AZUSA PACIFIC UNIVERSITY

RESISTING INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION: HYPNOTHERAPY (GUIDED MEDITATION) AS A LIBERATORY PRAXIS BY AND FOR WOMEN OF COLOR IN EDUCATION

by

Jaimis Rebecca Ulrich

A dissertation submitted to the

School of Behavioral and Applied Sciences

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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DEDICATION

I would like to show my respect and gratitude by acknowledging the caretakers—past, present, and future—of the land I have the privilege to call home. To the Gabrielino/Tongva Peoples: The Honuukvetam (Ancestors), ‘Ahiihirom (Elders), and our ‘Eyoohiinken (Relatives), thank you. May my actions and deeds be reflective of my love; appreciation; and gratitude to past, present, and future Gabrielino/Tongva Peoples and their land. This dissertation is dedicated to the de/colonizers of the world, to all those resisting, and to all those who are ready to resist. I stand with you. To all those who feel the rage within, who are at war within themselves, or who feel as if they are living in multiple worlds still searching for home—brothers, sisters, you are welcome. May you find refuge in these pages, and if not refuge, then a feeling of solidarity or community in knowing you are not alone. In unity lies victory.

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Makenna, Rose, Jubilee, Nekita, Dalia, and Ebony. May I bear witness to your stories with authenticity, grace, and compassion, from my heart to yours.

ABSTRACT

Internalized oppression is a pervasive issue that disproportionately affects Women of Color in education. Continuous exposure to systemic oppression, such as sexism and racism, can further exacerbate existing internalized oppression (Crenshaw, 1991) and can result in severe implications on the overall emotional, physical, and spiritual health of those affected (Bryant-Davis & Comas-Díaz, 2016). It is critical to recognize and challenge these internalized beliefs to foster personal growth and collective liberation. By engaging in practices that resist internalized oppression, individuals can reclaim their power and work toward dismantling oppressive systems. Integrating critical action research (Fine & Torre, 2021; Ledwith, 2007) with critical radical feminism (hooks, 2000), this qualitative study used an arts-based approach (Bhattacharya & Payne, 2016) and hypnotherapy (guided meditation; G. Smith, 2022) to explore the use of hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as a liberatory praxis (Freire, 2018) for confronting, transforming, and resisting internalized oppression. The participants of this project included Women of Color from various education settings. The findings of this study offer insight into how a decolonized approach to hypnotherapy (guided meditation) can support Women of Color in education as a praxis for spiritual and emotional health by cultivating a space for empowerment, redemption, resistance, and restoration.

Keywords: hypnotherapy (guided meditation), decolonization, systemic oppression, resisting internalized oppression, liberatory praxis, emotional authenticity

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INTRODUCTION

This manuscript is an act of living resistance (Curtice, 2023). As Indigenous author Curtice (2023) described, resistance is a living, breathing being; when individuals enter its flux, they enter a sacred, embodied, and interconnected state of being that brings liberation and wholeness. Living is an ongoing, active, cyclical manifestation; when individuals choose to embody resistance, they choose to practice it with everything they are and everything they possess (Curtice, 2023). Living resistance is choosing to practice the work committed to decolonization daily (Curtice, 2023; Fanon, 2021; Garvey, 1938/2010). I designed this critical action study (Ledwith, 2007) with this commitment in mind: to decolonize educational spaces as sites for healing and restoration as an act of resistance in collaboration with Women of Color.

Problem Statement

Internalized oppression has negative consequences not only on one's spiritual health, but on their emotional, mental, and physical health as well (Bryant, 2022; Menakem, 2017; Seidl, 1993). Women of Color in education are disproportionately exposed to and at risk of racist and sexist experiences, which are often linked to internalized oppression (Blackwell, 2023; Bryant, 2022; van der Kolk, 2015). Although experiences with sexism and racism are known to cause stress, anxiety, and other physiological and psychological harms (Porges, 2017), conventional therapies often do not address the harms caused by sexism and racism (Blackwell, 2023; Linklater, 2014). This critical action research study explored how to use hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as a complementary model to help meet this need.

