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Isabelle Garnand
Portland State University

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How Transitional, Restorative, and Transformative Justice Will Address Racial Injustice

Isabelle Garnand

Department of Psychology, Portland State University

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Abstract

Racism is still deeply embedded in the United States. Dominant white cultural narratives do not acknowledge African-Americans' experiences, and previous methods of addressing it have not been sufficient. Through a literature review using PsychInfo, Google Scholar, and Google the author researched how transitional, restorative, and transformative justice have been used in the U.S. and other countries to establish what methods of each would be best adopted for the U.S. The author proposes change through addressing racism on the state and county level using these multiple levels of justice throughout the U.S. to create space to perpetuate conversations, actions, and beginning community healing. Methods of justice that enforce truth-telling, acknowledgement of the human rights abuses against African-Americans, and respectful open conversations are what will move the U.S. to holistically start to heal the trauma inflicted in the African-American population.

How Transitional, Restorative, and Transformative Justice Will Address Racial Injustice

Racial violence against African-Americans in the United States is a result of many underlying problems and unaddressed histories: the kidnapping and slavery of African-Americans, then indentured servitude to those same masters, then segregation and Jim Crow, to modern day mass incarceration of disproportionate numbers of Black people posing as a war against drugs, but it is just the same war with a different look. The longer these problems go unaddressed and buried, the more convoluted they become.

Radical change is still needed. Our nation's previous methods of addressing this deep problem need serious revising. A new approach should include various forms of alternative justice that are not punitive or retributive processes, but ones that provide communities with

tools to succeed, and governments that actively support the changing culture to heal. One of those forms of justice is transitional justice which provides many beneficial tools in addressing this deeply concerning issue through focusing on truth-telling and reconciliation through a variety of efforts that begin at the top of the society. Restorative justice is another form that is more specific in how it is a response to the punitive justice system; instead of outcasting those who offend, it works to fully integrate those people back into the community. Transformative justice is a cultural shift in a society where the deep roots of a problem are addressed and communities are provided with tools to communicate to one another more effectively. Through these three justice avenues, a holistic picture of the problem can be seen and addressed on every level of the society, and the healing conversations can begin.

White people in the U.S. have the dominant power which allows them to control societal narratives, and this has all prevented the truth about the violence inflicted on African-American people from fully surfacing. This violence can be seen in the African-American community through the physical violence inflicted on them to this day, through deleterious psychological effects, in social divisions that limit the distribution of resources made available to the community, and in systematic discrimination. A horrifying glimpse into the extent of this violence was made public in a study that shows that, in the U.S., dogs are granted more spaces to live freely in, and have more civil liberties than African-American men. The U.S.'s newly evolving advocacy for dogs demonstrates how white ideology has attributed more humanity to dogs, while, at the same time, deeming African-Americans as subhuman (Parker, 2019).

No half measures or efforts in this area will do much to bring the beginning of true healing for the African-American community. This means starting and following through for the foreseeable future, uncomfortable conversations, and inconvenient changes for whites to aid their

fellow citizens in pursuing actual equality for all. This healing of the African-American community would happen as an ongoing process by mending the relationship of their community with white people through public apologies, truth sharing, commemoration, and acknowledgment of the past facilitated by the transitional justice's Truth and Reconciliation Committee, reinforced by restorative justice initiatives, and transformative justice cultural narratives and tools.

The purpose of this literature review is to establish how other countries that have faced self-perpetuated human rights abuses have treated these traumas through implementing alternative forms of justice, rather than continuing punitive forms, and then to connect how this would be beneficial in addressing racism specifically against African-Americans in the U.S. The research will focus on what methods of transitional, restorative, and transformative justice can be used in addressing the historical and ongoing oppression of African-Americans in the United States as an aid in bringing acknowledgment, truth, reconciliation, accountability, and healing to a country divided.

