Understanding and Healing from Racial Trauma

Racial Trauma is a term coined to capture the deleterious impact of race-related stress, racial harassment, racial violence (including witnessing such violence), racism, and discrimination on mental health functioning. Similar to other trauma, like sexual assault, Racial Trauma shares similarities to PTSD. Unfortunately, among students of color, the common stressors of the college experience are often compounded by the burden of racism and racial trauma. What’s more, many Students of Color may experience not just single events of overt racism, but continual and systemic incidents and exposure.

Racial Trauma may result in symptoms of poor concentration, depression, anxiety, hypervigilance, irritability, and low self-esteem and negative self-image (including internalized racial hatred). Racial Trauma may result intense emotional and physical repercussions that can impact multiple aspects of wellbeing and student success. Responses to racial trauma mirror those of other significant traumas and stressors [1].

For many years public and mental health professionals have known that racism, discrimination, oppression and inequality have negative effects on physical, mental, and spiritual health. Learn more and sound the alarm!

Racial Trauma is a Public Health Emergency [2]
Racism and Microaggressions Lead to Worse Health [3]
Discrimination is Harmful to Your Mental Health [4]
United Nations says racism and xenophobia are contagious killers? too [5]
Get the Facts about Racial Trauma [6] (PDF)
Collective Grief and Trauma [7]

This website has been created to assist with understanding and healing racial trauma. While there is no resource that can completely end or shield someone from the impact of racial trauma, these resources can hopefully in some small way help people to cope, and live healthier and more fulfilled lives in the face of racial trauma. While never
forgetting that the real work is to change our communities, society, country and world so that resources like these become unnecessary.

UNC CAPS would like to recognize the many helpful and amazing resources that other people or organizations have compiled. Because the amount of resources out there can be overwhelming, we have chosen a few select resources that we thought could be helpful to get you started.

**Understanding Systems and Sources of Trauma**

There are so many levels and layers to this trauma. So many layers contained in the too numerous stories of bias. **The Look** [8] encapsulates multiple levels of history and pain that so many have experienced. **When They See Us** [9] is a harrowing look at the devastation that bias and racism can inflict on people, changing the course of the youngest of lives forever! This is vividly, and heartbreakingly illustrated in the segment **Oprah Winfrey Presents: When They See Us Now** [10] that is included with the film.

Racial trauma does not just end with the individual. **Trauma can impact generation after generation** [11].

Racial trauma is not simply something inflicted by individuals. The insidious nature of racial trauma in the United States of America is that it is perpetuated and strengthened through **systemic racism and White supremacy** [12]. One example is the **slavery to mass incarceration transition** [13] in the USA that is documented in the powerful film **13th** [14].

In 1968, the day after one of the great tragedies in American history, one teacher set out to give a powerful demonstration on the impact of discrimination and prejudice [15]. It still resonates over 50 years later.

Internalization of harmful stereotypes and negative ideas about the self, identity and the racial (or other) group that one belongs to is one very insidious and damaging impact of racism and oppression. **Learn to dismantle this disastrous pattern** [16].