Research Question

I framed my critical action research design with the following research question:

How can I use hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as a liberatory praxis for confronting, transforming, and resisting internalized oppression among Women of Color in education?

Why I Chose to Focus on Women of Color

Before beginning this study, it was important to provide context about who I was and some of the ways in which I have lived resistance. First, I identify as an Indigenous Woman of Color—not Latina or Hispanic—purposefully as an act of resistance to language rooted in colonialism (Reynoso, 2018). I also identify as a neurodivergent thinker, as I was diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Living Resistance as a Woman of Color

I was reluctant to admit this diagnosis publicly because of the stigma associated with ADHD, along with the judgment and misperceptions that often follow (Bisset et al., 2022), but I practiced resistance as I typed this information. I am also a survivor of depression, sexual assault, domestic violence, and alcoholism—inner monsters that can be worse on some days than others. As such, access to diverse coping and mental health resources are important to me. I have always been a firm believer and advocate for multiple modes of self-care and healing. Unfortunately, for most of my adult life, I have had to find these resources on my own. I mention adult life specifically, because mental health care was not a topic of discussion in my house as a child or during my teenage years.

To speak about my personal problems to anyone outside of the family unit was strictly frowned upon and viewed as a betrayal of trust. The remedy suggested was often to pray about the issue and ask God for help. I admit, having someone to whom I could talk outside of my family unit (e.g., a counselor or a therapist) may have been helpful; however, the faith and discipline I cultivated as an avid "prayer warrior"—and "faith healer," as my great grandmother would call what we did in our community—helped me through the times when I struggled with addiction and depression as an adult.

Unfortunately, during my deepest struggles with alcoholism, turning to God for help was not an option. The God I knew then was much different from the God I have come to know. The God I knew then was an evangelizing and westernized God who gave me two options: Heaven or Hell. With the choices I was making, I already knew which path I was on. I decided to seek refuge in traditional therapy and counseling.

My Experience With Western Therapy

My experiences with traditional therapy did not meet my needs. Every therapist I had was always a white woman, though this, in and of itself, was not my concern. The problem was I never felt comfortable enough to truly express how I felt during a therapy session. To do so felt like an admission that as a Woman of Color, I needed a white savior to "fix" me. I already felt so much shame for betraying my family. Deep inside, I felt like I was disappointing my family for going outside of my circle to speak to someone else about my problems, as if my issues were a negative reflection of them. I also internalized considerable shame because I felt like I severed my relationship with God and was no longer worthy of God's love. I continued to work through my addiction

and depression, still knowing something was missing from the western medicine I received.

Years of soul searching, healing, and heart journeying brought me to where I was as of this writing: 8 years sober. I also became a certified hypnotherapist (guided meditation coach) and began my own coaching practice in 2021. I have remained a lifelong learner, and although there is still much for me to learn—and unlearn—my hope was to bring readers along with me on a journey of the heart in this study. Such a journey describes the depth of my project, a project that I was not separate from, but deeply a part of. This project involved nine Women of Color, me being the 10th woman, coming together to create a ritual and sacred space of emotional and spiritual healing (Bryant, 2022; Curtice, 2023; Narvaez & Topa, 2022).

Why Hypnotherapy (Guided Meditation) for My Project

Although hypnotherapy (guided meditation) proved to be a healing and therapeutic tool for me, I thought some aspects could be improved to provide more inclusion for diverse groups and individuals. From my training, hypnotherapy (guided meditation), though applicable to many spheres (Comsa et al., 2022; Delestre et al., 2022; Entwistle, 2019), primarily focuses on improving the success of a particular niche of people, such as chief executive officers (CEOs) searching for ways to overcome fears of public speaking, or self-sabotaging beliefs (G. Smith, 2022).

This is not to say that People of Color do not occupy those particular roles, but that there is a difference between what People of Color who occupy those roles might experience than people who have not been historically marginalized and disadvantaged (Carter & Pieterse, 2020; Hoskin, 2022; Roberson & Pieterse, 2021). As an example, the

fear of public speaking shown by a CEO of Color may be influenced by internalized oppression stemming from racism or sexism (Chancellor, 2019; Franklin et al., 2014). This fear is complex and goes beyond mere phobia or limiting beliefs (Bernard et al., 2017).