Method

The research of this thesis was conducted by a multi-valenced literature review process to understand what has been done in the past through transitional justice, restorative justice, and transformative justice and how this could be applied to address racial injustices faced by African-Americans in the U.S. This is to understand which aspects of these methods had positive effects in similar situations as to what is seen in the U.S. These concepts were applied to how these methods can be used to confront racial issues and relations mainly among whites and African-Americans in the U.S. The primary research engines used were PsychInfo, Google

Scholar, and Google. Key terms used in the search process were terms and phrases such as: transitional justice, restorative justice, transformative justice, racism, truth and reconciliation, truth and reconciliation committee or commission, the United States, Chile, Namibia, Rwanda, conversations, nonviolent communication, white supremacy, African American, cortisol, racial trauma, and cognitive flexibility. The research was then found, analyzed, and synthesized into a proposal for addressing racism in the United States, outlining steps that prove needed in healing the trauma racism has caused African-Americans by utilizing examples of what other nations have employed in similar cases, work that is already being done in the U.S., and by using healthier conflict and communication strategies.

Literature Review

Transitional Justice, Restorative Justice, and Transformative Justice

Transitional Justice

Transitional justice is a top-down justice response implemented by governing bodies in search of societal transformation following widespread human rights abuses. “It seeks recognition for victims and promotion of possibilities for peace, reconciliation and democracy,” (International Center for Transitional Justice, 2009). The timeline for implementation can vary, but it typically has long-lasting effects. The process has aided many countries in overcoming ongoing social problems that had escalated into violent atrocities. In the aftermath and during peace proceedings, transitional justice is a critical tool to use to address underlying problems, and bring justice to a country overcoming crisis. Transitional justice never looks the same from

country to country as each situation requires some variation, but it generally comprises multiple forms of justice targeted at a variety of different areas. Implementing transitional justice and a TRC should be understood in its longitudinal effects on a place and its people.

In 1973-1990, Chile was run by a military dictatorship. The ruling party especially punished those who were involved in politics by torturing those political prisoners, executing their family members, and other dissenters would just go missing. Further talk about those gone, tortured, or murdered would continue the violence for those involved, which enforced their silence for seventeen years (Cárdenas et al., 2019).

In Chile, a study (Cárdenas et al., 2014) was conducted, after transitional justice had taken place years before, examining the different attitudes and beliefs among those who had and who had not been directly affected by past political violence there. One of the big social attitudes that had been changed by the transitional justice process was found in the study that the victims were more likely to reject the idea that bringing up the past would reopen old wounds, and openly talked about it. The victims also had a more positive view of transitional justice than those the violence had affected less. Those affected directly had a more negative view of the overall socioemotional climate. They viewed public apologies as less sincere, and generally had less purpose in life, but at the same time, because of their experience, had more universalist views than those who had not been directly affected by the violence. Another study by Cárdenas et al. in 2019 found that in the case of Chile, the key to moving forward from the past political violence into posttraumatic growth was rumination of the past along with positive reappraisal, or reframing of it in regards to how it impacted their lives.

When the National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation was founded in Chile, the current president declared its mission to bring national clarity to the recent most serious human

rights abuses in order for the reconciliation of all Chile's citizens, those victimized, and those who were not. Without this, he believed there would be no true foundation for the country to reconcile and move forward on (United States Institute of Peace, 2002, p. 28).

In the Rwandan genocide in 1994, one million Tutsi were murdered. 37% of the genocide survivors are estimated to have PTSD, which is considerably higher than the general Rwandan population. Over time, this burden of mental health disorders on the victims has decreased significantly. This is most likely the case due to the strong efforts to reunite the nation and treat the symptoms of the suffering nation through national mental health programs, peace building, and gradual resolution (Musanabaganwa et al., 2020).

One of the many efforts of Rwanda's transitional justice initiatives included a reconciliation-orientated, psychosocial-intervention process that was used in the Amataba workshops. The method focused on healing with forgiveness in mind through empathetic listening with truthfulness to bring the victims and the perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide back together. According to interviews from those who participated in the workshop, the process was difficult and it was challenging for the individuals to stay present because of their strong initial feelings of fear, hatred, etc. In the end, however, the workshop proved very helpful for participants to leave their pain and hatred behind them and reconcile (Ordóñez-Carabaño et al., 2020).

