A study of the effects of slavery’s psychological trauma on African-American social work students

Deirdre V. Moore
CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

SOCIAL WORK

MOORE, DEIRDRE VELZORA B.A. EMORY UNIVERSITY, 2003

A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF SLAVERY’S PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA
ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

Advisor: Sandra J. Foster, Ph. D.

Thesis dated May 2006

The main objective of this study was to discover the level of psychic trauma of slavery among African-American social work students at Whitney M. Young, Jr., School of Social Work at Clark Atlanta University. The researcher finds it important to learn whether racial attitudes are present that may threaten the social work students’ effective practice with clients of both the dominant and minority society.

An exploratory design was used to measure the students’ level of psychic trauma. The Psychic Trauma Test, a 20-question measure, with added demographic questions was offered to social work students for research participation during practicum seminars. The results reveal 50% of students low in psychic trauma, 41% with moderate psychic trauma, and 9% with a damaged trauma level who all study to practice and bring others to a higher level of functioning.

The significance of this study has significant implications for the practice of social work education. It finds a need to focus on the racial attitudes of social workers who will be helping dominant, and minority populations.
A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF SLAVERY'S PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY
DEIRDRE VELZORA MOORE

WHITNEY M. YOUNG, JR., SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
MAY 2006
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to discover the level of psychic trauma of slavery among African American social work students at Whitney M. Young, Jr. School of Social Work (WMYJSSW). The researcher finds it important to learn whether racial attitudes are present that may threaten the social work students' effective practice with clients of both the dominant and minority society.

The Whitney M. Young, Jr., School of Social Work curriculum includes the Afrocentric Perspective as an integrative thread in educating students of social work, and has done so since the 1970's. This perspective focuses on African Americans as oppressed people recognizing that all humans have humanness in common, but their own ethnic identities as unique. It agrees that the more one has value for his own ethnic identity, the more one can have value for the ethnic identities of others (Clark Atlanta University, 1979). Examination of the dependent variable, psychological trauma, proceeds to reveal the ethnic confidence of African American social work students on their Black experience in relation to their experience into today's Eurocentric society. With teachings from an Afrocentric Perspective, the expectation was that most students would reflect low levels of psychic trauma due to slavery's past, given the Afrocentric
Perspective that "understanding of one's own heritage forms the basis for an understanding and appreciation of the diversity of the heritage of others" (Schiele, 1996). However, this is not always an easy accomplishment with the stigma that history's past has set.

Background of the Problem

The reason for the stigma of the black experience today, is slavery’s past and its continued oppression through racism under the dominant society. Robinson (1989) explains the black experience as "those interactions between black and white people, and among black people, in which racial identification of the parties is a dominant behavior determinant" (p.323). Aware of this, African-American parents prepare their young for such interactions. Black children are encouraged, "black is beautiful," "you are just as good as anybody else," "you can do anything the white kids can do," as the subjection to racial injustice is inevitable (Hale-Benson, 1986). There is an encouragement for African-American children to learn their cultural history. African-Americans have learned of the ploys of the white justification for slavery, the negative connotation of the words, black and white. White is related to purity and cleanliness, while black is associated with darkness, dirt, guilt, and anything negative. African Americans today know the property that their ancestors became for white slave masters. The Ku Klux Klan's White Supremacy concept lingers even today. Laws of Jim Crow subjected African Americans to obey a system that was created to stand for justice. Lynchings proved a harsh punishment for blacks who suffered through it, and those who viewed its
remains. The Civil Rights Movement brought a seeming resolve to whites who realized blacks would no longer be quiet about inequality. With all of this history, tensions arise and reservations harbor that relay back to the mistreatment from over 300 years ago. At the same time, whites know the roles their ancestors played in perpetuating the slave labor system. Myers, (2000) a white man married to a black woman, discusses racial issues, and finds that in general, whites lack excitement in the discussion of race because of the acknowledgement of its injustice brought on by their predecessors, while blacks lack thrill because of the pain. Some thought has been given to society’s perpetuated, unjust acts of overt and covert racism that consider one’s way of thinking would be affected. With this in mind, one might project that African-American social work students’ thinking may be affected. And if so, could that have an effect on their ability to work with diverse populations.