Through critical self-reflection and past-experience, I reimagined how my role as a hypnotherapist (guided meditation coach) can evolve to better serve diverse communities through the consistent implementation of methods and tools I have learned (Battiste, 2013). My goal as a hypnotherapist (guided meditation coach) has been to create a more accessible and holistic healing space that is culturally aware (Bryant, 2022), empowering, and liberating by and for People of Color. Most importantly, I believe hypnosis (guided meditation) and its benefits should be accessible to everyone, not only those privileged to afford its often-high costs (Healthy Minded, 2023). My experiences with internalized oppression as an educator and my training in hypnotherapy (guided meditation) inspired my passion and commitment to decolonization and social justice, which I incorporated in this collaborative effort and project.

Why This Study Was Important

This study was important because I employed a critical social justice-based action research project to uncover systemic and social issues anchored in sexism and racism that have continued to perpetuate harm and violence against Women of Color working in education (Chancellor, 2019; Collier, 2022; Crenshaw, 1991; Szymanski et al., 2009). Additionally, this study was significant because I addressed three aspects of the human condition that are essential to the quality of life for all individuals: mind, body, and spirit (Blackwell, 2023; Ellis-Sankari, 2009; Harris et al., 2021; Rosenwasser, 2002). I also

provided resources and tools for confronting, transforming, and resisting internalized oppression by and for Women of Color (Bryant, 2022; Bryant-Davis & Comas-Díaz, 2016; Linklater, 2014; Narvaez & Topa, 2022).

What Is Internalized Oppression, and How It Is Harmful

Internalized oppression is the process by which members of historically minoritized groups internalize and accept the negative stereotypes and prejudices imposed on them by society (Bernard et al., 2017). This experience can result in self-doubt, low self-esteem, and the perpetuation of oppressive systems (Hegde, 2022).

Internalized Oppression and Identity

Internalized oppression can have a substantial impact on a person's self-esteem and perception of self (Roberson & Pieterse, 2021). When people internalize negative beliefs and stereotypes about their own group, they may begin to doubt their own worth, abilities, and values (Bernard et al., 2017). Such internalization may result in feelings of humiliation, self-doubt, and diminished self-esteem (Roberson & Pieterse, 2021). Internalized oppression can erode confidence and prevent individuals from completely accepting and expressing their authentic selves (Bryant, 2022).

Internalized Oppression and Mental Health

Internalized oppression can have negative effects on individuals' mental health (Bernard et al., 2017; Carter & Pieterse, 2020). Constant exposure to negative messages and stereotypes is associated with elevated levels of stress (Porges, 2017), anxiety, and depression (Lee & Boykins, 2022). Individuals may feel helpless, depressed, or caught in a system that perpetuates their marginalization (Vance et al., 2022). Internalized

oppression can contribute to a negative self-image and a never-ending struggle with feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness (Vance et al., 2022).

Internalized Oppression and Building Relationships

Internalized oppression can also have a negative effect on interpersonal relationships (Bernard et al., 2017; Szymanski et al., 2009). When people internalize negative beliefs about their own group, they may develop a sense of mistrust or distance themselves from those who share their identity (Collier, 2022). Such withdrawal may result in isolation, difficulty developing meaningful relationships, and reluctance to seek assistance or engage in collective action (Collier, 2022). Internalized oppression can impede a person's ability to form healthy, supportive relationships and contribute to a sense of division in historically marginalized communities (Collier, 2022; Crenshaw, 1991).

Internalized Oppression Perpetuates Systemic Inequalities

Internalized oppression harms individuals and reinforces oppressive structures and systems (Goldsmith et al., 2014). When people internalize negative beliefs and stereotypes about their own group, they may unwittingly perpetuate these detrimental narratives (Sibrava et al., 2019). These narratives may manifest as self-destructive behaviors, internalized biases, and unwillingness to challenge or question the status quo (Williams, 2021). Internalized oppression can perpetuate systemic inequalities and impede collective efforts toward social change and liberation (Nadal et al., 2014). One way to resist oppression as an act toward social change and liberation is through decolonization (Battiste, 2013; Blackwell, 2023; Carpio et al., 2022).