Another study that looked at the deep need for the symbolic aspects of transitional justice, like truth and reconciliation (as opposed to material aspects, such as compensation for victims or rehabilitation for refugees) found that the symbolic aspects proved to be more valuable in reaching a full peace agreement (Kapshuk & Jamal, 2020). It is clear from these sources that creating openness around the truth, for it to be spoken freely, is more healing for

citizens and politicians than receiving material resources, which could feel less sincere and authentic without the acknowledgment of the trauma.

The importance of remembering the past as it truly happened is the core of transitional justice. In modern day Namibia, the process of remembering and acknowledging the Herero and Nama genocide has proven to be difficult. The genocide occurred in 1904-1907 when Germany had colonized the area, and its armed forces wanted full access to what they viewed as their land. They killed the Herero and Nama indigenous people through battle, forced labor, starvation, sexual violence, and medical experiments and disease in concentration camps. It is estimated about 80,000 people were killed in the genocide. To this day, the most arable plots of land are still owned by German descendants of the colonizers. Namibia has asked Germany, about 100 years after the genocide, to pay some restitution, and unfortunately, Germany has refused (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.).

Namibia was liberated in 1990, but progress to fully address the injustices endured by the South African military have been slow, and reparation activists find themselves fighting a battle over the political memory-scape. The first memorial to address the genocide and a concentration camp site was erected in 2014, but many other sites have gone unrecognized or honored. The perpetrators of the genocide did everything they could to intimidate witnesses and destroy the evidence of the genocide, going so far as to dig up mass grave sites and burn the bodies. These perpetuated narratives that erase the genocide from history are countered by those in Namibia who are called memory entrepreneurs. These people advocate for remembrance, memorials, they share oral histories, and engage their community's history narratives by legitimizing the truth of the brutality faced by the Herero and Nama people. This is a fight of sharing the trauma and

burden left on only those who were victimized, those who have to carry that persecution with them, so they do not have to carry it alone (Hamrick & Duschinski, 2018).

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is very similar to transitional justice. Instead of a broad scope, it is a form of justice that aims to bring perpetrators of a harmful action on their community to be reintegrated into it once accountability, and a kind of community service is paid. It focuses on the local relationships and repairing their disruption in grassroots approach. Whereas current retributive justice systems generally are held in duality of protecting the community from the offender, but then eventually readmitting them back to it, restorative justice seeks to heal the broken relationship between offender and victim, incorporating the dissonant values of the criminal justice system (Ward et al., 2015).

One example of this was in Granite Falls, Minnesota. Their approach came from the acknowledgment that the criminal justice system is ineffective in its punitive methods, does not work to fix the harm that was done to the victim or reintegrate the perpetrator, and is simultaneously incredibly costly. The community decided to use Restorative Justice Circles for youth offenders, their families, and those who have trouble with the law, mental illness and addiction. The circles come from Indigenous practices where a group of those in the local area (school, neighborhood, justice system, workplace) gather to have free, open and constructive conversations to bring healing to the community. The Circle sets goals of good behavior and community repair, and once these goals have been reached, the Circle consents, and the case is dismissed. The recidivism rate after one year was 0%, 100% of restitution was paid, and attitudes of those exiting the Circle were highly positive. 95% reported feeling loved, supported, and fulfilled (Buchanan, 2020).

A random national survey on how frequently restorative justice community-building techniques such as peer mediation, community service, and restitution were used in schools found that they were less likely to be employed by schools that had a higher African-American population. This mirrored how the criminal justice system uses more punitive and less healing tools when it comes to those of a darker skin color (Payne & Welch, 2015). Using restorative justice methods, if widely practiced, is critical in addressing problems of racism, as it undermines the systems that stereotype those with darker skin as fundamentally problematic, troublemakers, or broken. When all people are treated using community integrative methods of justice instead of punitive measures, then all people are being actively and passively told that they are ultimately worthy to be brought back into the community. Unfortunately, when restorative justice is used discriminately, racial bias comes out and is reinforced.

