reoccurring themes that created a story of feeling emotionally left behind.

Despite feeling emotionally neglected, the co-researchers' desire to generate change was still alive during the action plan phase. Suggestions of the group included wanting psychoeducation on relationships, having emotional support groups at school, wanting mentors and role models involved in their lives, and having a platform to empower their voices. A limitation of the findings is the inability to carry out the action plan with the co-researchers due to the 12 week limiting time factors of this research process. Navigating the dissertation process for the first time inhibited my ability as a researcher to carry out a platform for longstanding effects of the participatory action research. The intention of implementing the co-researchers suggestions would have taken a longer trajectory exceeding the 12 week aspiration of this study. In hindsight, the ability to support the implementations of the co-researchers community action plan into a true participatory action research praxis would have been the ideal. However, per the co-researchers' requests, the results were shared with the school administration to implement further action of providing emotional support groups at school facilitated by an outside person. Having a place for the co-researchers to continue sharing their feelings was a priority for the group, which was shared and received by the school administration.

On a broader scale, having the co-researchers' recommendations published within the academic literature allows for their action plan to be further researched in the future. Further research on this study would increase the validity of findings and support the needed action plan by indicating whether the level of emotional support the co-researchers were requesting was specific to their group or a continued theme across adolescent groups. Notably, the most recent

literature on macro-level findings and mental health symptoms in youth corresponds with the co-researchers' findings on overworked unavailable caregivers as a major contributing factor to the structure of family life (Maté, 2022) and compensating perfectionistic ideals that shape identity and mental health symptoms (Carstens & Bozalek, 2021; Maté, 2022). In order to fully grasp the intersectional findings, I will explore in this chapter a critical analysis of historical colonialism and current capitalistic societal power structures that may be affecting family intergenerational trauma and mental health symptoms in young people.

Intersectional Findings and Systemic Power Analysis:

The Narrative of Generational Emotional Neglect

Anodea Judith (1996) beautifully writes, “we may be a culture obsessed by power, but we are driven by the need for love” (p.224). This quote captures the overarching narrative of generational emotional neglect that was present in this study. Although there were incidents they described as finding ways and people to meet their needs, overall the emotional negligence that the co-researchers expressed within the study was pronounced. The reasoning this narrative might exist may be related to historical colonialism and current capitalistic structures that have contributed to the disconnect within their families, culture, and themselves. As mentioned in chapter 2, the concept that best describes this narrative is *metacolonialism*, which involves the historical and societal power structures' impact on an individual's daily experience (Bulhan, 2015). This becomes important when understanding what pane of glass people see the world through. The lens of a person's world is shaped through not only their day-to-day experiences, but the history their family and culture has experienced (Harvey, 1996). The societal structures of colonialism and capitalism that have contributed to the young girls' narratives of emotional negligence are the underlying themes that will be explored through this critical analysis. Notably,

these power structures were identified as an attempt to link the previous literature with the co-researchers' narratives. However, in hindsight the co-researchers should have been involved.

However, I have attempted my best to honor their descriptions during this analysis.

The co-researchers described the lack of attunement to others in their day-to-day lives, while having a heightened social awareness related to issues of racial inequity and sexism. From my observation, the disconnect between their high intellect and emotional selves was stark and also a reflection of a larger disconnect within Western-American culture. As mentioned in chapter 4, anger, depression, apathy, and suicidal ideation surfaced when the co-researchers did not talk about their feelings regularly. They noted several times that the inability to express or communicate their feelings in a safe way has caused them to emotionally shut down.

Thomas Hubl (2020) explains how an emotional shut down can stunt an individual and cause further harm to their health. In order to fully understand the emotional shutdown the researchers described, the etiology of the anger, depression, apathy, and suicidal ideation symptoms can be expanded from the epigenetic lens to a social-ecological perspective by exploring how the environment is shaping the individual (Jiang et al., 2019; Pederson et al., 2018). Traditional diagnostic measures only take into consideration the symptoms that people describe as part of an inherited biological disease; however, this study will consider the full historical and current social structures (Ogle et al., 2014; Pederson et al., 2018; Subedi, 2020). The societal structures that come into question also go beyond just the family/home life, but rather explore the environment the family structure is experiencing, including the family's social pressures. Through a critical social-ecological perspective, the question to consider is: What systems are affecting how the family is able to operate? New critical theory research includes capitalism as a major societal system contributing to the family structure and embedded core

beliefs that are contributing to the narrative of emotional neglect the young co-researchers expressed (Maté, 2022; Quijano, 2000). The next section will describe in further detail how capitalism is creating the unavailability of family members, which may be affecting the secure attachment of young adolescents and contributing to the co-researchers' feelings of being emotionally left behind.

Insecure Attachment Style and Corporate Colonization

During the conversations, the co-researchers referenced numerous times how they do not trust others and how this has created a general mentality of guardedness. They feel that this view of the world has forced them to mature more quickly. The co-researchers explained that they learned how to navigate their emotions by being guarded in order to protect themselves. Being in a culture that lacks emotional attunement at home or in the community may be translating to the apathetic communication style. Bizarre statements related to the lack of others' emotional needs described how detached the co-researchers' emotions have become: "I like it when babies cry," said Taisha on a few occasions during the study. When further discussed in the groups, there were stories of either their parents, peers, or adults that they had emotionally confided in at one time which whom then later betrayed the co-researchers in some way. Through their experiences they learned to be emotionally withdrawn.

There were also stories of this mistrusting mentality being taught by other family members. The experiences of betrayal validated the family belief systems, which echoes the previous literature review findings on attachment theory (Eisenberg et al., 1998). According to the literature reviewed in chapter 2, experiencing emotional betrayal by a family member would warp any sense of secure attachment and project a skewed view of the world as a threatening

place (Kwon, 2022). The mistrusting mentality of the adolescent teens could be a result of insecure attachment style that has been passed down through generations.

The learned insecure attachment style may be expressed as a guardedness or emotional withholding in the teen girls' daily lives, along with an apathetic attitude of *what's the point?* The lack of attunement that the co-researchers described may be causing the apathetic and mistrustful tone that is being translated in their actions. The apathetic response to the mistrust could also be a guardedness that reflects Gabor Maté's (2022) notion of emotionally freezing as a survival response when attachment needs are not met. This was described in many of the descriptions of the lack of emotional attunement within some of their families.

The sense of mistrust did not extinguish their desire for connection, but the risk to be vulnerable in order to connect with others was not seen as worth it. This supports literature indicating that true emotional intimacy is avoided when unresolved family trauma continues through generations (Mitchell, 2018). For the co-researchers, this translated to unintentional isolation and resulted in expressed feelings of loneliness. From a clinical standpoint, this would be observed as a symptom of depression. This would indicate that depression, emotional guardedness or views of mistrust may be untreated insecure attachment style, which supports the attachment theory literature (Beckes et al., 2015; Ogle et al., 2014).

Through mistrusting family beliefs and social experiences with their peers, adolescents are receiving two reinforcing messages from their family and society that they need to protect themselves. As mentioned in chapter 2, this belief system also has a deeper historical context rooted in Western-American colonial culture, which will be explored further in the next section (Pitlik & Rode, 2017). The idea that people cannot trust others translates into an individualistic mentality and the belief that one can only rely on themselves. The co-researchers directly

referred to the *every-man-for-themselves* ideal as a part of how they operate in life. This supports Betrayal Trauma Theory (Cromer, 2018; Freyd, 1996) as discussed in chapter 2, suggesting that mistrust with a caregiver can also result in altering a child's lens of the world. If their caregivers cannot keep them safe, the world may be seen as unsafe.

The young person adapts to the family's attachment style, but how is the family attachment style fostered? Taking a social-ecological theory perspective, the attachment styles of communities may be affected by societal structures (Harvey, 1996; Kellerman, 2007; Subedi, 2020). Subedi (2020) specifically focuses on capitalism as the power structure that affects historical trauma, which could potentially result in mental health symptoms. Capitalism emphasizes production and financial growth as valuable constructs within Western-American culture and negates putting family or community needs first (Maté, 2022). In theory, the research findings suggest that capitalism breeds insecure attachment style, which has not been identified specifically in the literature.

The Macro-cultural Narrative of Mistrust

Capitalism, or *corporate colonialism*, has created a hierarchy of putting emotional needs on the back burner in order to carry out daily tasks (Kirkwood, 2016). Corporate colonization refers to the organized social structures that benefit corporate initiatives rather than the individual person or family (Kirkwood, 2016). In relation to this study, the corporate colonization that is affecting families is two-income households or multiple jobs by parents to support a family, which take time away from interacting with their children. Kirkwood (2016) describes the 'dog eat dog' mistrustful mentality as a byproduct of "corporate colonization" (p. 50). This concept becomes an intersection for capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, sexism, classism, and racism through the young adolescents' experience.

The social structures that create systems of behavior in societies contribute to narratives of those societies. The individualistic narratives that are created in this study portrayed the fact that the co-researchers feel they have to fend for themselves. Sherri Mitchell (2018) poetically describes this notion, “if we carry the wound of the oppressed, there is often an inherent sense of distrust or despair within us” (p. 64). The mistrust and apathetic tone of the young co-researchers may be a direct result of the intersecting metacolonization social structures of Western-American culture, which will be unpacked further in this chapter.

Rather than overt colonized force and slavery tactics that have created intergenerational trauma in the past, there may be a new-age dynamic that can be expanded off Subedi’s (2020) findings with capitalism. Taking a critical socio-ecological lens on mental health, the capitalistic society has created a system of two-family incomes separating caregivers from raising their children and normalizing a sense of insecure attachment style. This intersection of classism and racism puts marginalized populations at higher risk for not being available for their children (Heymann & Sprague, (2022). The capitalist culture has also normalized increasing demands without parental leave for childcare or sick time, and the need to maintain employment in order to sustain health care (Kendall, 2020). These constructs have created a reliance of excessive working to keep the power systems as a priority.

Classism, racism and sexism have also all been associated with psychological distress (Cavaliere & Wilcox, 2021). The effects of historical trauma have created a narrative of societal oppression with inequitable systems and survival mentalities. One might suggest that one or all of these paradigms can contribute to the feelings of being guarded. If individuals or groups are oppressed and subtly attacked for generations, overtime the willingness to be open may cease. In Western-American culture marginalized people are seen as second rate people, and the otherness

may contribute to feelings of psychological segregation. Research shows that the intersection of class and race interact uniquely suggesting that African American women reported higher parental expectations and more involvement in the middle class bracket (Cavallieri & Wicox, 2021). This may reinforce the idea that low socioeconomic status interferes with being available caregivers and perpetuates insecure attachment that the co-researchers are experiencing.

Just because the physical actions of colonization are not currently taking place in the lives of these young girls does not mean that the oppressive ripple effects are not continuing (Mitchell, 2018). The importance of understanding the capitalist societal effect on attachment style could be instrumental in progressing the psychology and counseling field. Without learning how to securely attach and emotionally attune to each-others' needs, adolescents living in low-income family households are at risk of severe mental health symptoms and may potentially perpetuate intergenerational trauma. The mistrusting perception described by the co-researchers may be a reflection of the current times and generations before. When I started to critically listen to what the girls were saying, I could also hear the history of oppressive systems that are still alive within them today.

The intersection between family and society messages has melded threads so deep into the young co-researchers that they fully believe the world is threatening. The importance of capitalism linked with the emotional neglect narrative became important in critically analyzing the pathological source of distress that the co-researchers were trying to express. This identification also became important when considering the social-ecological lens for mental health symptoms, indicating that the capitalist social structures may need to be explored further as the sickness, rather than the young person themselves.

Capitalism as the Client

Society is reinforcing social structures that create the disconnect and perpetuate emotional segregation (Kirkwood, 2016). Western-American culture has accepted the capitalistic way of living and perpetuates this cycle of oppression. The *every-man-for-themselves* subconscious belief is a competitive byproduct of individualistic capitalist culture, which inherently creates the cut-throat thinking and mistrust of others. The social construct of the work-labor force supports the literature review related to betrayal blindness on a macro scale, where the oppressive systems are overlooked and disregarded in order to continue surviving (Cromer, 2018). Capitalism supports a survival method of living (Ananya, 2013) and may potentially disrupt family secure attachment style. Having an individualistic mindset “is favorable to the creation of growth-promoting institutions” (Pitlik & Rode, p. 575). Mudgway (2021) describes this labor structure as a slave work-force that sustains white heterosexual men to remain in power. The competitiveness of capitalism creates the segregation and inequity between those that need to survive and those that are in control of those surviving. It also creates a sense of normalized detachment among individuals because everyone is trying to win (Mudgway, 2021).

Through this patriarchal dynamic, the cultural oppression has created historical trauma patterns that perpetuate in marginalized populations (Rinker & Lawler, 2018) in order to promote the individualistic values needed for wealth (Pitlik & Rode, 2017) of white patriarchal hegemonies. According to the literature research described in chapter 2, the historical trauma that has been generated by these power structure systems have translated into individual cognitive schema messages (Helms, Nicolas & Green, 2012; Ungar et al., 2013). Colonization, loss of land, and slavery practices are historical markers that have embedded a deeper sense of mistrust and supported individualistic mentalities (Pitlik & Rode, 2017). The impact of families in

poverty have created mental health adversities in early child development (Bierman et al., 2021), which puts children of color disproportionately at an emotional disadvantage to their white peers.

The intersection of classism and racism are prominent in capitalistic Western-culture and are currently reinforcing historical dynamics of colonialism. With this lens, slavery and industrial capitalism have potentially created intergenerational trauma imprints on family belief systems. The historical implications of slavery, colonization and capitalism increase the risk of mental health symptoms for BIPOC or other marginalized populations, including depression, anxiety and overall low self-esteem (Bessire, 2012; Cardwell, 2021; Harvey, 1996). These were symptoms and descriptions that were shared within the co-researchers and may be linked to historical trauma which has resulted in disrupted attachment styles.