Statement of the Problem

Latif and Latif (1994) believe psychic trauma is the mental condition that results from the black slave experience of extreme psychological abuse, declaring it is “a malady suffered by every African-American, regardless of sex, occupation or religion”. DeGruy-Leary (2005) finds what she terms post-traumatic slave syndrome comparable to the trauma experienced by the World War II, European holocaust survivors subjected to camps where over 6,000 were tortured. She points to research that has consistently found severe trauma affecting multiple generations that did not experience the trauma directly. Asserting that torture and abuse also occurred during slavery over a long period of time,
DeGruy-Leary declares blacks should have received treatment just as the holocaust survivors did, but this was not provided. The repeated negative treatment towards blacks has caused this psychological trauma to be passed on from generation to generation. Pugh (as cited in Jenkins, 1995) confirms before the Black Power Movement of the 1960s that African-Americans adapted to the inferiority of whites in order to cope with apprehensions that surface in interactions with whites. Blacks then taught their children this "adaptation", which was then internalized as an expected or normal principle. If it is true that 'every' African-American has some suffering of psychic trauma, then African-American social workers need to be prepared by examining themselves and their self-confidence before practicing with other African-Americans and other cultures. Few studies have observed the psychological affects of slavery among African-American social work students who prepare for practice with various clients who have a great chance of being African-American as well due to the minority groups that seek or are referred to social work services.

Significance of the Study

Exploring the racial mentality of black social work students, who have a great chance of working with black clients, can bring to the forefront and challenge future social workers to find healing for any negative mental state that results from slavery's past. Such a study deems important because as social workers begin to work with their client populations, social workers' own psychological well-being need a balance in order to effectively help their clients. By beginning with the self and gaining knowledge, social
workers bring more balance to their own lives and perspectives (Aymer, 2002).

Uncovering the level of psychic trauma among black social work students at WMYJSSW will determine the potential social worker's confidence in working with other minority populations as well as those of the dominant society. A black social worker's self-healing can prepare him or her not only to relate to, and better work with his or her African-American client, but can also strengthen him or her to be effective with non-black clients.

**Summary of the Introduction/Thesis Overview**

The purpose of this study is to discover the level of psychic trauma of slavery among African-American social work students at WMYJSSW. Slavery has been said to have a negative effect even on the mentality of African-Americans today. As African-American social work students study to practice with other African-Americans and Americans of the dominant society, it is of substantial concern that the psychological trauma levels of these students be evaluated to bring an awareness of racial attitudes to the surface that may threaten the effectiveness of these future practicing social workers.

Strengths and weaknesses of previous literature from accredited scholars and researchers related to psychological trauma and African-Americans will be analyzed and synthesized to formulate questions that need further research in chapter two. The Theory of Afrocentricity will explain the rationale for the research questions and hypotheses in chapter three. The methodology, in chapter four, will describe the entire design and process of the research as well as analyze the data of the research. Findings from
analysis of the data will be presented in chapter five, and chapter six will discuss implications, limitations and findings of the present research. Conclusions will be drawn, and suggestions for the enhancement of social work practice will be provided.
The following literature review is designed to explore what ideas have already been established on the slave mentality, explanations of black personality, and therapeutic relationships with African Americans. Concepts on these topics will establish this review as a guide to furthering this study.

On Current Slave Mentality

In 1712, Willie Lynch spoke to slave masters, giving them his guaranteed plan to control slaves for at least 300 years. He pointed out, "...the good thing about this plan is that if used intensely for one year, the slaves themselves will remain perpetually distrustful" (Hassan-El, 1999). Negative statistics among the African American community today can be traced back to slavery. DeGruy-Leary (2005) argues that since no therapy was provided to slaves after 250 years of slavery, effects were passed down through generations accounting for the behaviors that display. She draws attention to the many African American men today and the number of babies they have made due to the value placed on reproduction for more slave labor during slavery. Akbar (1996) agrees: the strong-armed stud from slavery...occurs as the modern-day pimp or the man who delights in leaving neglected babies dispersed around town...such family
irresponsibility does not occur among African people who have never endured the ravages of slavery or who were able to preserve their cultural integrity in spite of slavery.

Whether referred to as _post-traumatic slave syndrome_ or _post-traumatic slavery disorder_, the authors agree with real connections to symptoms of the present including: associating being smart with acting white, defining good hair as long and straight, believing blacks are better in sports than science, music than math, and rap than reading (Kunjufu, 2004). Woodson (2000) must have agreed with the guarantee of the Willie Lynch letter asserting, “If you make a man feel that he is inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept an inferior status, for he will seek it himself”. These interesting concepts have been of interest to many sociologists and psychologists who sought to understand the formation of black identity.

**Explanations of Black Personality Development**

**Biculturality**

Chestang (1976) presents African-Americans are marginalized and are left being bicultural, sustaining that black culture is the fusion of two cultures: the one dominant culture he lives and must operate with every day and his own in which he must learn to know who he is. Hale-Benson (1982) agrees that this duality is necessary for African-Americans to be successful in the larger society, while maintaining their own culture. However, Hilliard (1995) doubts that many African-Americans are sure of who they are given that it does not seem a priority for parents to teach their young about their history.
He supports that a strong group identity is not possible without knowing one’s own history. Group identity is just one part of the black self-concept.