Transformative Justice

Within this article, the implication of integrating transitional justice and restorative justice is to address the human rights abuses against African-Americans in the U.S. is to heal our nation like never before as a holistic, cultural shift to address problematic deeply held national beliefs about whites' relations to African-Americans. This cultural shift of addressing deeply held problematic beliefs is the heart of the third and final alternative justice I will introduce: transformative justice. Transformative justice is the antithesis to our punitive criminal justice system. It seeks to understand the deep roots of the symptomatic problems encountered, and it works to bring transformative healing and ways of being, breaking generations of traditions that ultimately cause pain.

There has been controversy over transitional justice's focus over recent years on how it seeks to bring the country back together again or possibly only focus on legal accountability, but

does not fully touch deep social inequalities such as class structures. This critique recommends the addition of transformative justice to the process to address the true underlying social shadows at work that caused the initiating human rights abuse that brought the transition. This is seen in Sudan's civil war conflicts, transitional resolution without transformative change, and then further subsequent conflicts. Understanding the meta-conflict is key to determining the appropriate actions of transformative change. If the meta-conflict is not understood, then the problematic cycle is bound to keep perpetuating itself (Carolan, 2020).

Transformative justice targets the meta-conflict by understanding that all people need basic tools to transform the society. It aims to bring communities in a grassroots way everyday skill sets to learn how to be in conflict, communicate, learn to forgive in communication, and truly acknowledge the pain inflicted, apologize, and take the appropriate actions to integrate back into the community. Knowing how to communicate with those in daily life and exercising those tools frequently in small conflicts in a person's life will ultimately go on to inform how they will deal with life's larger conflicts in a healthier and holistic way, and once enough people practice these skills, they change their communities, and their communities are able to transform their society.

The Problem with America

In the U.S., we have not had a dictatorship or clear genocide that took place within a short period of time like Chile, Rwanda, or Namibia. The problem within America is much more drawn out and almost subtle to the white observer from what is taught and shown in our society, as it has been silenced. The African-American side of our nation's story has been violently repressed, seldom repeated in white circles, and generally unacknowledged on a large scale. This

silence around human rights abuses to the African-American people is what ties us to what happened in Chile, Rwanda, and Namibia. The U.S. also has its own set of values and cultural traditions, which varies greatly throughout the many different regions across the country. Because of this, addressing our silence and repression will have to be approached differently than other countries that have done to acknowledge and heal their own.

White people in the U.S. have the dominant power, culture, and ability to influence societal narratives. History textbooks and memorial sites do not tell the full history of slavery. Critical facts are left out. White people experience discomfort, anxiety, and threats to their group or personal image when exposed to their own group's persecution of African-Americans, thereby minimizing the discussion about the U.S.'s historical treatment of African-Americans in order to ease whites' social identity and discomfort by leaving information out. These narratives, of course, further add to the pain of African-Americans, who have been victimized by past injustices and who want acknowledgment of their deplorable treatment (Ditlmann et al., 2017).

In fact, it was found in a 2020 study (Yi et al.), those who are high in colorblindness (or the denial of seeing or acknowledging race or racial differences) generally found in white people, is indirectly associated with less likelihood of confidence in confronting prejudice and acting to confront prejudice to resolve a situation. This means when the average white person witnesses another person treating someone of color with prejudice, they are unlikely to intervene, and the cycle of abuse will not be interrupted. This pattern of behavior may seem not very significant moment to moment, but not addressing a problem further adds to the trauma experience many African-Americans report.

Another instance of this can be seen in family and couples therapy sessions among white therapists and African-American clients. Even though diversity and equity inclusion (DEI) is

often taught to budding therapists, when white therapists were asked about how they felt when it came to actually bringing up race in session with their African-American clients, they frequently had great difficulty in doing so. Their reasons for this difficulty ranged from the fear of being viewed as racist, perpetuating stereotypes and clients buying into them, the awkwardness of the experience for the practitioner, and or not being corrected gently by their client (Watson et al., 2020). What can be understood from this study is that even those who are supposedly well trained in delicate matters and even conflict resolution still have a very difficult time talking about and confronting racial problems.