How to Resist Systemic Oppression in Education

Decolonization is a topic often discussed among those seeking to dismantle settler–colonial dominance (Fanon, 2021) in spheres such as education (Manion & Shah, 2019), race (Decolonize Race, 2022; hooks, 2009), gender (hooks, 2009; macabre, 2019), language (Thiong'o, 1986), and even the mind (Fanon, 2021; Garvey, 1938/2010). As hooks (1994) asserted, colonization of the mind takes shape when powerful colonial institutions—whether social, educational, or economic—become internalized by the acquisition of white lenses.

Decolonizing Education as an Act of Resistance

Decolonization is the process of undoing the effects of historical outsider dominance on subordinated populations (Fanon, 2021; Hira, 2016). Just as colonization produces various forms of oppression, decolonization requires multiple prisms for critically reflecting on what decolonization signifies and entails for people historically, institutionally, and systemically marginalized by colonizing agents (Fanon, 2021; hooks, 2009). A commitment to diversifying and decolonizing education necessitates new coping and resistance strategies for instructors and students alike. In addition, providing resources and support for Women of Color in education may contribute to reduced teacher turnover (Eisenmann, 2017) and the advancement of efforts to diversify classrooms and decolonize the educational landscape (Battiste, 2013; Hira, 2016; Manion & Shah, 2019).

Spiritual Health and Wellness as an Act of Resistance

I argue the importance of decolonization also warranted exploring the use of hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as a liberatory praxis for confronting, transforming,

and resisting internalized oppression. Decolonizing oppressive thoughts and beliefs rooted in internalized oppression may support spiritual health and wellness (Bryant, 2022; Bryant-Davis & Comas-Díaz, 2016; Menakem, 2017).

To clarify, spiritual health is the aspect of an individual's well-being that organizes their values, relationships, meaning, and purposes in life (Menakem, 2017; Seidl, 1993). My passion for decolonization, liberation, spiritual health, and social justice was the deciding factor for choosing critical action research (Ledwith, 2007) to design and implement this study.

Why Critical Action Research

I chose critical action research for my study because the process attempts to identify and transform the root causes of oppression (Fanon, 2021; Ledwith, 2007). As with the aim of this study, critical action research examines causes of oppression and engages an antioppression philosophy (Bhattacharya & Payne, 2016; Ledwith, 2007). The tenets of critical action research aligned with my positionality and epistemology because the process is rooted in "dialogue attempting to work with, not on, people and intends that its process should be empowering for all involved. More than this, it is committed to collective action for social change" (Ledwith, 2007, p. 599). My leadership style, philosophy, and epistemology also informed my work. In the following paragraphs, I provide insight into who I am as a leader, my core values, and epistemological stance—all of which informed my approach and design of this study. I close this chapter with a brief overview of my critical action research and chapter summary.

Self as a Researcher, Artist, and Leader: Critical Indigenous Feminist

First, and foremost, my leadership philosophy was rooted in revolutionary feminism (hooks, 2000) and an Indigenous worldview (Ermine, 2006). I believe in dismantling and disempowering the oppressive forces of patriarchy that create and sustain inequalities for all people (hooks, 2000). Because colonialism; patriarchy; capitalism; white normativity (Miñoso, 2020); and social constructs such as racism, sexism, and classism sustain oppression, my leadership objective has always been rooted in decolonizing spaces (hooks, 2000), resisting oppression (Bryant, 2022; Crenshaw, 1991), and using my work as a liberatory practice (Freire, 2021). As a *Toltec* (i.e., artist), my Indigenous soul and spirit has always guided my mind and heart toward art—whether poetry, music, or any other form of mixed media—to help me express what my words alone cannot (Bhattacharya & Payne, 2016).