Black Self-Concept

The two factor theory of black self-concept includes personal identity (PI) and reference group orientation (RGO). The importance of research of personal identity seeks to determine psychological well-being, exclusive of a person’s gender or cultural identity. For this reason, self-concept scales do not have to be adjusted for males or females, African-Americans or Caucasians. PI is simply regarded as a component of one’s personality. Variables unique to individuals determine personal identity. Reference group orientation, is just the opposite. It is concerned with a person’s perspectives in regard to their group identity. Such research explores indications within cultures that incite apprehension. Thus, how a person feels about their social group, its values and experiences uncovers another aspect of their identity (Cross, 1991).

Therapeutic Relationships with African-Americans

Various professionals find that in order to help others, they must first help themselves. Martin and Martin (1995) have worked among black social workers today and find that black social workers do not analyze black history and culture to be able to help black clients in an African-centered way. These social workers may not feel the need to go in depth on such an area that they feel they live every day. Jenkins (1995) agrees with Martin and Martin (1995), declaring black social workers “should relate to African-American clients on their own terms, accepting their expressive styles and their
special concerns, and recognizing their basic human effort to free themselves of the
demoralizing sense of not being able to control major aspects of their psychological life”
(p. 247). But not only do black social workers need to reach their African-American
clients, but other races as well. The power position of the African-American social
worker in practice does not eliminate them from having to deal with the racism in society,
and they can carry attitudes of hurt as well (Aymer, 2002). Proctor and Davis (1994) say
racial tensions impede professional helping, but the experienced practitioner, sure of their
skills can be effective in working with clients of differing races. Because establishing
rapport, and bonding with the client is the important connection to begin problem-
solving, Allen-Meares and Burman (1999) assert practitioners should recognize and deal
with their own barriers. Even new self-awareness can perfect practice skills (Allen-
Meares and Burman, 1999). Robinson (1989) notates that people’s experiences influence
their attitudes, and since no clinician is immune, negative attitudes can resurface in
treatment with a certain type of client. This certainly should never happen in the process
of helping a client to overcome their own situations.

Limitations of the Literature

As interesting and as credible as the concept of post-traumatic slave disorder is,
there has been but one measure, the Psychic Trauma Test, used in this study created in
attempt to discover any salient evidence on the notion. Still, it may be challenged that,
far from slavery, influences such as that of the male slave stud turned pimp today could
result from his misunderstanding of sex as love. Further study with large African-

American samples need to be implemented to uncover more on this modern subject.

Personality studies are complex in themselves given that human beings are unique individuals. There are many different perspectives and responses people can have even to the same situation. Biculturalism is certainly plausible for minorities who must adapt to the manner of the dominant society in order to move forward, while remaining true to their own culture. Jenkins (1995) admits there are many aspects to self-concept and such studies will continue to have interesting results.

Observing the racial barriers that exist in the world that may affect therapeutic relationships to suggest self-awareness is a strong point to suggest for black social workers. It is a true and necessary stance that is the crux of this study.

Meaningful research has been given to psychological slavery, and black identity as well. Existing research on the African-American in the therapeutic relationship is informative, yet a combination of all of this research would bode useful to the social work profession when applied to a more specific population.

Proposed Study

This present investigation views the variable of psychic trauma of slavery in an attempt to discover whether racial attitudes are present that threaten black CAU social work students' future in the social work profession.

Definition of Variables and Their Relationships

Psychic trauma is the dependent variable, and the past slavery of African-
Americans is the independent variable. For the purpose of this study, psychic trauma will be defined by the measures from which it was derived so that analysis of the results will reveal what the measure intends.

Latif and Latif observe Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary definition of the two words, "psychic" and "trauma", and understand that it is "what happens to victims of extreme psychological abuse". Psychic is defined as "pertaining to the mind or soul; mental as distinguished from physical or physiological. Trauma is "a severe emotional shock, having a deep often lasting effect on the personality" (2004).

The past slavery of African-Americans is the independent variable to determine the effect on psychic trauma level. Although the occurrence of slavery and its physical abuse through beatings and labor, as well as mental abuse through abasement of Africans as property and lies about themselves, is in the past, generations that identify as African-Americans must deal with the effects personally as racial oppression has been perpetuated through society even until the present day. Thus, the variables relate in the manner that Africans who experienced slavery's trauma can suffer a slave mentality due to the perpetuated racism in the dominant society.

Summary of Proposed Study

This present investigation views the psychic trauma of slavery in an attempt to discover whether racial attitudes are present that threaten black CAU social work students' future in the social work profession, by replicating a study and measure by Latif and Latif (1994).
CHAPTER THREE

CONCEPTUAL/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For the purpose of this study, psychic trauma is viewed as what happens to victims of extreme psychological abuse where slavery is the circumstance that directly affected Africans that were brought to America hundreds of years ago. Perpetuated by racism, some behaviors of African Americans reflect an arrested mental state. Asante (1942) says the theory of social change is what many African Americans need for healing.