Psychiatrists have been found to prescribe less antidepressants to Black and Latinx patients than white ones, even when the diagnosis was adjusted for. Both Black and Latinx groups were also found to be disproportionately diagnosed with psychosis or disruptive disorders than their white counterparts. This is most likely due to stereotypes of anger and aggression in Black males mixed in with structural racism (Cerdeña et al., 2021).

These are just a few examples of everyday racialized encounters in a legacy of slavery and subsequent violence perpetrated by whites against African-Americans that still echoes throughout our nation today. It is in these seemingly small interactions that the divide between our constructs of race is built up, and built up high it is. It has been extensively documented that racial discrimination against African-Americans and its subsequent and frequent stress response has altered their cortisol secretion responses, which is partly what has led to their health disparities that are commonly seen. Anxiety was found as the moderating response to how much the cortisol levels would be disrupted. This means that the psychological impacts end up causing physiological dysregulation effects (Lee et al., 2018).

Part of the very problem of widely unaddressed injustice against African-Americans is the broad spectrum of awareness and narrative surrounding their part of American history. The spectrum of concern can be easily seen by examining recent events and their narratives, such as those who have recently taken to the streets to protest against police slayings of Black men and women, declaring loud “Black Lives Matter!” Then there are those on the other side of that spectrum who cannot fathom the notion of the movement, retaliating in their racist, blind confusion by shouting “All Lives Matter!” entirely missing the point.

The incredible news is, however, that we are culturally in a very telling moment for our future and how we will address and confront racism. The movement of Black Lives Matter has already started a large process of change: from the protests, to changing workplaces and their narratives, generally the antiracism narratives spreading, awareness of the deep problem of racism, and the conversations that have sparked throughout the nation. This movement has been an amazing surge of energy in confronting Black injustice and repressed Black narratives. Even with such disparate narratives on every level of our society, there is hope to be had that if we decide to put in the effort and change, we can.

Proposal

Racism is a social construct we have all continually reinforced, and wired into our brains and thoughts. This construct exists in our minds, and it is within our power to release it, vanquish it, and adopt antiracism. By changing, challenging, and empowering ourselves, sharing our experience with others, we change the shape of our world. Individually, we are only one person, but it is within our power to influence those around us, and hope they will do the same to spread change exponentially.

I propose that we address the deep wounds of injustice towards African-Americans in the U.S. through changing social spaces. I will comment on how we can change community spaces, workplaces, schools, public spaces, certain political spaces, and individual mental spaces. There are many other places that need to be addressed such as prisons, criminal justice systems, hospitals, institutions, and many more. We can change these spaces with tools of transitional, restorative, and transformative justice. The heart of these justice tools is about acknowledgement and respect for all people, acknowledgement of the unaddressed historical and current pain and injustice, and working through the broken relationships to heal them. The primary tools I propose to enlist from transitional justice are the TRC (renamed as UAC) for the state, incorporating symbolic and material aspects of transitional justice such as government acknowledgements and apologies, then, following that, tangible acts of change from government, memorials of African-American history erected, and government funding for programs to support restorative justice practices in communities. In terms of restorative justice, it would be vital to utilize Healing Circles for those who offend in the community, workplace, and schools to reintegrate them, teach schools how to practice restorative justice instead of punitive justice for all students. For transformative justice, the main focus of this level of movement is to be educational in all the aforementioned spaces to be impacted with bringing those places the tools needed to foster healthy communication, conflict skills, and what the role of the individual is when it comes to addressing racism.

To address injustice in the African-American community, it is of prime importance for our governing bodies and leaders to talk about this issue so we may have symbolic cultural cohesion in moving towards healing this deep wound, and secondly, for governing bodies and leaders to follow through in solid strides forward to create a more equitable society. Lots of

public apologies, acknowledgements of the trauma inflicted on the African-American community, and great strides in telling the truth are needed from our government bodies. Their ability to have actions following these speeches that are tangible works to rid our systems of structural racism is incredibly important for the trust to be built back for African-Americans to be able to have faith that their government will support them. These actions will show the African-American citizens of their government's ability to include their problems by acknowledging the many roadblocks created within the systems of our society.