The statements of mistrust and guardedness by the co-researchers may be a micro reflection of Eurocentric colonized schemas that are continuing as a result of patriarchal cultural norms. Their narratives of feeling emotionally disconnected with themselves and others supports the idea that capitalist systems impact all people; however, there are nuances of inequity within racial and class social structures that could potentially create barriers for secure attachment. The two family working household or single parent household limits the social class accessibility, which limits time for their children, whereas, the privilege of wealth may provide more availability to care and attune to a child's needs. Sam et al. (2015) describe the effects of colonization and intergenerational trauma to include "discrimination, social exclusion, poverty, [and] violence" (p. 242). This description describes how the reenactment of trauma may be passed down to the next generation of marginalized oppressed young people. According to this notion, BIPOC adolescent girls may be at risk for slavery workforce dynamics that perpetuate poverty.

However, the literature does not describe the specific cognitive schemas that may be passed on through the intersection of historical and intergenerational trauma. Even if the co-researchers may not be experiencing any outward display of racism themselves, the effects of colonization and racism have been perpetuated in their family systems. Along this thought, the idea of separation of people from their spiritual practices is also a result of colonization (Mitchell, 2018). This aftermath of cultural washing may be affecting the co-researchers today. As discussed in the previous chapter, this was seen in the lack of spiritual connection that the co-researchers described. Spirituality is seen as a major coping strategy for mental health symptoms (Plante, 2022), and the lack of spiritual connection or guidance that the co-researchers explained may be an implication of macro-cultural influences saturated in colonized values. The intersection of colonization and lack of spirituality should be a point in the literature for further exploration.

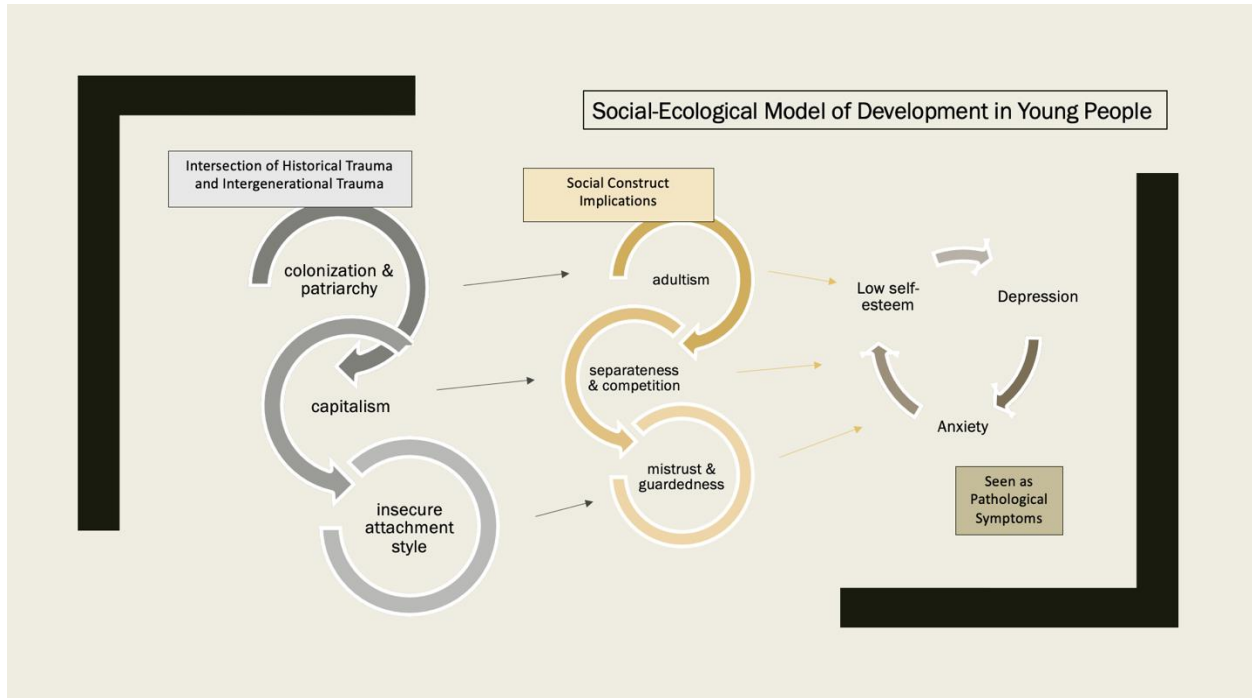
Social-Ecological Model of Development in Young People

My findings reveal that there may be multiple tiers of how colonization and attachment style intersect and the multiple layers that co-exist within those paradigms. Figure 3 Social-Ecological Model of Development in Young People describes the intersecting tiers of historical trauma, current social structures, family attachments and individual pathology that may be influencing young people through these intersecting dynamics. I have created this model as a way of representing the reciprocal relationship of intergenerational trauma, historical trauma and current social constructs that I found within the critical power analysis. The model depicts an alternate explanation of symptomology from a biomedical model perspective to a socio-ecological perspective. The biology of a person is not neglected; however, the biology of the presenting symptoms is a result of the environment, supporting the idea of epigenetics mentioned

in chapter 2. As a result of historical trauma, social structures may have an influence on intergenerational patterns including attachment styles and family beliefs which may be contributed to/and reinforcing present-day historical trauma systems.

Figure 3

Social-Ecological Model of Development in Young People



Note. This figure describes the intersection of colonization, capitalism and insecure attachment style; the social constructs that have resulted from the critical analysis of those intersections, and the pathological symptoms that may result from those social constructs.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Cromer (2018) identifies the victor/aggressor cycles that are perpetuated in colonization, which can have lasting effects on BIPOC family beliefs, creating individual cognitive schemas and ultimately result in potential mental health symptoms. The hierarchy cycles that have been generated by these systems also creates the inherited sense of devaluation that may also contribute to low self-esteem that is described in the literature (Bessire, 2012). Based on these links within the literature, macro power systems create the basis

of social constructs, such as, race and gender hegemonies, that are playing out throughout generations.

In real life, this is seen as working the 40-hour a week job with little time for family or self-care. The working two-family households that have little time to bond or connect due to high stress and low resources despite working so hard may potentially continue the oppressive structures onto the next generation. The co-researchers reflected on their caregivers' unavailability and the ways their families have adapted. As described in chapter 4, having to care for themselves or harboring feelings of being a burden on their parents were common themes that stem from the capitalistic family lifestyle. The idea of capitalism affecting attachment to children may support the literature reference in chapter 2 related to ADD symptoms (Maté, 2000). Without the available caregiver, the lack of attunement can generate "external signs of the wound" (Maté, 2000, p. 145) seen as defenses of not feeling the pain and altering the cognition of infants. On a cultural level, ADD/ADHD may be a cultural representation of the lack of attunement related to capitalism in Western society. It may also be worth including as a symptom within the above model.

Analyzing the relationship between capitalism and attachment and taking into consideration the narratives of the co-researchers, I believe there is a sense of normalized detachment for strained low-income households. However, it is important to note that the co-researchers' narratives were not all describing insecure attachment style. There may be other factors that contribute to feeling emotionally neglected that do not stem from the parent/caretaker's emotional availability. In an effort to better understand the dynamics of historical and intergenerational trauma, colonization and attachment will be further discussed from a secure attachment standpoint.

Secure Attachment Style and Historical Trauma

Another indication that supports attachment theory and the co-researchers' mistrust within the literature was reflected when the co-researchers shared that if someone expressed or showed love to them, they expressed feelings of security. Theresa explained a meaningful interaction she had had with an older sibling that caused her to open up more than she had in the past during photovoice discussions. Her short narrative mentioned that negating the invalidation of her parents and spending quality time with someone she cared about was very important to her wellbeing. The interaction allowed her to express herself and she was noticeably more positive in the group that day. Her mistrust and apathy somehow disintegrated for that moment. This was an example of how when a child's emotional needs are met, the security to be open and forthcoming can be present.

Also, as discussed in chapter 4, Taisha's mother made a decision for her family to move to Massachusetts because of the anti-Black culture in southern states. She expressed that her mother supporting her Black identity allowed her to feel cared for and safe. Taisha was heard by her parent that she felt oppressed within her school system, and her caretaker responded with care and consideration for her opinion. This attunement to her needs created a sense of validation and safety that supported secure attachment (Ainsworth, 1964; Beckes et al., 2015; Bowlby, 1973; Choate et al., 2020). Her willingness to share was represented in her forthcoming dialogue during difficult group topics. This was also reflected in her confidence and ability to share that her voice/opinion mattered.

Taisha experienced the ramifications of white supremacy, a demonstration of racial inequity within her southern culture. As mentioned in chapter 2, the construct of white supremacy created cultural oppression and marginalization as a racial historical trauma narrative

(Rinker & Lawler, 2018; Quijano, 2000) and has led to mental health symptoms in marginalized populations (Cardwell, 2021; Helms, Nicolas & Green, 2012). Taisha was able to override these symptoms and expressed feeling confident that she was able to rise above the injustice.

Taisha's experience may be a representation that shows how familial security can potentially override historical trauma racial injustices embedded in colonized historical trauma narratives. Taisha did not receive the same message from her culture and home life. Her confidence in her voice was prominent within the group because her caretaker has given her the message that her voice matters. The oppression she felt at school was not reflected by her mother, which allowed her to make her own concept about how she expresses herself. This provides context that secure attachment can be an interception for historical trauma and intergenerational trauma.

However, not every family has the resources to leave a toxic cultural environment. Even with education and resources, the awareness may not be enough to overcome the engrained social structures that support oppression. Further understanding of how endured environmental oppression affects youth with or without a secure attachment figure should be explored. However, the reflections by the co-researchers support attachment theory, which claims that secure attachment perpetuates a healthy model and view of the world despite environmental changes (Eisenberg et al., 1998). However, through critical analysis within these findings, attachment theory can be linked further to a social-ecological historical trauma viewpoint that has only recently been explored within the literature (Maté, 2022).

Anti-Black Racism and BIPOC Family Trauma

During the discussion of *Concrete Rose* (2021), the story of a young Black man's life of poverty and police brutality, the identification of racism and family trauma became noticeable.

Mosley et al. (2021) termed *racial trauma* or *race-based traumatic stress*, which is the psychological effect of real and/or perceived racism. Racism can include overt (racial slurs) and covert (exclusion based on race) strategies that can be absorbed directly or experienced in the environment (Mosley et al., 2021). The racial experiences can be through direct instances or absorbed by vicarious description. Racial trauma symptoms can include “anxiety, depression, and pessimistic outlooks” (Hargons et al., 2021, p. 50). The literature has demonstrated the direct relation between historical trauma and mental health symptomology.

As mentioned in chapter 4, the Black co-researchers’ descriptions of police brutality within their families was emotionally non-reactive. Taisha explained that she had family members that experienced police brutality, which was followed by Jasmine’s “yah I do, too” comment. There was little emotion around the family trauma topic and the conversation kept moving despite the severity of what police brutality represents. The co-researchers knew it was important but saw it as a normalized event within their community. The de-sensitization of police brutality within the co-researchers’ families suggests racial trauma symptoms may contribute to their apathetic outlook on life and inherent mistrust of others. The normalization may also represent the powerlessness that is felt and represented as learned helplessness (Cromer, 2018).

Despite the sociocultural interventions taking place at the co-researchers’ school to promote dismantling racism, which included the school system supporting Black literature, there was a macro-level gap within their BIPOC families. This reflects a relatively more recent concept within the literature known as post traumatic slave syndrome (PTSS), which affects African Americans being marginalized in mainstream society (Leary, 2017). Leary (2017) describes these effects as *vacant esteem*, *ever present anger*, and *racist socialization*. The

underlying family slave narratives could be contributing to the police brutality within marginalized communities and may be misdiagnosed trauma response behaviors stemming from historical trauma. The anecdotal accounts of racism as discussed in chapter 4 reflected a deep sense of oppression continuing to affect the co-researchers' family structures. When family members experience police brutality, what interventions do they have or need in the community? How can these experiences be processed in order to not perpetuate the trauma onto the next generation? The notable difference in macro-cultural interventions and the lack of intergenerational trauma interventions seemed to be a major component of keeping the cycle alive.

As mentioned in chapter 2, the literature suggests that Emotional Emancipation circles have been a major intervention for Black oppression (Smith, 2015). Although the co-researchers described wanting emotional spaces to explore their own emotions, there was no acknowledgement for the need to heal their families' trauma. Without the co-researchers' families healing from the effects of colonization and racial trauma, the attachment systems will still potentially be warped between the co-researchers and their caregivers. Creating spaces for caregivers to heal from their trauma within the community may be a missing intervention and incorporating these outlets in the community may initiate empowerment that dismantles the sense of learned helplessness (Maygenga et al., 2018; Nutton & Fast, 2015; Quinn, 2019). This finding highlights the gap within the literature which revealed the idea that research has mostly addressed either intergenerational trauma or historical/macro-cultural influences, with minimal information on addressing both paradigms. Without a comprehensive healing structure for individual, family and community, the effects of historical trauma including depression, anxiety, distractibility, substance use, suicidal ideations and negative cognitive schemas may continue.

Although the co-researchers described interventions for their own healing, narratives from co-researchers reveal a main component of family healing that is needed. The issue with not addressing family that have been affected by racism also supports white supremacist dynamics. The family healing social structure became a major consideration for my recommendations, which will be outlined later in the section.

Youth as Sub-Humans and the Role of Adult Hierarchy Dynamics

A major theme throughout the research revealed feelings of invalidation by authority figures, which created a sense of disempowerment for the co-researchers. The young teens reflected on incidents of power struggle with their parents, teachers, and extended family members. As mentioned prior, the hierarchical struggle between children and adults is a concept within the literature known as adultism. *Adultism*, or inequitable assumptions about youth by adults, creates a power relation that promotes inferiority (Wright, 2019). The hierarchical power dynamic between adults and young people creates a culture of silence—*be seen and not heard*. Many of the co-researchers expressed a need to silence their opinions or emotions because of the idea that adults have the ultimate authority. The co-researchers shared that they have been withholding themselves verbally and emotionally with adults in their lives because they do not feel their opinion will change the outcome. Silencing youth may perpetuate feelings that are assimilated to oppression as a byproduct of historical trauma systems. Through this research, the understanding of adultism and patriarchy has surfaced to be a prominent point that should be explored further in youth literature.