Asante defines Afrocentricity:

Afrocentricity is a mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values, and perspectives predominate. In regards to theory, it is the placing of African people in the center of analysis of African phenomena. Thus, it is possible for any one to master the discipline of seeking the location of Africans in a given phenomenon. In terms of action and behavior, it is a devotion to the idea that what is in the best interest of African consciousness is at the heart of ethical behavior.

Finally, Afrocentricity seeks to enshrine the idea that blackness itself is a trope of ethics. Thus, to be black is to be against all forms of oppression, racism, classism, homophobia, patriarchy, child abuse, pedophilia, and white racial domination (1942).
Kunjufu (2004) states “The fundamental problem is that many African-Americans who are suffering from post-traumatic slavery disorder are in denial and do not feel a need to expose themselves to Afrocentricity, which is needed for their healing.” As with usual psychotherapies, it is the confrontation of the knowledge that brings the healing. To be effective change agents, black social workers need to study their culture, but becoming self-aware is a first step (Swigonski, 1999). Schiele (1997) agrees that this is important for social workers to look within themselves at a problem, and begin to heal as well.

Clark Atlanta University’s School of Social Work has recognized the importance of the Afrocentric Perspective, and has integrated it into the teachings of the social work discipline at Clark Atlanta University. “It places primacy on the strengths and uniqueness of differential population groups and dictates service response patterns, which respect the cultural integrity of affected populations as well as their ethos, talents and creative cores” (Atlanta University, 1979). Hill (as cited in Atlanta University, 1979) agrees that identifying one’s own ethnicity allows one to have value for many other ethnicities. These modes of thought make the social worker think about the important roles they play in the lives of other Blacks that need help.

Graham (1999) asks why a profession that seeks to help so many minorities – especially African-Americans – study from and utilize intervention strategies that have a Eurocentric basis. She challenges that black social workers need to be more versed in the Afrocentric perspective to provide relevance to their most likely client. This perspective adds to empowerment theory which is necessary for African-American clients (Manning
et. al, 2004). Each black individual needs to begin with their history in order to know themselves (Adeleke, 2001). The Afrocentric perspective calls for knowledge of the history of the Africans brought to America. An African-American’s knowledge of self balances one’s own self-concept, and thus enables them to help others – black, white, and other minorities.

Statement of Research Questions

This study asks the questions: What is the overall level of psychic trauma of black social work students at CAU? Does reading Afrocentric literature in addition to learning through an Afrocentric Perspective lower psychic trauma?

Hypotheses

The hypotheses for this study are as follows:

$H_0$: Students learning social work through an Afrocentric Perspective will reveal low levels of psychological trauma.

$H_1$: If students have read at least one book of Afrocentric literature, then they will reveal lower levels of psychological trauma than those having read only some.
CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

In order to observe racial attitudes among social work students, their levels of psychic trauma was assessed. The study’s design notation is as follows: O. The O indicates an assessment tool which measures level of psychic trauma.

Setting

Clark Atlanta University is a historically black university in Atlanta, Georgia established in 1988. Founded in 1920, the university’s school of social work is accredited by the Counsel on Social Work Education. The school of social work was renamed the Whitney M. Young, Jr., School of Social Work (WMYJSSW) in 2000, and celebrated 80 years of existence. Students actively enrolled in Clark Atlanta University’s School of Social Work make up the sample frame from which the study’s sample was derived.

Sampling Procedures

Purposive, convenience sampling was applied to obtaining subjects for this study. This sampling method deems appropriate as one particular ethnic identity was sought for
research, and the most logical classes were sought to survey this particular group at one time. The researcher allowed one teacher who teaches practicum seminar classes required by interning social work students to disseminate the consent forms and questionnaires to each class. Although other ethnicities are enrolled in WMYJSSW, only African Americans were asked to participate in this study.

Human Subjects/Consent

Since experimentation is being done on human subjects, approval was sought from Clark Atlanta University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The proposed study was explained in the application process to assure that no harm could be done in the research process. Participants were also explained of the minimal harm involved in the participation of this study (see Appendix A). Although no response from the IRB board was received, research proceeded.

Measure

Psychic trauma was measured by a 26-item questionnaire including questions of demographic characteristics (See Appendix B). Psychic trauma is defined as the resulting state of what happens to victims of extreme psychological abuse. The Psychic Trauma Test was used to measure psychic trauma levels (Latif and Latif, 1994).