The U.S. is a unique and vast country, unlike many other countries that have used transitional justice methods which have been smaller and already had a foundational culture of some level of communalism. In the U.S., we are individualistic, like being left to our own devices, enjoy seeing those at fault, who are generally not white, being held accountable for their actions and punished.

Since there is this great divide of narratives in the U.S., it is paramount to be cautious in the narrative employed to attempt to unite the people of the nation, and leave as much room for starting conversations with as varied a populace as possible. For this reason, the name of the committee for implementing restorative justice and transitional justice should not be a Truth and Reconciliation Committee, but rather a Unity and Accountability Commission. Since the U.S. is such a large country, it will be best to initiate Unity and Accountability Commissions (UAC) on a state level, and create Restorative Justice Commissions on the county level. Targeting local cultures through their most directly elected representatives will be the best way to get communities on board with change. When community leaders are the ones instructing change, when those with the locally held high regard are the ones speaking, that community will be most likely to listen.

This is not to say we should idly let this great divide in narrative and view on things be accepted, only acknowledged as a roadblock to change. These disparate views need to be reconciled and the truth brought through. A widespread problematic trend in the U.S. is how the past is viewed by who and what we have memorialized. Many buildings, flags, statues, holidays, institutions, and places reflect the values of the dominant culture. These values implicitly degrade all who are marginalized by the dominant culture. This can most readily be seen in the prolific number of symbols throughout the U.S. that honor the Confederacy, the losing side of the civil war that believed African-Americans should be enslaved based on, what they thought was, their obvious inferiority to whites.

There has been a recent movement spurred by the Black Lives Matter protests to reassess who is being memorialized by the names of our buildings, places, monuments, and even flags, but there is always a lot of room to grow in this area. Portland's public schools have announced that they have full intentions of renaming their schools that were named after historical offending figures, and changing their names to more positively impacting historical persons who have been marginalized and unremembered until now (Mann, 2020). Mississippi has also finally changed their state flag from one that has a confederate military flag in it to one that has the state flower centered with the words "In God We Trust" below it, symbolically ending their ties to the losing side of the civil war, and a way of shedding the values of racism, at least superficially (Pereria, 2020).

Not all attempts at reforming narratives and monuments of the past have been wholly successful when truth and reconciliation are not kept at heart. An example of this was the renaming of Brady Street in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The street was originally named after a man who was a KKK member and participated in the 1921 Tulsa Massacre, which resulted in the deaths of

many African-Americans, and the destruction of a vibrant community they had created in a neighborhood in Tulsa. In a half attempt to not continue to honor a man who was a part of a hate group and participated in such a horrible day, Tulsa agreed to rename Brady Street to M.B. Brady Street. M.B. Brady was a man who was a Civil War photographer, and shared the same last name with no affiliation. This was done as a compromise to appease the financial interests on the street so they were able to keep a similar business address. Only vaguely changing the name, but not truly changing the name undermined the whole effort by this compromise, since the project's original intentions for renaming the street were about bringing attention to the local narratives about historical icons. By not actually disrupting the narrative and fully changing the name in order to keep the businesses comfortable, the effort failed (Brasher et al., 2020).

A more powerful and successful example of addressing the U.S.'s racist history against African-Americans can be seen in Bryan Stevenson's National Memorial for Peace and Justice. It actually arose in part to counter the widespread narratives of the Confederacy, and to honor those African-Americans who lost their lives from the legacies of slavery and its inherent and vicious racism. The site addresses the historical and current violence (lynching, slavery, segregation, and current racial injustice) against African-Americans in Montgomery, Alabama. It honors the 805 African-American victims of lynching in the nation through an immersive experience to invite visitors to join the ongoing transformative healing process about the truth of the pain and trauma African-Americans went through and continue to go through in Alabama and the U.S. (Schult, 2020). This memorial is a very strong representative of how a TRC in the U.S. should approach transitional justice towards African-Americans.