Those with an Indigenous worldview understand this lens as a living phenomenon that has the capability to heal themselves, their families, their communities, their nations, and the earth (Absolon, 2022; Curtice, 2023; Narvaez & Topa, 2022). In this study, I was guided both by critical pedagogy and an Indigenous way of knowing, which required a continuous ebb and flow of both my theoretical prism and praxis (Narvaez & Topa, 2022).

Critical Praxis and Indigenous Knowledge

I drew influence from Freirean pedagogy, which posits it is not sufficient for one to engage in discussion to understand social reality; rather, theory must be put into practice (Freire, 1998; hooks, 1991). This pedagogical stance is complementary to an Indigenous worldview where there is no distinction between living and working (Ermine,

2006). Rather, Indigenous knowledge is living knowledge, meaning I practiced what I knew and became what I did (Mahuika, 2019).

Although I was quite fond of Freire's approach, it was not sufficient alone, as one limitation of the pedagogy is the exclusion of gendered forms of oppression (hooks, 2000). As with hooks (1994), I too found Freire's (2018) pedagogy provided a conceptual framework and tools for analyzing my own oppression through conscientization, which is the process of recognizing one's social and political oppression and acquiring the skills and knowledge to resist it. Such a process of critical thinking and action leads to deeper knowledge of one's place in the world. Because social justice was at the core of my critical action framework (Ledwith, 2007) feminist theory also influenced this study. I relied specifically on hooks's (2000) concept of revolutionary feminism, which centered on love.

Revolutionary and Radical Feminism

What I admired about hooks (2000) was her philosophy that feminism is for everybody. hooks's (2000, 2018) concept of revolutionary and radical feminism seeks to integrate love into personal, interpersonal, and intergroup relationships as the answer to dismantling oppression and oppressive forces. When one gender seeks to control the other, love cannot exist (hooks, 2015). When a relationship is predicated on dominance instead of equality, love cannot exist (hooks, 2018). According to hooks, it is impossible for people to love themselves if they are required to define themselves in accordance with rules that involve coercion and dominance. This position implies that a society must be founded on the principle of mutual development (hooks, 2014). From this perspective, equality can progress from servitude to liberation, and from apathy to love (hooks, 2014).

Love was an important and integral aspect to my strengths as a leader and my leadership values in this study.

My Leadership Values

My values included collective identity, generosity, community service, inspired action, and commitment to ethics (Bordas, 2018). In addition to these principles, my leadership philosophy was influenced and aligned with the theoretical perspectives of transformational leadership, compassionate leadership, and servant leadership (Chin et al., 2018; Davenport, 2014; Robert K. Greenleaf Center of Servant Leadership, 2021).

I found my leadership practices and belief systems became strongest when compassion and love were at the heart of my work. Such strength came from providing more resources (e.g., professional development) or simply by being the role model needed at the time—even if that meant being vulnerable and sharing my own stories of resisting oppression and overcoming hardships—to help demonstrate possibility (Black & Rose, 2010; Bordas, 2018; Davenport, 2014). Leading by example also required remembering my roots, where I came from, and giving back to my community (Bordas, 2018). My values in this study were also supported by my top five strengths (Rath, 2007).

My Strengths-Based Leadership Analysis

As a doctoral student, I had the opportunity to explore my top five strengths through the Clifton StrengthsFinder (Rath, 2007). My top five strengths were connectedness, relator, strategic, learner, and individualization. My VIA Character Strengths Profile included honesty, kindness, love, humor, and spirituality (VIA Institute on Character, n.d.), which helped me learn more about myself and how to use my strengths when collaborating and working with others.

Connectedness

My goal has always been to flourish as a leader and active member in my community. This goal incorporates my top strength, connectedness. As a person with an Indigenous worldview and who believes in the power of grassroots advocacy and social justice, I was not surprised that connectedness emerged as my top strength. I truly believe humans are all connected.