Lac et al. (2022) describe the ways that slavery and patriarchy have embedded an obedient structure of power relations onto marginalized people that has trickled down into adult-youth dynamics. This creates an undervalued labor system that perpetuates capitalism and

benefits those that are in power, which have historically been white heterosexual men (Mudgway, 2021). As mentioned in chapter 4, the co-researchers described examples of this with feeling silenced by adult authority. The authoritative reaction that young people have may create motivation based on fear rather than desire and labeled as “disobedient,” which also reflects a cultural value of punishment (Tate & Copas, 2003, p. 40). The disobedient strategies infer messages of being wrong, bad and shameful. As described in chapter 4, this was seen in cognitive schemas the co-researchers shared as feeling like a disappointment to their parents or not living up to expectations placed on them placed by school standards.

Notably, Black youth have more negative relationships with teachers than positive ones (Legette et al., 2022), which was demonstrated in the reflections of Taisha as a Black student versus Rachael as a white student with the same white teacher. By not including BIPOC and marginalized young people in dialogue and decision making, the culture of patriarchal obedience is normalized and there is risk that BIPOC/marginalized youth will adopt colonial capitalism as a normative social structure. Co-researchers described the adultism dynamic at home and school, creating two avenues of feeling silenced. This contributes to the lack of mistrust (Legette et al., 2022) that was mentioned throughout the dialogues. Tate and Copas (2003) emphasize the need for adults in authority to foster values of equity and inclusion.

The power dynamic between adults and young people is normalized within Western-American society (Legette et al., 2022) which may be a result of patriarchy history. The normalization of patriarchal views becomes embedded in family values and carried on through the expectation of parents (Cromer, 2018). By not including youth voice, adultism becomes the standard expectation, displacing youth power and lowering their self-agency because their voices are silenced. This silencing also refers to the betrayal blindness mentioned in chapter 2, where

the oppressed child may start to avoid confronting the adult as a means to survive, creating a deep sense of helplessness (Cromer, 2018). These survival mechanisms become a sense of who they are and may develop into behaviors that create an identity related to feeling defeated. This was seen in the accounts of the co-researchers stating that they did not care and had an apathetic tone that the adultism dynamic could change. This can perpetuate an oppressive role that the literature identifies as a victimhood mentality with risk for depression, substance use, anger and guilt (Cromer, 2018).

Learned helplessness becomes a reoccurring theme within the analysis, created by messages of sub-human inferences. The message the teen girls are receiving is that they know less than adults, that they do not have a say in decision making, and that they are expected to cater to others' needs. They are seen as less than people with a deficit-oriented perspective that they are not capable of adding anything valuable (Call-Cummings, 2020; Lac et al., 2022). This was observed in the group as withdrawn behaviors, discussion of avoiding conflict with peers, and apathetic mentality. The distinction was the way caretakers handled power relations—remaining disempowered by adhering to obedience or taking action. The need to directly address adultism in order to dismantle subconscious power dynamics that are rooted in historical trauma requires adults to be aware of what they represent to young people (Pech et al., 2020). Gaining a sense of equity fosters the liberation psychology movement, which promotes dialogic engagement and equitable relationships to help facilitate dismantling patriarchal systems that are embedded in adult-youth exchanges (Fals-Borda, 2013; Gupta, 2019; Martín-Baró 1996; Mayengo et al., 2018). The following section will also describe byproducts of adultism and patriarchal intersection.

Adultism Creating Perfectionism, A Byproduct of Patriarchal Capitalism

As described in more detail in chapter 4, the messages of co-researchers being “bad” were insinuated by messages of disapproval, invalidation and dismissiveness of their feelings by some of the adults in their lives. In order to compensate for the lack of validation, many co-researchers felt the need to be perfect. Through this perfectionistic ideal they have placed all-or-nothing expectations on themselves to gain attention, validation, and love from their caregivers. Without the validation, they felt like a disappointment and co-researchers described needing to be perfect in order to compensate. The lack of attunement by caregivers provides an emotional gap that the co-researchers were trying to fill through conditioned responses.

Invalidating responses are seen as criticism and a dismissal of a young person’s emotional needs (Bennett, 2018). Some of the literature acknowledges the ways children act out to compensate for invalidating environments, which focuses on children’s ‘bad behavior’ (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Penner et al., 2019;), while positive youth literature moves away from the deficit model and attributes these behaviors as resilient behavior of children attempting to get their needs met (Mas-Exposito et al., 2022). Notably, there is also literature emerging on the opposing behaviors of perfectionism or market-driven identities that are created by capitalistic environments (Butler, 2021; Kirkwood, 2016). Production and growth is rewarded in Western-society, which may be received as love by young adolescents who feel emotionally neglected. The need to overachieve may become an avenue of gaining the approval of being “good” for adults that normally interact in a hierarchical dynamic.

Butler (2021) describes how the evolution of market-based capitalism has produced extrinsic values to promote wealth, material success, and high achieving expectations, which increased the risk of mental health problems in young people. In American culture, young people are being conditioned to produce and compete in order to gain monetary reward and social

acceptance. This combined with the research that childhood socioeconomic status has direct effects on the health and trajectory of adolescent development (Kane et al., 2017). The capitalistic culture with the pressure of living in a low-income household could be the reason why the co-researchers described an urgency to make money. The pressures of classism in a capitalistic society could be creating a dissonance in children that is not usually recognized.

Developing literature is stating that the ‘over-achiever’ should not be overlooked in the mental health field (Butler, 2021). The over-achiever role was reflected by co-researchers’ descriptions and sought out as a goal that is expected. Market-driven systems normalize adultism relationships with young people and create the expectation that over-achieving is necessary to fit into the culture. These conditions may be creating perfectionistic mentalities that support capitalist values of perfectionism (Butler, 2021). Traits of perfectionism and over-achievement may need to be closely considered as symptoms of young people struggling with mental health. These symptoms now may be labeled as generalized anxiety disorder, which implies a biological inheritance of the symptom rather than identifying and treating the social structure that is activating the gene. The influence of social constructs being a potential source of symptom etiology is a reoccurring element of this critical analysis and will be further explored as an intersection with race and gender in the next section.

Black Feminism and Sociocultural Roles

The discussions of adultism and commentary on various social media/pop-culture platforms led to co-researchers describing how there is a lack of female role models within the Western-American culture. There were two distinct tracks of female role models the co-researchers explained that included a sociocultural role model and a more personal role model in their daily lives. On a sociocultural level, they expressed wanting to see established multicultural

women in the news, sports, pop culture, social media platforms and political public spotlights. The social construct they described would be a multicultural woman that came to her power by accomplishments and achieved notoriety. The sociocultural role model was someone they wanted to aspire to as they got older. As far as in their daily lives, their desire for a healthy role model was more personal and related to their emotional needs. The co-researchers explained they do not have a sense of healthy guidance to follow as young women and expressed a desperate desire to have that role filled within their lives. Overall, the group expressed wanting parents, teachers, and adult figures in social media/pop culture to demonstrate healthy ways of living.

Sociocultural Role Models

Creating healthy multicultural female role model figures within sociocultural standards produces a message that marginalized women can become successful. In my opinion, this depends on how the role models are presented. The messages may promote standards and norms that promote a fixed standard of racial expectation, or provide inspiration for people that may not identify that their race can be something other than what is already stigmatized. However, the desire for role models was something that continuously came up during the co-researchers' narratives. Wenhold and Harrison (2019) write about *wishful identification*, which describes the psychological process of wanting or desiring to be like another person. They conducted research supporting adolescents' identification with same-gender fiction characters and the need to identify with a role model. This phenomenon demonstrates the power and influence media has on emerging teen girls related to a potential inherent need to have guidance.

As mentioned in chapter 4, the desire for public role models was discussed in detail related to racism and sociocultural propaganda the co-researchers described in their images, including Black authors and marginalized pop star figures that they idolized. The Black and

biracial Black co-researchers noted that there are very few examples of Black women in power for them to reference. They shared that without these examples, the sexualized pop culture image of women is the only presence they have to reference. Several comments by Taisha, Ava, and Rachael described their wish to discontinue hypersexualized body images by women in social media/pop culture. They shared how this standard put too much pressure on what they need to look like themselves.

The Black feminist perspective highlights the oppressive nature of the Black woman role within society at the intersection of race and gender. This intersection of sexism and racism capturing Crenshaw's (1991) original intention of the term intersectionality has been skewed within the literature by the appropriation of the term. Kendall (2020) has now begun to acknowledge that there is a lack within feminism in general, and has brought attention to the need for a broader spectrum of female issues to address. These issues include food scarcity, affordable housing, universal healthcare, valuable education, and reproductive justice (2020). These issues become an intersection of classist accessibility which marginalized populations may be more at risk.

Another poignant example in the literature is the reference to the African American matriarchal societies that honor and take great care of their sexuality as reproductive agents (Dipio, 2019) rather than the exploitative use for men. This may also be an expansion of feminism interlacing traditional aspects of culture in order to dismantle patriarchal values. This was reflected in the co-researchers' desires to honor women for something other than their hypersexualized body images. The Black Lives Matter movement recently began to use social media activity to shed light on the "striking images neglected in the mainstream media" (Dipio, 2019, p. 1056). The need to expand on feminist issues is also a call to action for women to be

more acknowledged rather than the erasure or denial within Western culture (2020), which is what the co-researchers were advocating for by wanting women role models to be available. This gap in cultural role models is potentially affecting the identity of the young BIPOC co-researchers and may be linked to larger systemic issues of not having equal access to females. The “neglected images” may also be a cultural message that is reinforcing the co-researchers’ emotional neglect. If they are not seen on a societal scale, they may feel left behind as individuals.

For the co-researchers, the white heteronormative role model becomes a standard guideline of possibility that the young teens may aspire to be, which continues to perpetuate through subliminal messages in the media. The absence of a role model is an indirect message that Black females are subordinate, supporting a critical race theory perspective (Crenshaw, 1991). The importance of highlighting the intersection of sexism is also important when considering the sexualized concepts of beauty in the media and how that is affecting young adolescents. The patriarchal constructs that perpetuate Western-American culture have been stated in prior sections within this chapter, creating a reoccurring theme throughout the analysis. The co-researchers explained that young women are observing the need for racial and gender/sex sociocultural stereotypes to change within public platforms.

Personal Role Models

The need for role models on a personal level was also described in many accounts throughout the study. The desire for someone to show the co-researchers how to handle their emotions or navigate day-to-day living was expressed multiple times by each participant. Many of the co-researchers described relying on defaulted cultural figures as a role model template. Without healthy female role models that do not hypersexualize or stigmatize marginalized

BIPOC women at home or school, the teens are forced to create their own working model.

Without representing models of how to process emotions and initiate healthy behaviors, the co-researchers expressed various times of feeling emotional dysregulation or emotionally shutting down. As described earlier, Amelia was able to regulate her emotions with a teacher, which made her feel cared for and secure. This relational experience validated that she was heard and seen for who she is, which is something the co-researcher expressed she needs. Collectively, this was an example of what the co-researchers expressed they needed in daily life.

As described in chapter 2, the desire for a personal role model is an aspect of attachment theory and the need for a secure working model (Ainsworth, 1964; Beckes et al., 2015; Bowlby, 1973; Choate et al., 2020). Without having this model to refer to at home or in the BIPOC co-researchers' sociocultural environment, they are at risk for an insecure attachment style and potential symptomology. Shifting the importance of family and community to an individualistic perspective to work and produce more are societal values that align with a neoliberal society. As mentioned in chapter 2, without considering family and community as a valuable factor in society, social structures and roles may be contributing to the perpetuation of the co-researchers' descriptions of feeling emotionally neglected. The role model concept then becomes a major focus when critically thinking about societal structures and roles that may have shifted as a result of a capitalist culture and will be explored further in the next section.

Colonized Influence on Aging People

Based on the critical analysis of how capitalism has affected family attachment styles, further discussion on what has culturally shifted in American society compared to other cultures will be explored. The idea that poverty and colonialist slave-labor systems have created unavailable caregivers for low socio-economic households is not explicitly explained within the

literature, but does correspond with the co-researchers' narratives. As described in chapter 4, the co-researchers discussed the time they had with their parents was not very frequent and often strained, leaving imprints of feeling that they are a burden.

The co-researchers' desperate desire for a role model and the negative emotional effects the lack of this role is creating in their lives is an example of the psychological impact that may be stemming from the capitalist Western-American social structures. This idea supports the literature that the current culture the teen girls are living in does not provide for their evolving emotional and developmental needs because of the capitalist focus and cultural value systems that promote individual needs rather than community needs (Subedi, 2020). Historically, citations of the Elder role are marked throughout history as people providing context for wisdom with deep respect to their place in society (Jebara, 2021). The emotional neglect and need for that to be fulfilled by a family member, teacher, or sociocultural aspiration that co-researchers described may be a contemporary issue tailored to capitalistic Western-American culture.

The Role of the Elder

In order to gain a better understanding of the co-researchers' need for role models, I explored alternative cultures outside of the Euro-centric standards that have had success in meeting the role model need. Taking a cross-cultural perspective of role models allows us to consider the societal role of the "Elder"⁹ within the community. The role of the Elder does not necessarily mean the oldest person in society. However, it embodies a role for young people to seek wisdom and guidance. In Chinese culture, the role of grandparents as mentor figures for youth is highly regarded (Mjelde-Mossey, 2007). Elders provide teachings that support healthy

⁹ The word Elder is capitalized as referenced in other Indigenous Elder descriptions within the literature, making a distinction between elder population and Indigenous Elder wisdom and teachings (Gifford & McEachern, 2021)

practices to the next generation. In a parallel context, Indigenous Elder teachings come in the form of story-telling, drum making, ceremonies, rituals, and connecting with nature (Lessard et al., 2021). Through these practices an attunement and secure attachment naturally forms.

