Self-Awareness and Resilience

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Abstract

This essay addresses the interrelatedness of trauma and resilience experienced in the lives of Black females. It emphasizes the importance of self-awareness as a process in mental health to promote psychic resilience.

Keywords: Trauma; Resilience; Subjectivity; Black Females; Self-Awareness

Commentary

The American Psychological Association [1] defines resilience as "As the ability to bounce back and show early successful adaptation and recovery from a significant trauma situation" (p.1). Trauma studies discern that resilience can emerge from adversity, and social context, social supports, and environmental conditions determine processes and outcomes.

Moreover, resilience has been empirically studied to ascertain clear-cut observable, measurable indicators and the emittance of different developmental pathways to achieve well-being. One of the many pathways is recognizing resilience as a subjective internal phenomenon and using the narrative as a springboard [2,3]. It behooves mental health professionals to apply contextual analysis to examine black females' voices of resilience.

My commentary focuses on black female resilience and trauma that rises from the margins of their subjectivity rather than the center of empirical research. Below is an excerpt from a Black female literary writer who dares to speak of her subjectivity from the margins:

"To name ourselves rather than be named, we must first see ourselves. For some of us this will not be easy. So long unmirrored in our true selves, we may have forgotten how we look. Nevertheless, we can't theorize in a void; we must have evidence. And we-I speak only for black women here-have barely begun to articulate our life experience" [4].

In the above narrative, the author accords a heightened awareness of her subjectivity to outsider status, place, and space. She resurrected ancestral implicit memory as a visceral relational connection to make meaning of her present-day existence. Moreover, self-awareness empowers her to name her invisibility to claim visibility. She identifies with her multiple subjectivities as a marginalized black woman who parlays inside and outside the margins as an act of resilience and resistance. Her narrative is intuitive yet intentional with choice. Moreover, with a heightened racial and gendered awareness, Black females may resist the hegemonic margins of exclusion and choose subjectivity and positionality to move forward and occupy psychic space in the center. Increased self-awareness promotes relationality, intentionality, and psychological resilience for those who wish to lean into it.

Historically, systemic racism and stereotypes have

relegated Black females outside the margins of subjectivity. Contemptuous representations of crack-addicted welfare mothers erase and objectify. The Black female's legacy of motherhood is denigrated when the mammy's role of caring for babies is objectified. Their hard work is devalued when they are misnamed as mules of the earth. The African tradition of revering black motherhood places this group in high regard for their fortitude, strength, and resourcefulness, transposed across divergent lands and seas. The intergenerational aspects of Black motherhood carried the culture and mothering practices in their families and communities [5]. These women enabled Africans to survive in Europe and the Americas, and Africa despite the separations and losses of family and children. These cross-cultural practices embrace resilient values, norms, and expectancies for intergenerational survival.

Studies show that a positive racial identity bodes well with psychic resilience that builds self-esteem and a sense of competence [6,7]. Working black females positively correlate their employment with multitasking and access to resources away from home while caring for their families. Their success at work mobilizes them to achieve greater economic security by attaining advanced college degrees. Yet, their struggle with gendered racism, being victims of sexual violence, and being deeply hampered by socio-economic exploitation-are all interlocking factors contributing to their vulnerability, trauma, and adversity. Although societal contradictions of Black females may be internalized, nonetheless, in line with the thought of black resilience that self-awareness becomes more palpable with the advent of group empathy and connection with others. Advocacy for voting rights, equity in the workplace, child care, and social and reproductive justice is becoming more predominant in society. Exposure to these matters may invite the curiosity of positionality for all who choose to imbibe [8]. Allowing self-awareness deepens understanding of negative stereotypes, positionality, and the impact of social structures that operate to block the disenfranchised from partaking in what others take for granted.

How do we understand the societal perception of black female resilience and the contradictory cultural stereotypes that objectify them? Can we consider the fluidity of coexisting trauma and resilience inherent in all human experiences? How wonderful if we could create an empathic world knowing that we all share both trauma and resilience and interconnectedness.

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