I perceived connectedness through the acceptance that unless all individuals are free from the bondages of oppression, no one is free. My belief in connectedness also tied closely to my indigenous roots, to my ancestry, and to my deep connection to nature. Connectedness has long been my greatest strength for collaborating with others, approaching situations, and seeing the big picture. Faith has also been a driving force in my sense of connectedness. I believe we as individuals are all intricately and profoundly interconnected. Furthermore, my VIA strengths were honesty, kindness, love, humor, and spirituality. Honesty has been essential as a person who views the world through a connected lens because it means I have lived and led courageously and authentically. During this research process, I took time to critically self-reflect, and viewed growth and development as two elements rooted in lifelong learning.

Lifelong Learning and Individualization

As a lifelong learner, I valued a dynamic environment, professional development, and growth opportunities as critical components for nurturing a thriving team. As a leader, I recognized the significance of group identity. Using individualization, I have often formed dynamic groups in which the personalities and abilities of each member

flourished. I have always had the goal of promoting compassion, kindness, and humor among those with whom I work.

Kindness and Compassion

Kindness has been foundational to my leadership style because I have found hope, purpose, and fulfillment in helping others. I believe humor is medicinal and often use fun and respectful humor to bring people together. Compassion is centered on my spirituality. My connection to God has also served as the foundation to all that I have been and all that I will do. Through my spirituality, I have found strength in my connection to all things. Lastly, but most importantly, is love. Love is my fuel, and love is my energy. hooks (2018) warned against rejecting love as the cornerstone of feminist movements out of fear of not being taken seriously. I took her words to heart and resisted the temptation to conform to the patriarchal idea that love should only be demonstrated behind closed doors.

Love as my Cornerstone

With love as my cornerstone, as I worked with participants, making genuine connections was of extreme value. I strove to create inclusive environments that facilitated group solidarity and camaraderie. People usually have more in common than they imagine. I practiced entering an unfamiliar environment with this thought: “I know I have at least one thing in common with each of these individuals that can be the basis for forming a connection.”

I also placed value on the importance of honoring people for who they are and where they are. This strength stemmed from individualization. Individualization helped

me identify and value people's unique qualities, strengths, and characteristics, forming new ways by which I could relate to them and appreciate them for who they are.

My strengths influenced my work with participants because I valued relating to and understanding their lifelong goals and aspirations. Understanding and getting to know those with whom I worked enabled me to develop rapport, trust, and strategies for leveraging my strengths to support their short- and long-term objectives (Rath, 2007). As a relator, I also developed an appreciation for autonomy, which extended to working with others. It would be demoralizing to micromanage a team that can manage itself. If a group or individual is unwilling or needs help, I believe I am responsible for empowering my team through training, teaching, and mentorship.

Collective Identity

Fostering a collective identity required building trust with others, collaborating, communicating effectively, being an active and engaged listener, understanding the needs of others, sharing leadership responsibilities with others, and having a "we" mentality that prioritizes the group over the individual (Bordas, 2018). A collective identity also inspired faith in community and a spirit of generosity.

Gratitude

By sharing my gifts with the others, I expressed gratitude and appreciation. With this attitude came the understanding that there is more than enough for everyone and that growth is the result of teamwork, not the efforts of a single person (Bordas, 2018; Chin et al., 2018). Incorporating a spirit of generosity also entailed recognizing that my success is influenced and facilitated by all those who have invested in me (Bordas, 2018). My leadership philosophy included an attitude of practicing gratitude, acknowledging others,

and celebrating together as a community. This approach to leadership relied on the principle of community service.

Community

The idea of serving in community with others inspired me, and was at the heart of my purpose and passion in this study. I am a firm believer in inspiring others by leading by example. I learned to lead by example through my faith. Although there were great people and models around me to gain influence, my eye was always on Jesus's life, acts of compassion, and self-sacrifice. In my opinion, Jesus was the radical feminist of the time, as Jesus demonstrated characteristics of social justice leadership, advocacy, compassion, humility, strength, and love (Vance et al., 2022). Through Christ's love, I gained hope in the possibility of a world liberated from the bondage of all oppressions. My leadership philosophy was also grounded in my epistemology.