Taking a look at the socially constructed roles within society from a social-ecological perspective allows for a person-community description of what the co-researchers are experiencing (Hoskins, 2020). The Elder is part of the collective community that provides a purposeful role to young people (Menakem, 2017), which also supports the idea that the Elders have value as aging people (Gifford & McEachern, 2021). The Elder role supports a community-based system where reciprocal needs of the community are met (Mjelde-Mossey, 2007). This does not mean Elders impose an authoritative hierarchy (although they are deeply respected), but rather provide guidance and attunement for the next generation. This research demonstrates that without this role, the individualistic mentality of Western-American society has impacted young people's navigation of life skills. By not having a guide or mentor figure to support the developmental process, the co-researchers described feeling lost and left behind. In a few instances described in chapter 4, the co-researchers had moments of role model guidance from teachers or an older sibling that impacted them in a deep positive way. Without this consistent role model, the tendency to not care about their future and feel somewhat directionless was more inclined.

The impact of not having the Elder role in Western-American culture has reciprocally changed the value and meaning of older aging people. Bergeron and Lagace (2021) describe how the value attributed to age is a socially constructed process which changes within each culture. The purpose of the Elder has diminished within Western-American culture and is contributing to a construct of *ageism* where older people are seen as cognitively, affectively, or behaviorally

compromised (Mjelde-Mossey, 2007; Bergeron & Lagace, 2021). Literature describes that within individualistic cultures, there is an overall lack of purpose for the aging person (Bergeron & Lagace, 2021).

By societal standards dismissing the worth and value of older people, the Elder role is eliminated and forces young people to seek elsewhere for guidance. Through my critical thinking about the cultural literature and the co-researchers' claims, the idea of eliminating the Elder role promotes further values of self-reliance and reinforces self-sufficient ideals of capitalism. This becomes an intersection of capitalist values perpetuating the individualistic mentality, creating a need for young people to compete and thrive in a market-driven society (Butler, 2021). As mentioned in chapter 2, the historical structures that promote colonialist values appear to have imprinted into present day capitalist individualistic mentalities. The narrative roles of ageing people within Western-American society have been sculpted by these mentalities and have potentially shifted the emotional needs of young people. The lack of the Elder role may be another contribution to the overall narrative of insecure attachment style and the emotional neglect the co-researchers described. This leads into a larger conversation how traditionally children were provided those needs through the role of the matriarch.

The Matriarch. African American proverbs described women were traditionally in charge of the agricultural economy within a matriarchal society (Canan, 2013; Ngohengo, 2022). This meant motherhood was in charge of nourishing the children, the agricultural economy and the spiritual wellbeing of the community. Dipio (2019) explains the idea of matriarchy is not a dual concept of patriarchy where women were in charge, however, matriarchy embodies the essence of complimentary strategies working towards balanced harmony together (2019). This looks like women equally distributing goods amongst families, growing crops together. "It

contrasts the ‘exchange economy’ aligned to patriarchy and capitalism; where the ‘gift principle’ is marginalized in the interest of profitmaking” (Dipio, 2019, p. 10). The matriarchy supports non-hierarchical power, with a spirit of shared collaboration for the greater good (Canan, 2013).

The concept of the matriarch is an embedded historical concept within African American culture (Dipio, 2019). Alternatively, some scholars believe that the Black matriarch is a stereotype as a result of single family households raising children by themselves (Hyman & Reed, 1969). Understanding the social context of the matriarch is difficult, however, the idea of having a leading female figure in the lives of the co-researchers was clearly expressed as missing. Menakem (2017) emphasizes the need for cultural healing for African Americans to begin with “African American leaders, artists, writers, speakers, activists, and elders who have healed their racialized trauma” (p.259). Notably, the co-researchers did not cite anyone that represented the matriarch figure within their lives. The larger question that presents itself from their reflections is the cultural impact that has been stripped from their families. Without the matriarch, there exists a missing link within current Western-American culture. The void may be a representation within the co-researchers’ lives of the patriarchal dissemblance of traditional female power within their heritage. The co-researchers’ desperation for guidance may be an attempt at calling the role of the Elder back into the community. Understanding further what Elders may need to heal their racialized trauma is equally as important. This would support the *cultural revitalization* that Jordan et al. (2021) discusses as a part of a resistance movement for people who are at risk for societal oppression. Other social dynamics may also be occurring to contribute to their experience, and the emotional narrative will be explored in the next section.

White Supremacy Perpetuating Sub-human Shame

During the discussions, the Black co-researchers described not having any Black figures in the media and their desire to have racial influence within cultural platforms. This is an example of macro-cultural factors within the media having white dominance. Sociologist Karen Pyke (2010) discusses the idea of internalized racism as a multidimensional concept of how oppressive systems create an unspoken racial hierarchy. An example of internalized racism is taking on the dominant race's view of other races as inferior. Marginalized populations will subconsciously perpetuate the racial stigmas as normative behaviors (Pyke, 2010). This "mental colonization" (p. 556) is infiltrated within the culture through mainstream depictions of one race being more dominant than others. Examples of this may include white cisgender heterosexual television broadcasters dominating news roles, or movies depicting characters that display certain racial Black/victim and white/hero roles. The internalized roles that macro-cultural systems have created are infiltrating the subconscious of people within the Western-American culture to see everyone outside of the white heterosexual male as sub-human others (Pyke, 2010). The following section will connect the co-researchers' accounts and how societal hegemonies may have created this dehumanizing dynamic.

The Subordinate Role of Black People

The dynamics within the group also provided information aside from the co-researchers direct responses and critically looking at these dynamics is important to understanding the impact of cultural roles. I began to notice at certain points within the study the microaggressive roles were playing out during the study in several different ways. One aspect of this narrative was revealed as potential internalized racism and intra-racial racism. As described in chapter 4, Taisha laughingly shared that her Black friend sent her a picture of a monkey indicating that she looks and acts like a monkey. When I challenged the idea that this may be racist, I was shot

down by all the co-researchers saying that the reference was okay because Taisha's friend is Black so it was not an insult. The idea of racialized humor within Black communities may be a form of mental colonization. On the other hand, this may also be a projection of my positionality as a white person, and I cannot make absolute claims about the nuances of internalized racism or inter-racial dynamics that may have been occurring. However, there is literature that demonstrates both views and will be explained further.

Internalized Racism and the White Notion of Animalistic Roles

White supremacy has many layers, including the outward dominance of white privilege contrasted with quieter undertones of microaggressive roles that contribute to the mindsets of young adolescent girls. The microaggressive messages were highlighted in Taisha's reflections of her and her friend interacting. Cardwell (2021) describes this as the Black/white binary, "the idea that our ideological structures have shaped us to view racialized bodies as either Black or white, as a monoracial paradigm of race which moves beyond the critique of the Black/white binary" (p. 209). Because the co-researchers saw the racialized humor comments as non-threatening, the monkey reference took away the concept of deep embedded historical oppression that is associated with white supremacist implications that Black people have animalistic sub-human traits (Corneilius, 2021; Said, 1979). The animalistic connotation infers that white people are above and better than Black people, which is a colonialist ideal that may be microaggressively perpetuating in present-day. The young co-researchers may be adopting this representation without knowing the deep embeddedness of white supremacy through their intra-racial humor, comments and communication.

Pyke (2010) mentions that the subordinate role of Black people has become a mental colonization that is subconsciously accepted within Western-American culture. The acceptance

of this role also contributes to continuing racial hegemonies. In his powerful book, *How to Be an Antiracist* Kendi Ibram (2019) discusses the powerless defense that Black people contribute to by expecting that people of color cannot be racist. This idea can be controversial within the Black academia, but is worth noting in order to create a variance of critical lenses on this subject. This inherited powerlessness becomes intertwined with the oppressed roles of helplessness and subservience that were adopted from slavery practices (Ibram, 2019). Menakem (2017) also supports the idea that Black people need to stop referring to each other with racial slurs, emphasizing the idea that other cultures do not use racial slurs towards one another.

Historically, Black people are referenced as having a “brute stereotype” portrayed as “savage, animalistic, destructive and criminal” (Picturing Race, 2017, p. 5). The reference of Black people being brutes/monkeys are terms related to slavery and colonialism. The sub-human archetype is a social mechanism of othering that is generated in multiple cultures outside of the Eurocentric peoples (Said, 1979). This animalistic implication subconsciously creates a mentality that Black people are a threat. Implying that Black people are criminals and a threat to society provides an underlying justification for the need to be detained.

Notably, through this critical analysis I am bridging the idea that the animalistic microaggressive roles may be subconsciously contributing to police brutality. Identifying Black people as subservient to white people implies that Black people need to be detained. The Black animalistic sub-human role may promote a sense of authority and entitlement that reinforces white dominance. Menakem (2017) explains that there are people that see police figures as noble protectors, while others view them as an opposing force. The colonized views instill a separateness within different communities and may contribute to further communication issues that lead to police brutality. The literature also reveals micro-level research focused on police

behavior rather than the macro-level social structures that have contributed to the dynamics of police brutality (Mars, 2002). If Black people are internalizing the animalistic role that was deemed in historical colonization, the communication style and actions may be a result of this internalized role. This may not be the case for every BIPOC person, and many BIPOC people have chosen to refuse racial schemas and associated language.

However, for those BIPOC people that may be engaging in those schemas, the monkey reference may be an inferred message that Black people are inferior to white people. This may potentially affect a Black person's self-esteem and a deeper belief of learned helplessness that continues daily oppression. This sense of learned helplessness is infused within the anti-Black slave culture that reinforces white supremacy with current day police brutality. Although some BIPOC people may believe intra-racial jokes are empowering, the argument is that such remarks are covertly keeping colonial ideals alive. Internalized racism may be an example of how historical trauma dynamics have been intertwined through systemic power structures and current social constructs to create intergenerational trauma. The idea that BIPOC people have subconsciously adopted racial beliefs and are unknowingly perpetuating these beliefs through intra-racial exchanges is something to be further explored.

Pyke (2010) describes how internalized oppression becomes adopted by the oppressed when they accept the oppressive roles that are placed on them by the oppressive race. She also discusses how using racial slurs or insults intra-racially may be a defense mechanism, "defensive othering," which may be used by a subordinate group to align with the dominant group (p. 557). The young co-researchers may have subconsciously accepted the racial roles and do not feel the need to intercept. Another example of this was seen when Taisha felt bad for speaking about white people in front of Rachael. Menakem (2017) refers to the need to make white people

comfortable, “nor is it your job to soothe white people whose lizard-brain fears get activated by the color of your skin” (p. 193). The ramifications of continuing the mental colonization may result in lowered self-esteem and perpetuating the beliefs of learned helplessness in their future actions. Jordan et al. (2021) describes the need for self-authorship within an individual’s authenticity, which may be missing due to the resilient conformity behaviors that marginalized people have learned to survive and coexist in a colonized environment. Taisha is usually shamed for speaking the way she wants by white teachers and may be restricting her authentic expression at the expense of conforming to white societal standards. These subconscious constructs of historical trauma may also be creating the cognitive schemas that perpetuate cycles of classism, which inevitably reinforces the idea of learned helplessness. The subconscious constructs may also be seen as symptoms of mental health issues related to historical trauma that were previously described in chapter 2. This reciprocal process has deep underlying roots that need to be acknowledged in order to heal.

The Black/white binary creates an illusion that history does not have a current effect on the perpetuation of racism. Mars (2002) explains this as *conflict theory* where the differentiating social systems create a divide between the powerful and powerless. Colonialism and slavery became the social systems that categorized white people (powerful) and Black people (powerless). These systems are replicating in police brutality and more covertly in linguistic communication styles (Washington, 2020). The social norms of Black and white culture need to be communicated for deeper critical understanding. The alternative opinion that intra-racial jokes are a form of empowerment will be explored further below.

Black Linguistic Empowerment

On the other hand, the co-researchers felt that the monkey remarks were justified because of another adopted belief that using the racial messages intra-racially becomes a form of Black empowerment, which could also be valid. The normalization of using racial slurs intra-racially within the Black community can be seen as Black people taking their power back. This is known as African American Language (AAL) within the literature and refers to the broader tradition of historic African American communication styles within the United states (Washington, 2020).

African American Language (AAL) involves the “linguistic practices, discursive styles and rhetorical strategies” that have shaped Black culture (Washington, 2020, p. 360). The linguistic system describes how there are linguistic codes within the description of a word that differentiates Black speech from standard English white speech. Using racial terms like *nigga* have subcultural rules that Black people view as Black verbal art (Washington, 2020). The semantics of language become altered based on different cultural norms. This was clear when Ava defended Taisha’s point: “I think if [Taisha’s friend] was white and said it [the monkey comment] to her it would make it more racial.” The cultural norm that the co-researchers were identifying with was clearly different than the one I was adhering to and needs to be acknowledged to reduce bias within the study. Understanding these blind spots is important within the power analysis and aligning with the critical assumptions of co-created knowledge.

As described in chapter 4, the idea that I was imposing my racialized beliefs on the young co-researchers may be another form of colonization in itself. As a white female, I am assuming the racialized white supremacy connotation of monkey as the true cultural norm definition and inadvertently creating a subservient view of the co-researchers’ cultural norm. Why is my white cultural norm the more accurate view? The co-researchers were trying to tell me their cultural norm view and I initially dismissed it as wrong or misinformed. This is a representation of how

there are different sociocultural contexts for the same sociocultural message. On the other hand, there may be internalized racism that the co-researchers are not aware of existing within themselves. There is no definitive answer to the claims.

The idea of discursive differences adds another layer of implied hierarchical systems. Linguistic empowerment in one cultural context can be seen as internalized oppression in another cultural context, depending on the value systems. The idea that there is a cultural and linguistic separateness illustrates that there are still sub-divisions of human experience. The disconnect between the Black cultural norms and assumed white hierarchical systems may be perpetuating patriarchal white supremacy. This disconnect creates barriers of understanding between races that default to white supremacy hegemonies and ultimately disempower BIPOC populations as being misunderstood and wrong.