The Psychic Trauma Test is composed of 20 questions developed with help from Dr. Florestee Vance “to measure the degree to which an African American's behavior and attitudes have been affected by the social conditions in a Eurocentric society” (Latif
A 5-point Likert scale measured responses: 4 = strongly agree, 3 = agree, 2 = unsure, 1 = disagree, and 0 = strongly disagree. The questions addressed five symptoms: fear of white disapproval and looking to them as authority figures, feeling inferior to whites, rejection of African features of beauty and accepting European ones, rejection of the African identity while preferring identify with the European culture, and the tendency for denial of the issues previously stated. A score closer to 0 reveals a healthier racial identity and supposes a higher self-esteem, while a score closer to 80 reveals extreme psychological trauma and negative affect due to racism in society (see Table 1). In the original study, 500 males and females of various religions, ages, education, and economic backgrounds were assessed (Latif & Latif, 1994). However, test developers did not reveal a reliability coefficient for the test or mention its validity.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher proposed the study to the IRB on the campus of Clark Atlanta University located in the Science Research Building via application. Although no response from the IRB was received, sampling began. The researcher sought permission from the practicum seminar teacher that she request voluntary participation from students for this study. This method was chosen as to dispel the coercion factor due to the relationship the researcher has with colleagues. At the start of classes, this teacher announced the voluntary participation in research study, and gave out consent forms. Questionnaires were then distributed to interested participants and time was allotted for
Table 1. Analysis of Psychic Trauma Test (Latif & Latif, 1994)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>No Trauma</td>
<td>You appear to have eliminated problems related to fear of whites and low self-esteem due to the African American slave experience. You have learned to be proud of your racial identity and have a healthy sense of self worth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-20</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>You have taken some steps toward developing a positive self image. However, your attitudes are still affected by racial prejudice in society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-40</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Many of your perceptions are influenced by preoccupation with what whites may think and do. This could be having a negative effect on your self-esteem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-60</td>
<td>Damaged</td>
<td>You are struggling with feelings of inferiority, and your self-esteem has been greatly damaged. This could affect your ability to reach personal and professional goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-80</td>
<td>Extreme</td>
<td>You have suffered extreme trauma. You have accepted your presumed inferiority as a matter of fact, and may unconsciously act out the role by purposely performing below standard or seeking out demeaning relationships. You will have to work hard to change deeply ingrained self-hatred.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

completion. The researcher retrieved the completed questionnaires from the seminar teacher at a later time out of the presence of students.

Data collection began on November 14, 2005, and took one day to complete. One morning, one afternoon, and one evening class was offered participation on that day. After all the data had been collected, it was analyzed and interpreted into useful information for further research.
Statistical Analysis

The independent variable is of nominal value as it represents slavery, being that it has varying effects on behaviors and mentalities of those whose ancestors directly experienced it. The dependent variable is psychic trauma. Psychic trauma was measured by the Psychic Trauma Test Analysis. Scores on the test range from no trauma to low, moderate, damaged, and extreme trauma to determine the significance between the expected relationship of the dependent variable and the actual relationship.
CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Demographics

All thirty-eight participants in this study were African-American. One participant who only reported demographic responses was omitted from all analysis. The thirty-seven participants were between the ages of 21 and 42, yet most of them (56.8%) were between ages 21 and 26 (see Table 2). There were 33 female and 4 male participants. The percentage of male students (10.8%) compared to female students (89.2%) is reflective of those practicing in the social work profession, which is dominated by females. Most participants (83.8%) were MSW students; the remainder was bachelor’s level. More master’s level students are represented because all MSW students are required to have a practicum placement, and attend the class in which the questionnaires were presented.

An overwhelming majority, 89.2 percent of the participants responded ‘Yes’ to awareness of the Afrocentric reading reference list suggested by the WMYJSSW upon acceptance to the school. Only three indicated that they were not aware of the reading list. Of those who were aware of the list, 35.1% specified they still read none of the books, 35.1% read some, 24.3% read 1-2 books, and 1 participant read three or more
books. One subject did not answer the two questions asking for awareness of the list, and how much he or she read. His or her omitted response is indicated as “missing data”.

Results of Psychic Trauma Test

Observing questions 7-26 revealed participants’ responses to psychic trauma. All thirty-seven participants provided a response unless otherwise stated. Questions were created to explore 5 different symptoms of psychic trauma and therefore grouped into the five symptoms: white approval, personal inferiority, rejection of African features, rejection of African culture, and denial of the previous symptoms.

White Approval

Over half of participants agreed (43.2%) and strongly agreed (13.5%) with question 7 that they get embarrassed when an African-American being interviewed on television is using “incorrect” grammar with a heavy “black dialect”; 8.1% were unsure, 24.3% disagreed, and 10.8% strongly disagreed. One participant gave no response for question 8, so the valid percentage indicated 8.3% strongly agreed, 27.8% agreed, 11.1% were unsure, 25% disagreed and 27.8% strongly disagreed that they consciously alter their pronunciation to sound more like whites when speaking to them. More participants strongly disagreed (24.3%) and disagreed (21.6%) with feeling fearful when being stopped by white police officers in traffic than those who agreed (16.2%) and strongly agreed (24.3%); 13.5% were unsure. Of the 36 who responded, a great majority disagreed (41.7%) and strongly disagreed (44.4%) with feeling uncomfortable when they hear an African-American leader speak forcefully; only 1 agreed (2.8%) and 2 strongly
Table 2: Demographics of participants (N=37)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GENDER</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>89.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLASSIFICATION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSW</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>83.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21–26</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>56.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27–32</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33–38</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39–44</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWARE (of book list)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>89.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMOUNT READ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>35.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>35.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 Books</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3+ Books</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