Stevenson has also created a joint museum to the memorial called the Legacy Museum, which is also in Montgomery, Alabama situated in an old warehouse that held enslaved Black

people. The “museum uses interactive media, sculpture, videography and exhibits to immerse visitors in the sights and sounds of the domestic slave trade, racial terrorism, the Jim Crow South, and the world’s largest prison system,” (Equal Justice Initiative, n.d.). It works as a learning experience for the visitors to experience and understand the context of what it was and is to be Black in the U.S. and to validate that experience by telling its truth of the racial terrorism inflicted on Black people throughout our nation’s history. The museum recognizes that our country cannot heal unless there are places where the truth of our past is told and held with value. By creating those memorials, those spaces, the needed conversations will be finally brought into our society.

Not enough is being said, even with these sprinklings of positive movement in the direction of healing, to truly paint the picture of how racism has shaped our country, and the experiences of those who have to fight against it every day. Monuments and memorials tell a story, and our current memorials are not saying enough, and this needs to change. Similarly to Namibia, our national memoryscape needs to reflect the truth of the brutality of our past, and although this is a hard truth for some to confront, it must come through and be represented in cultural representations of our history. More monuments and memorials that tell the history of African-Americans in the U.S. need to be built in public spaces, and just as importantly, racist monuments and memorials need to keep coming down.

Another important aspect of the change needed is to slowly dismantle our punitive justice strategies and replace them with integrative ones throughout our society. One method which I propose be integrated into schools, workplaces, and communities is to create Healing Circles where offenders of the communities can face the people they have affected, acknowledge and process the pain inflicted, and have the community integrate them back in when the time is

appropriate and their goals of healing have been reached. The impacts on the community in Granite Falls, Minnesota were incredibly successful, and show great promise in the use of this practice (Buchanan, 2020). This simple practice would reshape how communities find justice, and using this restorative justice method, further spread equal treatment of all people. There is a clear difference in punitive sentences between white people and POC, harsher sentences given to the latter. Creating systems where the goal is to have all people be a part of the community once more in the end will restructure how we view and treat others. Especially ones who, in a punitive justice system, we stigmatize as bad, corrupt, or broken, and only continue to punish them and keep them that way in our minds. Healing Circles will work to challenge and disrupt that narrative, and creating places to practice that disruption will be critical to addressing this problem.

A huge problem, as stated previously, is when witnessing a prejudiced situation unfold in front of them, white people tend to not confront the situation because it is uncomfortable for them to do so, and they are not culturally trained to intervene in conflict scenarios, especially those involving race (Yi et al., 2020). Therefore, it is important in transformative justice work to provide basic tools of communication and intervention for all people so when one witnesses social violence, they will have more confidence to confront the situation, and truly act as an ally to the person in need. In this way, having healthy tools of communication and conflict intervention skills, our society will be better equipped to address our deep problems of silence and discomfort, and then transform how we culturally interact.

A powerful tool to this effect is a practice called Nonviolent Communication (NVC). It is a kind of reflection practice that allows those who use it to examine how they are feeling, and what the feeling is telling them about what they need. Knowing what you need helps ground the

person to better communicate how they are being affected by their environment, and what they would like from it. All this is asked in an open, requesting way, without judgements, and not asked in the form of a demand. Marshall Rosenberg, the founder of the practice, used his technique in many racially charged, perpetrator and victim scenarios, and had success using it as a restorative justice process for those communities he helped (Rosenburg, 2015). This technique could be adapted and taught in schools of all ages, workplaces, community workshops, and in public classes.

Even therapists need to use this practice to facilitate more open and honest communication with their clients, especially if the therapist is white and their clients are African-American. Using NVC can help those therapists who feel uncomfortable in discussing the impacts of race with their clients connect to that discomfort, and tell their clients what is going on with them. At the same time, the therapist can make it clear to their clients that they are allowed to voice their own feelings if they become uncomfortable with the content of the conversations. The more we learn to communicate and connect with ourselves long enough to be able to speak what we need and what we are seeing and feeling, the better we will all be able to get along and have respectful conversations and conflicts. Authenticity, truth-telling, and honesty are key building blocks for creating trust from white practitioners to POC clients, especially fully sharing the reality of adverse health effects systematic racism creates for POC (Montgomery et al., 2020).