As example of racial linguistic disconnect was seen in the communication differences between the Black/bi-racial and co-researchers with the same white teacher. As described in chapter 4, Amelia and Rachael both described one of the white teachers at school as someone they could confide in emotionally. Taisha and Theresa described getting reprimanded with silent reflections numerous times as a result how they communicated in sarcastic, playful ways that were interpreted by the white teacher as insulting and bullying other students. This made them view the white teacher as unhelpful and opposing, someone they could not confide in emotionally and replicates the separateness of Black/white divide. The white teacher was taking a white supremacist stance on linguistic communication, seeing the humor as disrespectful rather than empowering between peers. The white teacher's expectations that all young teens should have the same heterogenous communication style dismisses the idea that cultural expression outside of white supremacist norms is possible and important.

The Black co-researchers' experiences were drastically different than those of the white and bi-racial Hispanic co-researchers. This clear distinction of the same teacher communicating with students from different races and having different reactions from each race may be a result of the conflicting social norms. The white teacher may be implying that white norms are the default social etiquette that should be followed in the classroom. The communication style of Taisha and Theresa as Black students is seen as wrong and inappropriate according to the white supremacist social norms and creates an expectation that Black students need to conform to the white linguist system. This representation of cultural messages implies that Black culture should be corrected and creates a microaggressive hierarchy between Black and white communication styles. Through the dismissal of AAL Black communication styles, the message of mental colonization can also be absorbed and integrated into the identify of young adolescent girls. The cultural message that Black communication style is wrong may also promote a sense of shame and was seen in Taisha's descriptions of remaining silent with her white teacher. She felt that she was going to be scolded and not understood, creating an oppressive barrier in her classroom learning experience. This is why understanding these dynamics becomes important to eliminate as much disconnect within inter-cultural relationships as possible.

Dialectically Understanding Both Sides. There are multiple layers of disempowerment covertly happening within simple day-to-day interactions as a result of the misinterpreted social norms. The co-researchers revealed how the clear social norm discrepancy is affecting their lives. Whether intra-racial language is seen as racist or empowering, the critical examination uncovers the same trajectory of white supremacy and the idea that Black people are inferior. The sociocultural messages that the young Black adolescent girls are receiving may contribute to lowered self-esteem, depression or anxiety from the inherited messages that they are wrong. This

could lead to mental health issues later in life, which would be misdiagnosed as individual pathology rather than the historical trauma that has created nuanced power systems fueling mental health issues (Bessire, 2012; Cromer, 2018). This is an example of how historical trauma should be fore-fronted within the mental health system as a contributing factor, taking into consideration internalized racial oppression as a mental health initiative for social norm change rather than placing the responsibility on the marginalized to heal themselves. The social structures contributing to sub-human status quo standards need to be further investigated in relation to mental health symptoms, as these structures can be a dismissed guise of continued colonialist dynamics.

On the other hand, the co-researchers may be utilizing humor as a strength to overcome the injustices of the world. Outley et al., (2021) describes the idea of playfulness is an ability to frame or reframe situations and experiences” (p.306) in order to integrate and understand what is happening to people. This can be understood in the form of a resistance culture to reclaim power and overcome oppression. Black people have been using theatre, humor, play, singing and reappropriation of language as a way of navigating rage associated with cultural oppression for a long time (Outley et al., 2021). This idea of utilizing humor would be seen as a tool for understanding and processing the world, rather than dismissing emotions related to racism. The alternative perspective creates an interesting tension without a specific *right* answer. The overall idea that multiple perspectives of how and what cultural norms should be is inherently segregating without an interactive dialogue of understanding between people. Further dialogic engagement between Black and white people needs to continue in order to promote anti-colonialist ideals to promote the deconstruction of white supremacist hierarchy (Petroni et al.,

2021). The idea that Black people are sub-human is a concept that is reoccurring within marginalized populations and will be explored in other social constructs below.

Heteronormative Beliefs and Sub-Human Shame

During the co-researchers' discussions, feelings of shame were associated with sexual orientation/gender identity and how the co-researchers are trying to navigate not being part of mainstream heteronormative ideals. As referred to in chapter 4, co-researchers' experiences of being judged by family members caused them a sense of overall apprehension when talking about the subject to people in their day-to-day lives. They mentioned that the shame of not being accepted by mainstream beliefs has made them emotionally retract and be guarded with their feelings.. The co-researchers' fear of judgment by their parents or peers was associated with larger societal discussions around cultural or religious expectations that support heteronormative hegemonies. Because of strong cultural or religious beliefs that conflict with their gender identity and sexual orientation, the co-researchers experienced internalized shame which made them feel confused on who to trust. The varying sociocultural beliefs by family members, teachings at school and social media made the queer or bi-sexual co-researchers question their gender identities. The co-researchers revealed that having multiple viewpoints of gender within different areas of their lives caused inner turmoil. They shared that conflicting messages of who accepts them creates a moral dilemma and internal separateness they feel inside themselves.

Heteronormativity supports the notion that sexuality is an issue of moral choice rather than a natural occurrence (Smith & Drake, 2001). The demonization of LGBTQ identification by certain religions and cultures has created an inherent belief that anyone outside of the heterosexual-normativity is wrong, bad, and inferior. This affects family belief systems that are passed down within generations that are ingrained as traditional (Smith & Drake, 2001) and

religiously affiliated. The conflict of hetero-normative family beliefs may clash with LGBTQ equitable understandings that are being promoted within Western-American culture. Co-researchers shared how family beliefs are now conflicting with peer relationships which provide more understanding and unconditional support. These peer beliefs were generally drawn from other macro-cultural influences like school or social media. Having to choose between their parents' beliefs and their peers' beliefs caused co-researchers' distress.

Mjelde-Mossey (2007) describes the idea of having opposing viewpoints within the environment as the concept of *cultural dissonance*, a sociological term for people experiencing discord in their environment. The co-researchers experienced this by having different messages of what is "right" in their family culture/religion, school and social media. The juxtaposition of traditional belief systems that support heterosexual dominance in religious institutions and family heritage is in conflict with current gender fluid identities. Judith Butler (1999) describes the conflict of moral religious beliefs dismissing LGBTQ identity as keeping the "heterosexual matrix" (p. 151) alive by creating fixed identities of men, women, gays, lesbians and the power that is allotted within those sex/gender identities.

Notably, there is more recent research on the intersectional topic of heterosexual dominance and shame within the literature (Scheer et al., 2020). The lack of previous information may also be a microaggressive reflection of keeping LGBTQ beliefs as not important or silenced. This gap within the literature may reflect the 'heterosexual matrix' within the current mental health field. Much like capitalism being misidentified as a contributing factor to symptomology as referenced in previous chapters, mislabeling heteronormative ideals as pathology may also create harm. It is important to understand the impact of heteronormative standards and how that may be contributing to the sub-human othering that exists within LGBTQ

stigma. The social norms of these dominant standards may be imprinting cognitive schemas of feeling different which may present as symptoms of anxiety or depression. Scheer et al. (2020) explains that shame represents a psychological state involving global negative evaluation of the self in which the individual feels inferior, helpless, vulnerable, and desires to hide” (p. 132). The sub-human shame that heteronormative dominance infers on LGBTQ may contribute to withdrawn behaviors and negative beliefs about themselves. The symptoms of depression could also perpetuate misdiagnosis and place the pathology onto LGBTQ adolescents rather than identifying social constructs as a major contributing factor.

The limited research in the literature includes Smith and Drake (2001) addressing the concept of LGBTQ pathology and references white cisgender heterosexual dominant culture as a social construct that may contribute to other repercussions that stem from otherness including outcast from families and communities. These social outcasting can be a contributing factor to the symptoms of young people. Their research demonstrated a correlation between young people with same-sex attraction and a relation to alcohol, drugs, and/or suicide (Lynne & Lyn, 2004). The lethality of suicide in gay/lesbian/bisexual teenagers is also greater than in heterosexual adolescents (Smith & Drake, 2001). As described earlier, Amelia experienced suicidal ideations related to feeling rejected and not cared for. The judgment and rejection by her mother and the culture related to her gay sexuality may potentially be impacting her mental health. She becomes an example of how heteronormative family beliefs and societal rejection can create shame and ultimately lead to mental health symptoms in young people.

Through personal clinical experience, many times transgender or gay/lesbian teenagers are labeled with diagnoses that reflect their personal disorders rather than the shame they experience from cultural heteronormative oppression. Shame may present diagnostically as low

self-esteem, lack of motivation, self-harm, suicidality, and being socially withdrawn. This is another instance of social structures creating dynamics that perpetuate mental health symptoms in young people, all while the systems themselves are dismissed as a contributing factor. This section is another example of macro-level social constructs being ignored as contributing factors to mental health symptoms, which contributes to pathologizing the individual.

Section Summary: Systemic Social Structures Contributing to Symptomology

Through the critical investigation of themes, the findings revealed the intersection of historical trauma and intergenerational trauma to be complex and multifaceted. The co-researchers' narratives revealed the interlocking of systems that affect their lived experiences, which was threaded through critical analysis of power structures. The overarching social structures of colonial capitalism, racism, adultism and heteronormative white supremacist beliefs were identified and related to the co-researchers' findings.

The idea that capitalist structures may be contributing to unavailable caregivers resulting in insecure attachment style is not something that has been explored within the literature. These findings may explain the continued theme of mistrust and emotional guardedness that was revealed in the narratives, creating an overarching theme of the co-researchers' generation being emotionally neglected. Colonial capitalist social structures are embedded in historical trauma and may be perpetuating the altered attachment styles in families. The findings of this study support these associations and should be investigated in future research in further detail.

The literature findings on white supremacy and patriarchy were portrayed in the researchers' findings as adultism, racism and heteronormative standards and contributed to silencing their voices. The dynamics of these social structures may be inferring messages that they are sub-human and contributing to feelings of otherness and shame. These messages may be

creating a victimhood mentality seen in their apathetic mentality and restricted emotional expression because they feel like their voice does not matter. Adultism may also be contributing to invalidating perfectionistic ideals, which corresponded with co-researchers' descriptions of feeling like a disappointment or burden.

All of the findings suggest that societal structures rooted in historical and current-day systems of oppression may be creating the narrative of emotional neglect the co-researchers' identified. These systems are not identified in current diagnostic assessments in the mental health field, which currently focuses on a bio-medical disease-based model. These findings suggest that an intersectional analysis to treatment may be necessary for an accurate holistic approach and supports the phenomenological perspective of seeing the whole person. This critical analysis promotes a de-pathologizing initiative in the mental health field and will be further identified later in the recommendations section of this chapter.

De-Constructing Pathology and Moving to a Holistic Lens

This study emphasized the need to consider sociological perspectives within the mental health field in order to de-pathologize an individual. This means understanding the reciprocal person-community relationship that is the human experience (Ratner, 2009; Tomasi, 2000). As described in chapter 2 and within this chapter, community psychology is mentioned throughout the literature as a means to promote ecological structures of wellness and consider cultural modifications as a way of existing in the mental health field (Prilleltensky, 2008). Rather than identifying what a person needs to do to get better, questions lead to a social-ecological perspective of how the person is experiencing their environment and what resources can be implemented to support mental health wellness (Hoskins, 2020). Focusing on resources as a

means of mental health improvement shifts the idea that the individual is the issue to a larger perspective of working on the greater community that the individual inhabits.

Gabor Maté (2022) in his most recent work is one of the few writers I came across in the literature that provides concrete bridges of societal hegemonic paradigms that may be contributing to mental health symptoms. He describes how capitalism should be recognized as a contributing factor to mental health symptoms, but does not acknowledge racial or sex/gender intersectional social constructs. On the other hand, Black feminist literature identified in chapter 2 explores paradigms of white heteronormative supremacy, but does not link the historical contexts of colonial capitalism (Fleming, 2015) and connecting how colonial capitalism may be currently contributing to mental health symptoms. The limitation of research that negates a holistic intersectional approach may fog the full macro-systemic lens that needs to be seen in order to address social-ecological structures impacting young people. The breach in the person-community literature does not seem to capture a full scope of social analysis and the historical/intergenerational trauma effects on attachment styles.

The critical analysis of this study expanded on Maté (2022) and Crenshaw's (1991) research with the inclusion of past and current-day effects of colonial racism and white supremacist heteronormative standards. An important aspect of this may be addressing social systems that contribute to the issue of generational invalidation. This was seen in the intra-racial and black linguistic sections earlier in this chapter, and previously mentioned by the Black/bi-racial co-researchers as not feeling understood by the expectations of white communication styles. An example of how to navigate this systemically was viewed in the literature as *intercultural willingness to communicate* or a means of reducing ethnocentric beliefs that one culture is more superior than the other (Yousaf et al., 2022). Being willing to acknowledge and

communicate with people to bridge understanding gaps that may have been implemented by white patriarchal norms may reduce feelings of invalidation for marginalized youth. Creating spaces to have deeper dialogue about expectations and how, as a Western-American society, we feel about white patriarchy seem to be part of the solution. Considering these societal structures as historical and intergenerational trauma effects within mental health assessments could potentially change the course of diagnostic procedures and may focus on conversations for long-term structural changes.

Considerations for how the structural implications can be utilized within the mental health field to de-pathologize the individual will be described in the recommendations section. The aim of this study was to hear all aspects of the co-researchers' narratives as a way to not only de-pathologize adolescent girls, but to increase the accuracy of this research. The following section will describe how the CYPAR structure contributed to the validity of this study.