agreed (5.6%); 5.6% were unsure. Participants mainly disagreed (32.4%) or strongly disagreed (51.4%) with having difficulty looking a white man wearing a business suit
speaking in an authoritative tone in the eye; 5.6% were unsure, 5.4% agreed and 2.7% strongly agreed.

Personal Inferiority

Not one participant strongly agreed with believing whites will perform better than themselves in business, job or academic competition, but 8.1% agreed; 10.8% were unsure, 21.6% disagreed, and 59.5% strongly disagreed. More participants disagreed (40.5%) and strongly disagreed (16.2%) with feeling self-conscious in events where he or she is the only black person in attendance than agreed (29.7%) and strongly agreed (8.1%); 5.4% were unsure. Of the thirty-six participants who responded, more than half disagreed (30.6%) and strongly disagreed (22.2%) with believing they would be further along in their career if they were white; 13.9% were unsure, 16.7% agreed and 16.7% strongly agreed. Presented with the statement, “I hesitate to take on certain professional responsibilities because I don’t believe I have the ability to master them,” most strongly disagreed (51.4%) and disagreed (32.4%), while 5.4% were unsure, agreed, and strongly agreed. Most participants (59.4%) disagreed and strongly disagreed that if they were to suddenly lose their present means of employment that they would have great difficulty surviving; 18.9% were unsure, 21.6% agreed and strongly agreed.

Rejection of African Standard of Beauty

A large amount disagreed and strongly disagreed (62.1%) that they feel embarrassed and unattractive when a member of the opposite sex who they want to attract sees their hair before it is pressed or permed; 16.2% were unsure, and 21.6% agreed and strongly agreed. All participants gave a certain response for the thought of themselves
being more attractive if his or her skin were a few shades lighter; 34 participants (91.9%) strongly disagreed and disagreed while 3 agreed or strongly agreed (8.1%). Of the 36 subjects that responded to question 19, 25 strongly disagree (69.4%), 6 disagree (16.7%), 1 is unsure (2.8%), 1 agrees (2.8%), and 3 strongly agree (8.3%) that the people he or she finds more attractive tend to have lighter skin and curly or straightened hair. Participants mainly disagreed (21.6%) and strongly disagreed (64.9%) that they consider it a greater compliment when a white member of the opposite sex finds them attractive than when a black member of the opposite sex finds them attractive; two were unsure (5.4%), two agreed (5.4%) and one strongly agreed (2.7%). More uncertainty presented (21.6%) when questioned feeling resentment when seeing an attractive black member of the opposite sex romantically involved with a white person of participant’s sex; however, 32.4% disagreed, 18.9% strongly disagreed, and 18.9% agreed, while 8.1% strongly agreed. Of the 36 that responded to question 22, 22 participants (61.1%) strongly disagreed, and nine (25%) disagreed with feeling that they were more attractive than their darker skinned associates; two (5.6%) agreed, and one (2.8%) strongly agreed. Two (5.6%) were unsure about the issue.

Rejection of African Culture

Although two (5.4%) were unsure, there were no participants who agreed or strongly agreed with seeing African films expressing African rituals and activities as repulsive. The remainder disagreed (29.7%) or strongly disagreed (64.9%) with question 23. More participants strongly disagreed (51.4%) and disagreed (27%) that they thought blacks who were brought to America from Africa became more “civilized” than those
who remained in Africa; four (10.8%) were unsure about the idea while three (8.1%) agreed and one strongly agreed (2.7%). All participants had a certain opinion for the consideration of traveling abroad to become more “cultured”. Twenty-one students strongly disagreed (56.8%) and six disagreed (16.2%) that their first choice is a place in Europe rather than a place in Africa. Nine agreed (24.3%) and one strongly agreed (2.7%) that their first choice is a place in Europe.

Tendency for Denial

No student strongly agreed with finding himself or herself defensively making excuses for their answers as he or she filled out this questionnaire. However, one agreed (2.7%); three were unsure (8.1%) nine disagreed (24.3%), and 24 strongly disagreed (64.9%).

Summary of Findings

To obtain more meaningful data and get an accurate account of psychic trauma level of black social work students, the five participants who omitted content responses were not analyzed. Thirty-two participants were analyzed for levels of psychic trauma. None fell in the “No Trauma” category, 16 (50%) in the “Low” trauma category, 13 (41%) in “Moderate”, 3 (9%) in Damaged, and none in the “Extreme” category (See Figure 1).