Epistemological Stance

Although time had physically removed me from ancestral knowledge, I was nonetheless informed by a presence that transcended time, space, and place—my inner-knowing (Palmer, 2010) or *Nagual* (Castaneda, 1968). My entire existence was filled with the wisdom of my ancestors and all those who came before me. My epistemology was subsequently grounded in social constructivism and symbolic interactionism (Charmaz, 2012) and knowing through lived experiences (Takács, 2003). I also honored an Indigenous epistemology, which Ermine (1995), an Indigenous scholar, explained is grounded in the self, the spirit, and the unknown. Knowledge must be sought through the stream of inner space in unison with all instruments of knowing and conditions that make individuals receptive to knowing (Ermine, 1995). In Indigenous epistemology, the self is

seen as the most important source of information that can be found by delving into the metaphysical and the nature and origin of knowledge (Narvaez & Topa, 2022).

The ways in which I understood the nature of knowledge could be attributed to the idea that knowledge is constructed by the way we, as individuals and groups, interact with the world (Goffman, 2017). Additionally, the way knowledge is constructed, produced, and distributed is not always fair. Power and the need to dominate often influence knowledge production and consumption (Palmer, 1993), and in turn impact cultural production—those who hold the power have the podium (Adorno, 2001).

My lived experiences taught me the beauty in being curious, but also the reality of being judged because of my multiple identities and how they are affected by identity politics (Combahee River Collective, 2016). I held awareness that all my identities intersect in ways that weave together culture, history, language, signs, and symbols (Blumer, 1969; Crenshaw, 1991). Although recognizing these identities was essential to understanding the ways I have made sense of the world, I also maintained the belief that they shaped the ways in which I have been received by the hegemonically white, patriarchal society in which I live (hooks, 2015). My leadership values, feminist position, and passion for being a decolonizing agent (paperson, 2017) shaped my approach to and design of my critical action research project.

Overview of My Critical Action Research Project

In this project, I used a liberatory (Freire, 2021) and revolutionary feminist prism (hooks, 2000) to engage a critical reflective praxis (Crenshaw, 1991; Freire, 1998; hooks, 2000) for decolonizing (Battiste, 2013; Fanon, 2021; L. T. Smith, 2023; Thiong'o, 1986) my work as a hypnotherapist (guided meditation coach). By doing so, I worked with

Women of Color in education to explore ways to resist internalized oppression rooted in racism and sexism (C. Smith & Freyd, 2014).

I used hypnosis (guided meditation) as a tool (Barker et al., 2010; Vandenberg, 1998) to engage hypnotherapy (guided meditation) inspired by Freire's (1998) concept of liberatory praxis—a method for developing critical awareness of the human condition while working toward transformative change through reflection and action (Freire, 1998). Liberatory praxis is not a journey I traveled alone; rather, I engaged collaboratively with my participants (i.e., collaborators) in this study (Freire, 1998; hooks, 2000).

For the purpose of this study, I facilitated my critical action research project virtually over Zoom. I designed my project to include an intake session, three one-on-one hypnotherapy (guided meditation) sessions, and a closing interview. In addition to the hypnotherapy (guided meditation) sessions, participants were given the opportunity to complete a reflection exercise they received after each session. The reflection exercises were not mandatory; rather, I designed them to create additional space for self-reflection and creativity. In Chapter 3, I provide a detailed description of the actions I took to complete my project.

Chapter 1 Summary

In this chapter, I introduced my concerns with internalized oppression, specifically the ways in which Women of Color in education experience internalized oppression through social constructs such as sex and race (Blackwell, 2023; Chancellor, 2019; Collier, 2022). I also discussed the purpose of this study and the importance of decolonization as an act of resistance (Curtice, 2023; Narvaez & Topa, 2022). Further, I explained how my leadership and epistemology influenced my study. Additionally, I

provided an overview of why I chose the framework of critical action research and how it shaped my study's design.