Validity

Validity becomes central to better understanding the research role within culture (Fisher & Sonn, 2008). Critically analyzing power within culture means to question the different impacts of multifaceted systems. This can be difficult without a validation framework to reference and substantiate these critical claims. Prilleltrensky (2008) created a framework utilizing three domains of psycho-political validity that affect research power dynamics—collective, relational, and personal interests and the interplay of these paradigms. I chose this framework of validity to correspond with the previous intersectional discussion because of the multi-faceted need to capture the whole human experience. The social-ecological approach to viewing the experience of an adolescent girl can potentially be verified through this psychopolitical validity framework.

The following sections will be described utilizing this framework and how it was implemented within this study.

Member Checking as a Way of Personal Validity

The personal approach to validity was viewed through a validation system called member checking. Member checking involves having the co-researchers be a part of the verifying process (Cho & Trent, 2006). By including the young teens, the co-researchers' were contributing their personal information to the study which could later be analyzed at a deeper level from their reference. Through the member checking process and my own tendency to want to imply what the co-researchers were feeling, I was able to realize the patriarchal/capitalist disempowerment dynamics that were/are embedded in conversations with co-researchers and how those dynamics reinforced to suppress the voice of young people. There were several times I wanted to impose what I thought was happening to them and had to continuously bring the conversation back to open questions rather than suggested inferences in the dialogic process.

The underlying theme of emotional neglect was a result of feeling not heard, validated or emotionally supported, and through the member checking process I was able to check myself as an adult so as to not reinforce the story that they were already describing. Even with the insight and awareness of these power dynamics, there were times I had difficulty within the group not to impose my beliefs in order to get my point across. Utilizing critical youth participatory action research allowed me to take a step back and engage in the integral process of analyzing the data together with the co-researchers, which helped take my awareness into practice and incorporate the member checking validity.

Lac et al. (2022) describe CYPAR as a natural vehicle for understanding mechanisms within minoritized youths' day-to-day lives. The co-creation of data is generated by having both

the researcher and co-researchers engaged in constant dialogue about meaning making. This process inherently reduces the risk of adultism. I had to be very mindful of not reproducing a power dynamic that the co-researchers were not only used to but expected from me during the exchanges. This expectation was seen when one co-researcher thought she was going to get in trouble for using the word “shit” in our dialogues. These inherent roles had to be mindfully acknowledged to reassure them that I was not their teacher or an authority figure that is imposing authoritative boundaries. By reading the transcribed discussions with the co-researchers, the validity of their accounts was able to be increased to solidify a more accurate interpretation rather than my making inferences to what they meant. They could further elaborate to get a thicker description and context of what was said. This process helped with identifying overarching themes of adultism power dynamics that influence multiple areas of their lives.

At one point during the data analysis, I was able to read my contribution to the dialogue and reflect back to the group—“This seems like I was imposing my beliefs, what do you think?” The co-researchers agreed and the conversation opened up about how the co-researchers are used to adults imposing their beliefs and the how this normalized dynamic silences their voices. By checking their viewpoint, we were able to identify adultism as a major theme. This provided valuable and salient information for the overall research study narrative. During this discussion, the group noticeably opened up about feelings of youth disempowerment.

This process of “power-sharing” requires adults to intentionally re-examine their power roles when collaborating with youth (Pech et al., 2020, p. 305). I was able to stop and reflect on my authoritative presence and shift into a peer-oriented role. By reducing the power dynamic, the co-researchers became more forthcoming and vulnerable during the discussion. The process of member checking supports the liberation psychology movement to ensure the co-researchers’

voice as the vehicle for empowerment within the research (Mayengo et al., 2018). This also supports an increased transactional validity, which highlights the iterative process within research (Cho & Trent, 2006). As mentioned in chapter 3, transactional validity is a member-checking technique that allows researchers/co-researchers to come to insights about their reality that they may not have noticed originally (2006). We were able to play back the tape and critically analyze the dynamic and context between me as the hierarchical adult and them as the subordinate children (2006). These inherent themes are normalized in society and without democratic systems of equalizing power such as member checking, patriarchal conditioning may potentially continue in research.

Member checking became imperative to the critical analysis process by influencing me to take a deeper look at the photovoice discussions. Without this mechanism, the data produced would have missed an important social construct of adultism that may have been overlooked. On the other hand during the writing of this paper and further critical analysis, the validity of member checking was not integrated as strongly. Going through the process of picking what quotes would be decided to capture the co-researchers within the portraits may be a projection of my underlying motive to cast a certain representation of them. They were also not included within the power analysis of this chapter. Having the co-researchers be a part of the critical power analysis and reading the write-up about their portraits and direct quotes could have brought more understanding of what they want to represent. As a result of negating this process, the personal validity becomes compromised within this study and becomes a major limitation.

Prowell (2019) describes the fluidity of power and how the exchange of language about an individual's life becomes essential in understanding that fluidity. The fluidity of power was disrupted within this study without the co-researchers inclusion into the chapter 5 critical power

analysis. The member checking system could have been incorporated more throughout the process to increase the validity of this study and should be utilized with more thoroughness in future CYPAR studies.

The Validity of Research as Personal and Relational Change

As mentioned in chapter 4, the co-researchers would consistently express identifying with their peers' stories. This is a process of dialogic engagement, a reciprocal process creating a group bond through story-telling and circle ceremonies (Freire, 1970; Hallett et al., 2017). By navigating in a youth critical participatory action research design, the co-researchers discussed their lives without symptomology or diagnoses placed on them through facilitator contact. As mentioned in chapter 2, Cooper et al. (2019) emphasize this way of research as an anti-colonizing approach that aims to promote empowerment rather than hierarchy of research-subject power dynamics. Aligned with CYPAR values, the co-researchers were seen as experts of their own lives rather than being clinically evaluated and told what is wrong with them. There was no implementation of projecting the idea of sickness onto their identity. Each teen girl was able to be seen as a whole person that could just express what is happening in their lives (Lac et al., 2022).

This is an example of *catalytic validity*, which is the notion that the researchers initiate introspective transformation by the process of research (Cho & Trent, 2006; Lather, 1986). In a certain aspect, the research study itself took on what the co-researchers were asking for, a safe space to express their emotions with an adult that is not dismissing or telling them how to feel. By understanding that the co-researchers are experts of their own lives, I was also able to take the lessons for myself of how to better de-construct hierarchy within my own interactions as an adult. They expressed compassion, identification and understanding for other members' sharing

in the group. The feelings of mistrust and apathy were actually not seen within the group, and ironically they were able to unanimously agree through vulnerable sharing that mistrust and emotional guardedness are current issues they were experiencing. The process of group sharing and analyzing themes increased the relational process and may have potentially changed the dynamics they had with each other at school, as they expressed feeling more compassionate and understanding of their peers within the group.

The co-researchers liked the fact that they could identify with other people because it validated that they are not alone in their experience. There were many comments of how they wanted to have more time, talk more, and have a space where they could talk about emotions on a regular basis. A common theme throughout the discussions was needing a supportive space to have conversations that they could connect to emotionally either with a mentor or in a peer group. Without attention and attunement at home, the co-researchers' desire for connection becomes stronger in other areas of their environment.

As mentioned in chapter 3, Pech et al. (2020) describe how adults can provide the emotional container for youth to express themselves while simultaneously learning from others' experiences of how to navigate life. Through the process of dialogic engagement, the group participants come to further insights and peer problem solving rather than having an adult figure dictate or teach what they may need. As mentioned in chapter 2, this peer identification creates a cultural identity within the group and supports self-empowerment by actively engaging (Hallett et al., 2017). Reducing the adult role of an authority figure to be more of an equal standing with youth participants may be a potential way of reducing overall power-relation dynamics that support patriarchal/capitalist social structures.

As described in detail in chapter 2, Freire (1970) emphasizes this reciprocal dialogue as a liberation movement focusing on equitability and self-empowerment (Martín-Baró, 1996). Through the process of liberation movements, young people can begin to support their own emotional empowerment and may be a vehicle for reducing adultism. The ability for young people to take more initiative in their own lives also reduces the possibility of engrained learned helplessness. Young people can have an alternate frame of reference that self-empowerment and creative thinking is allowed. This reflection may initiate how young people see themselves in the world. The co-researchers clearly described their desire for available adult figures that do not judge, dictate or silence their opinions. The idea that they have autonomy over their choices, lives and future begins with a social environment that supports those values.

Through the roles of adults within young people's lives, opportunities for shared emotional dialogue may have a chance to become more normative. Notably, within the literature the multicultural research studies all suggested that healing circles are beneficial to holistic healing (Mayenga et al., 2018; Nutton & Fast, 2015; Quinn, 2019). The practices of sharing stories and practices are provided by Elders in Indigenous practices (Mayenga et al., 2018). Having Elder role model figures could supplement what adolescents may not be receiving at home. The community essentially compensates for family life as a sociocultural intervention.

The co-researchers in the group shared how they are navigating without role models by overcompensating with teacher relationships and seeking social media/television for examples on how to navigate emotional issues. Having the Elder role be of more value within the Western-American culture may provide what the adolescent girls are looking for and can be done in different settings. Creating systems where mentors and peer groups could be facilitated by

encouraging adults are practices that reflect liberation psychology and having the potential to transform inequalities within the adolescent community (Martín-Baró, 1996).

Mosley et al. (2021) describe raising critical consciousness as an interception for racial trauma. Having young people speak about issues affecting their lives promotes a space for them to be agents of change (Pech et al., 2020). The social structures that affect youth within the community on a day-to-day basis should be carefully looked at within the field of psychology. As mentioned in chapter 2, through a *traumagenic experience lens* (Rinker & Lawler, 2018), people learn to override a violent reactionary response to oppression and use verbal activism to navigate the effects of historical trauma including colonial capitalism, adultism, patriarchy, racism and heteronormative standards. Fostering systems that generate these conversations through a traumagenic experience lens may promote self-empowerment for marginalized populations. The catalytic validity could be increased even further in these conversations. The literature on catalytic validity suggests that CYPAR increases by providing a space to reflect and potentially transform on the information that transpires from the conversations. By the accounts of the co-researchers introspection, the catalytic validity in this study appeared to be high. However, the long term transformational effects are unknown and became a limitation.

Validity and the Larger Collective Picture

Although there were not any tangible outward results of transformation as a result of this study, the process of creating an Action Plan for the community provides the potential for impact validity. The participants allowed the findings of this study to be reviewed with their school administrators, which could directly impact families, or other figures in their community to assemble this plan. The psycho-education that was provided within the study could also be

brought back to their families to spark further investigation and potential family-system healing journeys.

Many times qualitative research addresses the thick description capturing the lives of the participants, but may ignore the contextual and systemic hegemonies that influence the participant's experience (Fisher & Sonn, 2008). The importance of connecting the research to a collective need is essential for social change. Fine (2006) terms this social process as *provocative generalizability*, a way of shifting the field and the social structures that contribute the larger social-ecological picture. Rather than looking at how the study can be generalized to the present, the term focuses on generalizing to what we do not yet know or have not yet experienced.

Through this study, there were a few generalizable themes that may be related to social structure hegemonies that were only emerging in the current literature, including capitalist systems as a major contribution to mental health symptoms, hierarchical systems that perpetuate sub-human shame, and questioning how the detrimental effects of the bio-medical model are feeding into pathologizing young people. The inter-racial and Black linguistic section of this chapter was also validated with peer reviews by self-identified Black colleagues. The peer review increases the generalizable validity towards aligning with racial standpoints by Black community members. These potential generalizable themes will be explored further in the discussion section of this chapter.

The importance of the generalizable themes take on the idea of *impact validity*, which explains the “extent to which research has the potential to play a role in social and political change or is useful as a tool for advocacy or activism” (Massey & Barreras, 2013, p. 616). The potential for transformation on a larger scale was validated by the reaction of the co-researchers identifying racial and sex/gender social structures and how their desire to emotionally explore

them further is needed. Having healing circles be a consistent part of social-ecological structures could be a part of the transformation of cultural norms. The limitations of this study should also be taken into consideration when thinking about the larger validity impact of this study and how it can be improved upon for further research. The following section will explore this in more detail.

Limitations and Future Implications

The limitations should be considered when reading this dissertation in order to continue exploring the navigation of how to improve in further research. One aspect to review is having the research done in a school setting, which provided advantages and disadvantages. This included how the co-researchers perceived me as an outsider coming into their school. As mentioned prior, one co-researcher used a swear word when expressing herself and felt immediate remorse or shame, stating she knew she is not supposed to use that language in the school setting. There was a censorship that had to be acknowledged and dismantled during our discussions that may have not been there if we were not already in the school setting. Initially, they also mentioned holding back for fear that I would tell their teachers what they were feeling, but they said they were able to let that go overtime. The effects of adultism were pre-existing because I am older and in a position of authority by presenting the research study. The advantage of doing CYPAR research in a school setting was being able to see the inherited adultism, which provided a deeper critical look at historical power structures that are at play in our society. Although adultism in research may be a factor in any setting, the feedback from the co-researchers seemed amplified because we were in their school.

A major limitation of this study relates to the unintentional continuing of adultism dynamic after the study. Adultism could have unintentionally been implemented through the

process of writing this paper as I was not as thorough with member checking as I could have been with the co-researchers to create their portraits and integrate their feedback into the critical power analysis. I could have taken more consideration to incorporate how they wanted to be represented within the dissertation paper rather than picking which quotes I felt represented them. By not incorporating the co-researchers in the totality of the analysis, the validity was jeopardized. The advanced language used in this dissertation created a hierarchy and limited the ability for the co-researchers to validate the chapter 5 critical analysis information. The language when writing about a CYPAR study should be examined to align with the all-inclusive values. This was not a consideration initially in my research and in hindsight I should have taken the verbiage more into consideration to create an inclusive dialogue with young people. In hindsight, I would have been much more methodical about this process overall. In order to stay true to highlighting youth voice, this should be considered in future research.

As mentioned in chapter 2, Brown's (2021) social-justice-based lens was important to validate the larger picture of the lives of young teen girls, particularly how the mental health field may be pathologizing their human experience. However, with this being said, it is fair to state that not all mental health practitioners are pathologizing clients or young people. Further research is needed to cross-validate this research study and accurately make claims about the collective needs of adolescent girls. Engaging in studies with girls from different races or socioeconomic classes may also be helpful. Until this has occurred, the generalizability should be improved and the discussion points are for further thought with recommendations to be implemented and observed within the field.