Exposing oneself to change, however uncomfortable that can be at times, is critical to personal growth, and societal growth when we all agree to participate. It was found in a study by Pauker et al in 2018 that the more white populations were exposed to a more racially diverse population reduced their views of race essentialism over time, and their social dominance

orientations, and overall increased their cognitive flexibility. A wonderful anecdote to this effect is the story of Daryl Davis. He is an African-American man who decided to sit down with leaders of the Klu Klux Klan, learned their stories, respected their right to say what they wanted, and eventually, over time, after many conversations transpired between the two men, those leaders stepped down from their positions, and the KKK has not flourished in those areas since (Van der Kolk, 2014). Davis says he was invited back into their homes over and over because he listened, he was patient, he was not condescending, he approached these men with a kind of curiosity, and was intent on having a mutual conversation with these men, and they knew it (Van der Kolk, 2014).

It is in this slow, soft power that change occurs. It is not a fast thing. It is not a comfortable thing to stay in, but it works. When instead of being strong-armed or the change is forced, people are drawn into new ideas, then change is able to burst forth out of that open space, and those respectful and honest conversations. Remembering in this practice, that by just having a few of these conversations each, we are planting the seeds of new ways of being, and we are able to all exponentially grow. In this way, our culture and nation will be able to begin healing.

Implications

Addressing racism in a real and trans-national way through a TRC that engages the entire public in multiple ways, and not just the people that are already involved in movements like Black Lives Matter, will help our country engage in honesty and real reconciliation and form a shared narrative foundation for our country to collectively heal and move forward. Currently, there is little education, minimal conversation, and few appropriate memorials across the entire U.S., and allowing that to happen has divided us as a nation. This division has become most

evident with the Trump presidency and administration (Southern Poverty Law Office, 2019). There are those who are aware of the true depths of the struggles of African-Americans in this country, there are people who only know a little about the history of prejudice and violence against African-Americans, and there are those who have no true understanding of this history at all, and many who have little to no understanding of the comprehensive context of the U.S.'s history. These people end up dehumanizing African-Americans, and perpetuate violence. In the synthesis of transitional, restorative, and transformative justices in order to address these issues through a unified narrative at the government level, local level, and cultural level by using holistic education, truth and reconciliation, and political acknowledgment, the U.S. might be able to begin to make movement toward healing the racial trauma among African-Americans. This movement will at the very least help reduce the ongoing trauma in the African-American community, and every action, big or small, will help bring us closer to a more unified country.

Future Research

Future research needs to focus on investigating all the different avenues of addressing this injustice in all the spaces that need to be addressed. More community-specific methods of justice to bring racial issues to light can be explored, how psychiatrists and therapists can work better to confront their institutional racism, as well as hospitals, and many other institutions. The government needs to push more policy and law to further civil rights, and also undo the many remaining heinously racist policies and laws that are still in place. There is much more needed beyond all this, as digging up the roots of our problems is no easy task, and there is much to do.

The future of a healthy and truly united United States is absolutely dependent on the equitable and fair treatment of all. At the heart of the country's shortcomings is its age-old

treatment of African-Americans. The place to truly build this country up together to start healing and building is here.

The work does not end with the African-American community. They are not the only ones to suffer by the horrific and dehumanizing culture of white Americans. The indigenous tribes were slaughtered and given the worst bits of land, and the historical memory of this is almost completely lacking. Our 45th president was elected on the basis of building us a wall to prevent Mexicans from illegally immigrating to the U.S. to say the least. Feminism still has a long way to go in dismantling the patriarchy and liberating women's bodies, choices, and sexual consent. Homophobia still runs rampant. We are uncomfortable listening to scientists who have told us about the implications of climate change. The list goes on, and the work we all have to do is daunting, but as long as we keep putting our collective energy towards actively healing, the world will shift and become a better place to live in for all of us.

We all may doubt that our lives and actions have much true impact on the world. In one of the closing scenes in *Cloud Atlas*, as a young man decides to tell his father-in-law he is joining the slavery abolitionists, to which his father-in-law tells him "No matter what you do, it will never amount to anything more than a single drop in a limitless ocean," to which the young man replies, "What is an ocean, but a multitude of drops?" (Colin Reynolds, 2014).

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