Among the half of students with Low trauma (50%), ten participants (62.5%) reported having read either “some” or “none” of the Afrocentric literature suggested by the WMYJSSW while 6 (37.5%) read either “1-2 books” or “3+ books”. Only three participants (23.1%) with “Moderate” trauma also reported having read either “1-2
books" or "3+ books"; ten (76.9%) revealed they read some of a book, or none at all. Yet all (3) participants referred to as having a "Damaged" trauma level (100%) said they either read none or only some Afrocentric literature. Overall, more participants did not read Afrocentric literature than did (see Table 3).

![Psychic Trauma of SW Students](image)

**Figure 1.** Psychic Trauma Levels of Social Work Students
Table 3. Participants Who Read Afrocentric Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trauma Level</th>
<th>Read at least one book (N=32)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>10 (62.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>3 (23.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damaged</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13 (41%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

The hypothesis that students learning social work through an Afrocentric Perspective will reveal low levels of psychological trauma black students at CAUSSW have low levels of psychic trauma is rejected since levels were not significantly low. Although it is true that more students reported to be in the low psychic trauma level, still a critical fifty percent were found on the moderate and damaged levels. So, while half of the students seem to have taken some steps toward developing a positive self image, their attitudes are still affected by racial prejudice in society, forty-one percent of student perceptions are influenced by preoccupation with what whites may think and do which could be having a negative effect on self-esteem. Even worse, nine percent of social work students are struggling with feelings of inferiority, and their self-esteem has been greatly damaged which could affect their ability to reach personal and professionals goals. This is a serious malady that needs critical attention.

The hypothesis that if students have read at least one book of Afrocentric literature, then they will reveal lower levels of psychological trauma than those having read only some is accepted as a strong correlation existed comparing those who read at least one Afrocentric literature to those who read some or none. It was interesting to find
that as trauma levels increased, so did the percentages of those who did not read at least one book of Afrocentric literature. What has been revealed authenticates the literature.

Literature Review Comparison

The literature addresses statements of the past such as making a person feel inferior for so long to a particular type of person will keep them feeling that way so that even when training in such a manner is no longer direct, the person will act inferior and deny themselves. This is one legitimate explanation. Yet biculturalism is another which may account for the large number of moderately traumatized students. They may have learned to use standard English in more professional settings as well as before white individuals, and have the ability to be less standard when in casual settings such as around other African-Americans and friends. The literature declares the importance of this ability to maintain both cultures to be true to the African American self, and to be able to move forward in the Eurocentric society (Chestang, 1976).

The literature also supports the conceptual framework in embracing that knowledge is freeing, so that the more one reads Afrocentric literature and history, and gets involved with Afrocentric culture, the more prideful the African-American, the more balanced, the more secure, and the better his/her ability to conduct effective therapeutic relationships with others. Such a social worker is more open to other cultures because of his/her own stability.
Limitations of the Study

Threats to construct validity included the tendency for participants to respond in a way that would deliberately reflect low psychic trauma. It is difficult to decipher whether or not this was the case in this study because there was a general spread of results. On the other hand no participant reflected extreme trauma, or no trauma at all. Participants were simply asked to respond honestly. It was also threatened by the reliability of the measure. The creators of the instrument did not present a reliability coefficient to ensure that it is measuring what it was created to measure. Prior to actual testing, the measure should have been given to at least five individuals who would not be analyzed as part of the study in order to determine a reliability coefficient. Without it, one can be skeptical that the measure is measuring what it intended. Due to the specific population studied, the results from the sample used is not generalizable outside of blacks in schools of social work as most responses only came from young adult females to other populations other than of black social work students.

Conclusions Based on the Findings

From the findings, it can be concluded that social work students deal with racism to a great degree, yet do not manage it well. What this means is that the psychologically traumatized black social worker, easily accepting whites as authority, may not advocate for their black and minority clients in meaningful ways if their superiors are white and have different viewpoints. Such a worker is a less effective change agent. Furthermore, the worker may discount client ideas on racism as a possible stressor, not being able to
recognize that he or she has this issue since Eurocentric ways are mainstream, and thus acceptable as standard. The traumatized black social worker, feeling inferior to whites, may have an issue with helping a black client with the same inferiority problem and be less inclined to empower the client. Yet a social worker confident in whom he/she is as an African-American can empower a client from a strong foundation within his/herself. Social workers rejecting their own African features or culture may find it harder to relate to black clients who desire to see black pride from such a helper in the social services. If a relationship cannot be established, then help cannot be transferred. Locked in the early stage of the helping process can frustrate both the client and the professional, and certainly impede moving the client to a higher level of functioning.

It makes since that those on “damaged” trauma level did not read one book of Afrocentric literature. Likewise, it can be understood that a greater percentage of those with low trauma read one or more books. Literature declaring more Afrocentric reading for healing of psychic trauma is supported. This certainly was the expectation.