Conducting a CYPAR study similar to this study in a different setting would also provide more context and information regarding the co-researchers' reactions to self-censorship. Another

consideration would be to juxtapose a demographic of adolescent girls that are not in a low-income marginalized bracket in order to expand upon the attachment style intersection with other macro-cultural influences. Further implications for this study would include longer durations of CYPAR and seeing through the community action plan implemented by the co-researchers. Inter-disciplinary research including sociological and epigenetic studies which follow the effects of community interventions on young people could also strengthen the holistic understanding of long-term sustainable benefits.

Summary of Discussion

The overall picture of this study highlights the need for taking a community-pathology lens in mental health and continuing to understand the environmental messages that affect young people. Understanding the family and sociocultural messages a young person is navigating is a multi-faceted topic of intersecting paradigms of past colonial systems, present day capitalist values, and white heteronormative supremacy that breach the scope of the current mental health field. As mentioned prior, the literature describes this overarching power structure in Western-American culture as colonial capitalism (Fleming 2015). This study attempted to sift through as many possible intersecting layers that may be contributing to the mental health issues in young people. Through this search, the findings highlight the most recent literature developments which are trying to bridge the gap between socially oppressive systems and the individual experience (Maté, 2022; Mitchell; 2018; Subedi, 2020).

The literature does not specifically acknowledge how the effects of colonial capitalism may potentially be perpetuating intergenerational trauma through unavailable caregivers and creating insecure attachment styles. Through a sociological macro-lens (Hoskins, 2020), the labor work force may be obstructing the security and guidance a young person needs by forcing

caregivers to be out of the home and disconnected emotionally due to long work hours. The social structures become important in understanding the holistic experience of a person's life and what treatment options would best benefit supporting mental health wellness. Through the critical analysis of the co-researchers' descriptions, the findings of several major discussion points that stem from colonialist capitalism are described below.

One major re-occurring theme the co-researchers identified was a general mistrust within their lives. Through the social structure power analysis in this study, the theme of mistrust may be identified as an inherent perspective stemming from the aftermath of historical trauma rooted in colonialist power systems and reinforced through insecure attachment styles within family systems, creating a need for protection, guardedness and avoidance. Their families have all identified as lower socio-economic income households with two working parents or single mothers, putting strain on being emotionally available for their children. This suggests that classism and capitalist systems have forced caregivers to be away from the home, which places more responsibility onto young adolescents to raise themselves and their siblings.

Without a healthy model of how to attach, people are likely to continue the cycle of intergenerational trauma. This capitalist dynamic may be contributing to the intergenerational transmission of insecure attachment and the co-researchers' reports of feeling apathetic, emotionally shut down and guarded. They also mentioned feeling like a burden to their working parents, which suggests poverty can potentially produce feelings of guilt. The emotional narrative that is created with capitalist lifestyles may create emotionally unavailable caregivers that cause young people to strive for love and affection. One common theme within the group revealed that perfectionistic behaviors and the pressure of having to do everything right is a way to get their caregivers' approval. This suggests that invalidation from the environment

(caregivers, authority figures) prompts the need to overcompensate with perfectionistic ideals in order to alleviate feelings of disappointing others, potentially continuing the cycle of capitalistic market-driven society in the next generation. This also supports the literature on invalidation as a contributing factor to mental health symptoms (McCallum & Goodman, 2019) and describes how invalidations becomes a cultural influence that shapes their perception of themselves and may contribute to their identity and behaviors..

As identified in multicultural literature, the role of the Elder is non-existent in Western-American values and has placed the colonial capitalist role of adults as authoritative figures to young people (Bergeron & Lagace, 2021; Butler, 2021; Mayenga et al., 2018). The co-researchers described the power dynamic of adults in authority, known as a social construct of adultism, as silencing and oppressive. Adultism is rooted in patriarchal power dynamics that disempower young people and the value of their decision making, normalizing an obedient culture to support those in power and creating a sense of apathy and lack of motivation that can potentially result in long-term mental health symptoms.

Literature has identified that historical trauma causes victim/aggressor cycles and may contribute to depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, substance use and overall negative schemas (Bessire, 2012; Cromer, 2018). Identifying the hegemonic social structures that are influencing mental health symptoms acknowledges that the presence of historical trauma through colonial capitalism and how it may be creating the foundational tone that allows other systems of oppression to exist, including adultism, racial hierarchy, and sexism. Acknowledging these systems in the mental health field may shift the focus of diagnosing the individual to diagnosing social structures and resources that can be changed. Listening to the co-researchers' narrative of generational emotional neglect highlights the need to change these existing social systems.

The previous literature on structuration theory supports the findings of this study that suggest the need for person-community social-ecological interventions for all the intersectional systems (Giddens, 1986; Schneidewind et al., 2018). However, based on the co-researchers' information regarding the emotionally/physically unavailable caregiver, I am suggesting that the larger question begins to surface of how person-family-community relationships can be supported rather than just person-community relationships. Neglecting the family healing from systemic resources does an injustice to the overall community social-ecological-system. If family trauma healing is not able to take place, supplemental role models or Elders need to be in place within the community. Having figures that create a secure attachment role provides youth access and guidance within their lives. The implications of the person-family-community idea will be described in the recommendations section of this chapter. The following section will explore a social-ecological framework for youth development.

Framing Theory and Social-Ecological Action

Through this study, the social-ecological model was able to be highlighted through the photovoice method. Having snapshots of co-researchers' daily lives gave moments and insight into how they feel about their environment. The process allowed the group to focus in on a moment and then zoom out into the larger context of what that moment means for them. Photovoice can be a method to promote a social-ecological lens in the mental health field by shifting the attention to the environment. By discussing images of their environment, the dialogue expanded on what is shaping their experience rather than in clinical settings that focus on personal cognitive schemas without any family or social structure context.

As mentioned in chapter 2, the photovoice method supports Kellermann's (2007) argument that the need for *sociatric* methods rather than psychiatric methods should be a major

structural movement within the mental health system. Incorporating an inter-disciplinary approach with sociology and psychology to better understand the needs of young people may begin to dismantle historical and intergenerational trauma. The literature revealed the oppressive social paradigms that exist and perpetuate within daily Western-American culture. Rather than fixing the minds of young people to co-exist with these paradigms, the mental health field should be focusing on exploring what needs to be re-structured in the community to support young people's liberation movements. This could include providing community spaces for multi-generational interaction, fostering role model and mentor opportunities, and creating awareness around adultism dynamics, which may initiate a culture of reciprocity within communities and will be explored below in the recommendations section of this chapter.

Notably, this idea pays tribute to Indigenous and non-Western cultures that continue to support community as the focus for containment and healing (Maté, 2022; Mayenga et al., 2018) and incorporate ritual, tradition and spiritual practices as a way of coping with life circumstances (Mitchell, 2018). Menakem (2017) encourages a "regular customized growth routine" (p. 222) to support personal healing and working through racialized trauma within the body, while also incorporating group activities such as cooking together, sharing stories and proverbs, singing and dancing as a group. Utilizing the holistic processes to move through trauma within the mind-body-spirit becomes an essential tool that has been used for many years within many cultures. Incorporating this into a capitalistic lifestyle may begin to balance individuals and slowly start to shift how we think and operate within the community. This supports the idea of anti-colonization of the mental health field (Nutton & Fast, 2015; Quinn, 2019).

Part of the social structure change in the person-family-community social-ecological framework also includes youth empowerment to promote validation and security for an effective

change. Despite efforts of societal intervention (academia, social movements), the lack of family trauma healing may perpetuate survival responses including feeling silence, emotional avoidance, learned helplessness, apathy, and anti-racial oppression. Having an emotional support group was identified as being an outlet for validation for the co-researchers. The co-researchers were eager and forthcoming of ideas during the action plan phase. Their willingness to reflect on their lives demonstrated their desire to actively participate in problem solving when they have a safe space. This desire for a safe space (whether physically or a social media platform) can explore emotional issues and continue generating creative solutions. Integrating healing circles within a social-ecological framework can promote holistic healing and may potentially be an interception for intergenerational trauma.

In order to adapt this mentality into Western-American life, social structures that have been perpetuating systemic oppression need to be re-structured. This becomes a multi-tiered intervention analysis, including individual, family, community, institution and political policy. The recommendations for these social structure changes are as follows.

Recommendations

The recommendations for a social-ecological perspective will be outlined in three tiers. The tiers do not promote pathologizing or segregating an individual's experience and aim to integrate the multifaceted dynamics of a person's life. The interventions intend to be interventions for healing intersecting systemic social power structures that contribute to intergenerational trauma in families and individual beliefs, highlighting the reciprocal nature of person-family-community.

Family/Local Community Interventions

1. Safe haven healing circles for families that provide space for specific points of discussion including the effects of racism, colonialism, and current day police brutality
2. Creating monthly all-inclusive community gatherings/ceremonies including workshops held by local BIPOC representatives at local resource centers for families to attend as a place for education, support, connection and healing. Workshops can include education on intergenerational trauma, family bonding activities, and a space to express what families may need. This resource information could be provided as an intervention to adolescents learning about intergenerational trauma at school in order to bridge the gap
3. Creating mentorship/role model workshops which include multi-generational interaction where Elders can provide story-telling, rituals, or skill-based offerings as a way of conveying wisdom and having an interactive dialogue with young people about their life experiences
4. Creating community town hall meetings that include youth counsel, supporting young people's sense of agency and involvement within their community
5. Emphasizing spiritual and cultural practices as an inter-community learning tradition where people come together to explore spiritual beliefs and teach one another cultural traditions and communication styles in order to reduce white patriarchal cultural standards

Institutional Changes

1. Schools to strengthening social-emotional learning to provide psycho-educational classes within the academic trajectory, educating students about the terms and effects of intergenerational/historical trauma.

2. Schools providing emotional support groups led by outside practitioners in order to normalize emotional discussions where peers can identify with each other and reduce emotional guardedness and/or feelings of mistrust
3. Schools to create emotional support systems and self-care techniques (i.e. on-site therapist for teachers, holistic classes that may be offered for mind-body integration at the end of the school today, etc.) for teachers within schools to sustain their mental health in order for them to provide a healthy secure attachment environment for children.
4. School systems to implement social-emotional outlets and/or resources for adolescents to attend as a part of normative culture within the curriculum (i.e. mind-body wellness periods). This should include a holistic mental health professional(s) to provide a physical and emotional safe space for issues the teens choose to explore within that space
5. Schools to educate teachers and administration on the patriarchal dynamics of *adulthood*, implementing dialogic structures within schools (i.e. anonymous feedback, having a board including elected youth that identifies how to implement the equitable feedback, etc.)
6. Educational seminars provided at gynecologist, pediatrician and primary care offices for parents to incorporate a more accurate social-ecological perspective within mainstream medicine, incorporating sociological perspectives and reducing the pathology of biomedicalization with diagnosis.
7. Higher education institutions to provide an emphasis on sociological/community psychology interventions, teaching a de-pathologized perspective to mental health treatment

8. Psychology/Counseling fields to re-evaluating DSM Manual criteria to base sociological perspective including intergenerational trauma, historical trauma and current macro-cultural influences. This includes diagnosing the surrounding environment and targeting environmental symptoms (i.e. capitalistic over-achieving standards that create perfectionistic stress which could be mislabeled as anxiety disorder, or peer rejection that is labeled as clinical depression) that can become the basis of a holistic treatment plan for an individual
9. Utilizing the holistic models previously mentioned: Trauma-Informed Bio-Ecological Model in Human Development (Figure 1), Intergenerational Trauma & Macro-cultural Influences Diagram (Figure 2), and Intergenerational Social-ecological Model for Development in Young People (Figure 3) as a guide to describe sociological influences that are contributing to symptomology

Political Policy/Macro-Cultural Interventions

1. Focusing on preventative social structures rather than reactionary systems. Utilizing a *traumagenic experience lens* that reduces the collective limbic system of reactionary violence related to oppression and trauma, which has historically led to aggressor/victim cycles and creating initiatives that support equitable activism and education. This may look like early education policies encouraging preventative steps communities can take, which are also broadcasted within the media; highlighting local reflections and responses for what community members need or have displayed as preventative action. Rather than news reels focusing on crisis oriented systems, providing interactive ways of engaging with the media to prompt a sense of empowerment over these crisis issues

2. Political policies that support alternatives to capitalist lifestyles, creating financial incentive programs for single family households in order to reduce the risk of unavailable caregivers
3. Financial funding to support the resources that school departments need in order to be a main structure for holistic equitable care
4. Ensuring the marginalized populations are represented within the political sphere
5. Social media, podcasts, and websites can be created and supported by local teens in order to discuss larger issues of racism, sexism, homophobia, poverty, adultism, and other major topics they want to provide input for or promote using already existing media spaces. This space can be a vehicle for voice and empowerment as a young peoples' movement. Young people can have a sense of autonomy of how they are changing the world, reducing marginalized issues of learned helplessness
6. Highlight marginalized women who are overcoming the white patriarchal cultural standards utilizing social media platforms, television broadcasting, and BIPOC literature; also being aware of de-sexualizing women in media
7. Create safe haven platforms to dialogically discuss intersectional matters with all-inclusive communities in order to increase *intercultural willingness to communicate* and decrease racism/intra-racial concepts that have historically been linked to white patriarchy
8. Acknowledging the presence of capitalistic standards that are creating unavailable caregivers and potentially a nation of insecure attachment styles. Having larger societal conversations about values related to success, financial gain, and family and what

economic structures need to be changed in order for caregivers to have more time to be available physically and emotionally

9. Inter-disciplinary officials (i.e. politicians, sociologists, psychologists, medical doctors, economists, youth leaders, etc.) to be on a board that creates sociological treatment plans for each town to incorporate a social-ecological model of integration

There are many interventions that could take place to start dismantling family and societal systems that continue oppression. The one thing that this study revealed to me is that people enjoy coming together. Creating a safe container for that to exist can become the catalyst for change. In order for liberation to occur, safe emotional spaces need to be created and accessed within the community.

Personal Reflections

There were many points where I myself felt disempowered during my efforts to complete this study. The challenges to complete this study were going against the grain and times we are currently facing with a worldwide pandemic. And yet, somehow, somehow everything worked out. I was given the chance to meet with the young teens who kept showing up despite the difficult times, which highlights their resilience for wanting change in the world. I was able to hear what they have to say and reflect on the power dynamic I was bringing into the conversation. I was learning from them, and that is the humbling part of this participatory process. And yet, most of what they were saying I had heard from my young inner voice long ago that had had those same feelings when I was a teenager.

A part of this process of being in a doctoral program and writing about the oppressive nature of capitalism allowed me to realize the sickness that I myself have been caught in within Western-American society. The product of all my suffering as a young person was a mix of my

ancestral wounds and a fragmented capitalistic culture. My hero's journey (Campbell, 1990) started with the pain that I absorbed from the outside world which I turned inward at a young age, but it has only become a vehicle to understand others. I have been fortunate enough to have mentors, teachers, and cultural knowledge that have been passed down to me to better understand myself, my body and my soul purpose. Without the pain I would not have searched, there would be no *call to action*.

As I reflect deeper into this process, I would have tried to honor their voices even more. I can acknowledge that due to my own personal experience, I may have focused on their suffering and unintentionally overlooked their resilience. Although I cited how they continued to show up throughout these difficult conversations, I may have undermined how much strength they actually have to overcome the challenging world that was given to them. Part of my reflexivity comes from looking back at whether my story transferred to theirs and how I could have subconsciously projected that in this study. This may have come out in the specific quotes that I used to capture their portraits or the larger systemic reflections that they were not able to be part of.

Acknowledging this within myself allows me to understand that I may be continuing to use the deficit model when looking at young people, which ultimately pathologizes and reinforces that something is wrong and they may not have the ability. This idea resonates back to the literature of positive youth framework and the movement's emphasis on considering the restoration rather than victimhood (Mas-Expositó et al., 2022). However, I also do not want to dismiss the urgency and deep desire that was brought forth with the co-researchers words of wanting a change, wanting a safe space, and wanting safe people in their lives that they can seek guidance. I refer back to Ava's comment in my mind "we can handle it ourselves" to capture the

essence of both. They are in fact capable, and at the same time, should they have to do it all alone? The duality of honoring strengths without dismissing their intense vocalization of wanting more is a cusp that needs a nuanced reflection. It is hard to point out what is wrong with the world and yet still see what is right. Understanding this duality also acknowledges that we may all live within a gray area of hypocrisy due to the engrained hegemonic structures that have sculpted us, no matter how educated or insightful we are, we are all living within this tension of embodying some form of oppression.

Moving Forward as a Community

I feel grateful for having the chance to deeply reflect on who I am and how I may affect my community. Throughout this dissertation process I have also been fortunate enough to travel extensively. I was able to learn cultural alternatives through experientials, attend Indigenous ceremonies, and immerse myself in different ways of living all while sifting through the world of academia. I was able to stay with native families in the mountains, experience and understand what it is like to engage with community and feel the stark difference in small villages of tradition versus modern capitalist demand.

My partner and I returned from traveling and decided that taking action in our own community is necessary. I realized through this dissertation process that the isolation people feel not only from the pandemic but from the anxiety ridden capitalist mentality is fragmenting and causing illness, just as Thomas Hubl (2020) mentions in his description of collective trauma. I have sat with clients in my practice for a number of years now who only want the fundamental need of feeling connected. Through my clinical experiences with clients, my travels, and this experience listening to the co-researchers I realized that coming together is essential for things to start changing.

My partner and I have started a non-profit organization, Real Eyes Truth Inc., to provide therapeutic spaces for mind-body-spirit holistic practices using a healing circle model. Our healing circles are a place where people and families can be authentic, feel heard, identify, and support others. The idea that people can come together to help each other is the reciprocal relationship of person-family-community, the idea of a *shared quest* (2020, p. 2). We have been able to share spaces with parents that have lost their children to suicide, young men emotionally expressing themselves for the first time, older people having a space to provide support to youth, members that shared a desire to stop using substances and then making an effort to go to detox, and many other amazing human beings wanting connection and a safe place to go to feel accepted. We are all *people helping people, re-creating community*.

Through this shared experience of community healing, we can begin to disempower the segregating power structures of colonial capitalism by educating ourselves and raising the consciousness of how the oppressive structures are influencing our day-to-day lives. The inspiring co-researchers showed me a glimpse of what could happen, and now as a community we can put their shared knowledge into praxis. We can remove the disillusion that we are alone in an untrusting world. I hope one day, the co-researchers can somehow be a part of this process if we cross paths again in our community.

Following my defense, my partner and I traveled for a few weeks through the country of Morocco. I was able to experience the extreme warmth of the Moroccan people. They welcomed us into their homes, shared meals and let us stay with their families. Many of the families told us “this is your house, you are welcome”. Their hospitality was beautiful and somewhat foreign to the guardedness I am used to back home. We were able to listen to their history and how the integration of culture has developed over centuries.

They explained the Indigenous people of Morocco were/are the Amazigh people, who have been colonized several times by the nomadic Arabs, France and Spain. One Amazigh woman who was a local engineer invited me for tea and shared with me “we are welcoming everyone even the ones that colonized us because that is in the past and we are all here now”. She fully understands the sociocultural oppression that has existed and affected herself and her family and has risen her socioeconomic power to make changes within her community. It was an inspiring example for me to see the critical consciousness she has cultivated and has utilized to fuel action as a sociocultural resistance. Her self-agency was strong and she also maintained a mentality of other ethnicities as simply human. There was no sense of separateness.

It was amazing to see how the people we came across culturally cohabitated with each other without the strain of historical trauma. In my opinion, they do not identify in the victim/perpetrator roles. There is a strong sense of spiritual core values that has created structure for the Muslim country, but no certain beliefs are forced or pressed upon people. The traditional world was able to integrate and adapt through multiple historical phases into an evolving modern world. Morocco left an imprint of hope for me to understand that there is more beyond dismantling oppression, that a true sense of resilience some of the Moroccans have found is in a mentality of being loving and letting go of the hate associated with their past.

Although the Western-American capitalist society cannot be escaped, avoided or dismissed, there are ways of integrating traditional values rooted in connection, love, and kindness. The wisdom of the old ways can be threaded through a modern lens, and the idea of collective healing can become the liberation movement.

Closing

This gathering was seen as a vehicle to explore the psychological restorative needs of teenage girls. This form of discussion and analysis provided an Action Plan that may promote social changes in the lives of others going forward. The aim for future activism is to create *mana*—a state of being characterized by a community's experience to its own independent authority, control, influence, status, charisma, and spiritual power (Reid et al., 2014). Through this experience, a small group of teenage girls were able to come together to critically think about their lives on behalf of a greater collective conscious.

This study is a call to urgency that there are multi-faceted systems to be considered within a human being that is experiencing the process of life. The urgency to respond is demonstrated in the current generation of mistrusting isolated teen girls that are desperate for attunement and validation. This isolation and apathy are road marks to potential depression, anxiety, and longstanding mental health concerns. However, the study revealed that the presentation of an individual's mental health symptoms is a surface level representation of a greater social-ecological problem. Understanding the workings of these systems is essential in liberating the family and societal issues that manifest in one person. The need to gather, connect, and listen to one another is the beginning of changing how we see ourselves in the world.

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APPENDIX A: Recruitment Flier

Doctoral Research

Small group of teen girls (age 13-17)

coming together to talk about social/family messages

& thinking about how to take action in the community



Led by Raja Sinjab, LMHC; AT-R; Doctoral Candidate

Where: School Auditorium

When: Thursdays (3-month commitment)

What time: 3-4PM

****Participants will be given a letter of completion following
the research study for their school portfolio**

APPENDIX B: Parent/Guardian Informed Consent

Your child is invited to participate in the research project titled “Youth Empowerment Study”. The intent of this research study is to explore with youth participants/co-researchers the messages they receive from family and society and what they need to navigate those messages. The intent is to theoretically explore the constructs of intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural factors and what interventions could be used in the future.

Your child will entail meeting one hour per week for three months to discuss pictures your child have taken throughout the week to analyze and reflect as sources of information they gather. The discussions will then be analyzed through transcription in the second phase of analysis for deeper reflection on what themes may present. Using these themes, participants/co-researchers will then discuss an action plan for the community to support other adolescent females for their empowerment process.

In addition:

- The parents or participants/co-researchers are free to choose not to participate in the research and to discontinue participation in the research at any time without facing negative consequences.
- Identifying details will be kept confidential by the researcher. Data collected will be coded with a pseudonym, the participant’s identity will never be revealed by the researcher, and only the researcher will have access to the data collected.
- Any and all of your questions will be answered at any time and you are free to consult with anyone (i.e., friend, family) about your decision to participate in the research and/or to discontinue your participation.
- **Participation in this research poses the potential for emotional reactions, and clinical assessment will be ongoing; if risk to self or others is identified by the researcher, the researcher will notify parents and appropriate staff/resources in the community including crisis intervention and/or mandated reporting. Any unsafe behavior or information reported will have mandated reporting actions required.**
- The researcher may present the outcomes of this study for academic purposes (i.e., articles, teaching, conference presentations, supervision etc.)

If any problem in connection to the research arises, you can contact the researcher

Raja Sinjab; 774-400-0437; rsinjab@lesley.edu

or Lesley University sponsoring faculty Peiwei Li; pli3@lesley.edu

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairpersons at irb@lesley.edu

Participant/Co-researcher: _____

Birthdate: _____

Phone Number: _____

Parent of co-researcher: _____

Phone Number: _____

Alternative Emergency Contact: _____

I allow and consent to have my child take part in research study with Raja Sinjab, LMHC, AT-R. I understand meeting weekly for one-hour for three months is the commitment. I understand topics of intergenerational trauma and social pressures will be discussed, and if further clinical support is needed following the study, I will be advised by Raja Sinjab, LMHC, AT-R.

I understand that all information is confidential unless there is a safety concern related to my child, which will be clinically evaluated ongoing by Raja Sinjab, LMHC, AT-R. Notification of mental/physical safety concerns will be immediate, and discussion of continuing research will be suspended until further reviewed.

My child is under the age of 18 (Given that you used the word “age,” you do not need this info). I give consent for my child to participate and I understand all that is stated above. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Parent/Legal Guardian of Participant’s Signature; Date _____

Researcher’s Signature; Date _____

APPENDIX C: Participant/Co-Researcher Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in the research project titled “Youth Empowerment Study”. The intent of this research study is to explore with youth participants/co-researchers the messages they receive from family and society and what they need to navigate those messages. The intent is to theoretically explore the constructs of intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural factors and what interventions could be used in the future.

Your participation will entail meeting one hour per week for three months to discuss pictures that have taken throughout the week to analyze and reflect on as sources of information they gather. The discussions will then be analyzed through transcription in the second phase of analysis for deeper reflection on what themes may present. Using these themes, participants/co-researchers will then discuss an action plan for the community to support other adolescent females for their empowerment process.

In addition:

- The participants/co-researchers are free to choose not to participate in the research and to discontinue your participation in the research at any time without facing negative consequences.
- Identifying details will be kept confidential by the researcher. Data collected will be coded with a pseudonym, the participant’s identity will never be revealed by the researcher, and only the researcher will have access to the data collected.
- Any and all of your questions will be answered at any time and you are free to consult with anyone (i.e., friend, family) about your decision to participate in the research and/or to discontinue your participation.
- **Participation in this research poses the potential for emotional reactions, and clinical assessment will be ongoing; if risk to self or others is identified by the researcher, the researcher will notify parents and appropriate staff/resources in the community including crisis intervention and/or mandated reporting. Any unsafe behavior or information reported will have mandated reporting actions required.**
- The researcher may present the outcomes of this study for academic purposes (i.e., articles, teaching, conference presentations, supervision etc.)

If any problem in connection to the research arises, you can contact the researcher

Raja Sinjab; 774-400-0437; rsinjab@lesley.edu

or Lesley University sponsoring faculty- Peiwei Li; pli3@lesley.edu

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairpersons at irb@lesley.edu

Participant/Co-researcher: _____

Birthdate: _____

Phone Number: _____

Parent of co-researcher: _____

Phone Number: _____

Alternative Emergency Contact: _____

I am willing to consent to take part in research study with Raja Sinjab, LMHC, AT-R. I understand meeting weekly for one-hour for three months is the commitment. I understand topics of intergenerational trauma and social pressures will be discussed, and if further clinical support is needed following the study will be advised by Raja Sinjab, LMHC, AT-R.

I understand that all information is confidential unless there is safety concern related my child, which will be clinically evaluated ongoing by Raja Sinjab, LMHC, AT-R. Notification of mental/physical safety concerns will be immediate and discussion of continuing research will be suspended until further reviewed.

I am under the age of 18 and consent to participate in the research study. I understand all the terms that are stated above. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Participant's Signature; Date _____

Researcher's Signature; Date _____

APPENDIX D: Interview Protocol*Initial Meeting:*

Demographics: age, race, sexual orientation, gender identification

First Phase: Group Photo Discussions

The interview protocol will be shaped around informal discussions led by the photos co-researchers are reflecting on. This researcher will initiate conversation—*what message do you receive?* Conversation will be steered with active listening and reflections based on what the co-researchers discuss. Inferences by this researcher will be clarified with specific questions posed throughout conversation. Questions related to intergenerational trauma and macro-cultural factor categories will also be asked.

Last Phase (last two weeks) Creating Action Plan:

Questioning will be posed by the researcher—what do teen girls need from family or society? What responsibility do the teens have in making that change in family/society? What can help transform these messages into positive self-concepts?