Implications for Social Work Practice

This study has been instrumental in bringing psychological trauma to an awareness. Different implications can come from its results. Critical thinking on these issues within educational practice could be the area to begin. Social work professors could encourage on the awareness that may be important to future professionals. As it stands, the Afrocentric reading list is a suggestion. It could become more than just a suggestion, and become a preparation for testing or discussion that will be accounted for
in grading so that the emphasis is taken seriously by students. The school of social work
may want to ensure that all teachers are teaching from, or new professors who have not
heard of the perspective believe in the Afrocentric Perspective. The belief of the one who
brings this information is essential as subjective viewpoints can come through teaching.
Social workers who know themselves are on their way to being effective with various
clients. Further research in this area can provide students with a way to measure their
level of psychic trauma. They can then adhere to it by immersing themselves in their
culture, reading Afrocentric literature, or discussing such topics with peers.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Consent Form

This class was selected of all social work classes offered this semester to solicit participation. In order to explore any psychic trauma among African-American social work students, you are being asked to participate in this research. The Principal Investigator, wants to learn if any barriers exist within the social work student as he or she prepares to practice with other African-Americans and minorities, and if any, to what extent they exist.

The following questionnaire takes less than 10 minutes of your time. You will be asked to rate your feelings on statements of thought, behavior and response about your culture, and the dominant culture. The benefit of participation will reveal whether or not you have been affected by slavery, and if so, how deeply.

Minimal risk is involved in this study involving sensitive subject matter. Risk is deemed "minimal," as social work students have already had exposure to the subject through the SSW curriculum. All data gathered from the questionnaire is for the purpose of research only, and no identifying information is associated with the questionnaire; consent signatures will be taken separately. You have rights as a research volunteer, and may refrain from answering any question(s) or choose to decline participation without penalty of class participation or grade point(s). If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact, Principal Investigator, Deirdre Moore, at (770) 355-5790.

(fold and tear along dotted lines, and keep the above portion)

Please indicate consent with your signature below:

Participant Name ___________________________ Date ____________
APPENDIX B

Questionnaire

~ Please answer all questions truthfully, and to the best of your ability.

1. Are you African-American or Black? □ Yes □ No

2. What is your age? _____

3. What is your gender? □ Female □ Male

4. What is your classification? □ BSW □ MSW □ Ph.D

5. Are you aware of the required Afrocentric reading reference list that was provided by the Whitney M. Young, Jr., SSW upon your official acceptance? □ Yes □ No

6. If “Yes”, what amount did you read?
   □ None □ Some □ 1-2 books □ 3+ books

~ Circle the number which best describes how you feel about each statement. Strongly Agree (SA) = 4; Agree (A) = 3; Unsure (U) = 2; Disagree (D) = 1; and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 0.

SA A U D SD

7. While watching an African American being interviewed on a television program, when I notice that the person is using “incorrect” grammar with a very heavy “black dialect,” I get embarrassed. 4 3 2 1 0

8. When speaking to whites, I consciously try to alter my grammar and pronunciation so that I sound more like them, “proper.” 4 3 2 1 0

9. When stopped by white police officers in traffic, I feel fearful. 4 3 2 1 0

10. When I hear an African-American leader speaking forcefully or aggressively, I feel uncomfortable. 4 3 2 1 0

11. When a white man wearing a business suit speaks to me in an authoritative tone, I have difficulty looking him in the eye. 4 3 2 1 0
12. When competing with whites, whether in business, on the job, or academically, I believe they will probably perform better than I.

13. When I go to events where I am the only black person in attendance, I feel self-conscious.

14. I believe I would be further along in my career if I were white.

15. I hesitate to take on certain professional responsibilities because I don't believe I have the ability to master them.

16. If I were to suddenly lose my present means of employment, I think I would have great difficulty surviving.

17. When a member of the opposite sex whom I want to attract sees my hair before it is pressed or permmed, I feel embarrassed and unattractive.

18. I think I would be more attractive if my skin were a few shades lighter.

19. The people I find most attractive tend to have lighter skin and curly or straightened hair.

20. When a white member of the opposite sex finds me attractive, I consider it a greater compliment than when a black member of the opposite sex finds me attractive.

21. I feel resentment when I see an attractive black member of the opposite sex romantically involved with a white person of my sex.

22. I feel that I am more attractive than my darker skinned associates.

23. When I see Africans in films expressing their own cultural rituals and activities, I see them as repulsive.
24. I think blacks who were brought to America from Africa became more “civilized” than those who remained in Africa.

25. When I consider traveling abroad to become more “cultured,” my first choice is a place in Europe, such as Paris or London, rather than a place in Africa.

26. I found myself defensively making excuses for my answers as I filled out this questionnaire.
REFERENCES