In Chapter 2, I review current literature important to my research. Some, but not all, of the systems that maintain oppression and harm among historically minoritized groups are presented. My review included a comprehensive, but not exhaustive, summary of trauma-related terminology, such as historical trauma, microaggressions, and racial battle fatigue. In addition, I provide a concise overview of epigenetics (Menakem, 2017; Yehuda et al., 2016) and the significance of whole-person models for restorative healing for Women of Color (Bryant, 2022). Further, I discuss current barriers in traditional therapy to demonstrate the significance of decolonizing healing spaces to support Communities of Color (Bryant, 2022; Menakem, 2017). Lastly, I discuss the history of hypnosis (guided meditation) and how decolonizing hypnotherapy (guided meditation) might support a more inclusive and safe space for spiritual and emotional healing.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

I begin this literature review with teaching as a gendered profession (Eisenmann, 2017) to help frame and contextualize why this study was important, especially when considering the spiritual and emotional health of Women of Color as teachers. My review also discusses decolonization (Fanon, 2021), epigenetics (Menakem, 2017; Yehuda et al., 2016), and the significance of whole-person models for the restorative healing of Women of Color (Bryant, 2022). In addition, I briefly explore current research on racial trauma, interpersonal trauma, and intersectional oppression wounds, and explain how this research influenced my study overall. Further, I examine current barriers in traditional therapy to demonstrate the significance of decolonizing healing models, such as hypnotherapy (guided meditation), to support Communities of Color (Bryant, 2022).

Teaching as a Gendered Profession

Teaching is a gendered profession (Eisenmann, 2017). As of 2022, women accounted for 77% of public school teachers (Eisenmann, 2017; National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Such a considerable ratio between women and men teachers can be attributed to the sexist ideology that women are more suited for teaching than men based on the notion that women are stronger caretakers and more nurturing than men (Backett-Milburn & McKie, 2001; Fortier & Ortner, 1997).

Teachers of Color in the United States Are Disproportionately Represented

Although women have traditionally been funneled into teaching roles, Women of Color in the United States remain disproportionately underrepresented in this field (Ingersoll et al., 2018). Despite recent attention given to recruiting more Teachers of

Color, the turnover and departure rates of Teachers of Color have remained high (Ingersoll et al., 2018), undermining the progress of diversifying the education sector.

High Turnover Rates Among Teachers of Color

According to researchers, Teachers of Color have had substantially higher turnover rates than white teachers over the past 2 decades (Ingersoll et al., 2018). This divide has only grown in recent years, begging the question of why this gap has persisted and widened (Ingersoll et al., 2018). Though school demographic characteristics play a significant role in historically underrepresented teachers' initial decisions regarding where to teach, these characteristics do not appear to be the main reason for the subsequent decisions of Teachers of Color regarding whether to remain or leave (Ingersoll et al., 2018).

Unfavorable School Working Conditions

Ingersoll et al.'s (2018) analysis indicated teachers' decisions to leave are influenced by school working conditions, specifically the degree of autonomy and discretion teachers are granted over classroom issues and the level of collective faculty influence over schoolwide decisions affecting their employment. According to Ingersoll et al.'s study, the same institutions that find it hard to staff are more likely to hire historically underrepresented teachers and are also more likely to provide less-than-desirable working conditions with less pay, accounting for the higher rates of teacher turnover.

Stress and Anxiety Contributing to School Working Conditions

The aforementioned factors do not account for the tension and anxiety caused by the intersection of sex and race for Women of Color in predominantly white educational

settings (Chancellor, 2019). Such tension may increase the likelihood that Teachers of Color will experience emotional and spiritual harm anchored in misogyny and prejudice (Chancellor, 2019; Szymanski et al., 2009), which can be traumatic (Bryant-Davis et al., 2021; Carlo et al., 2022; Carter, 2006).

Understanding Trauma From a De/Colonial Perspective

As Indigenous scholar Linklater (2014) asserted, both western medical terminology and psychiatric terminology are subject to criticism. According to Linklater (2014), "The term 'trauma' originates from western contexts, and with a decolonizing approach, it is essential to acknowledge this" (p. 22). Importantly, it may be necessary to begin searching for a more suitable way to describe the harmed conditions that have resulted from colonial violence. Using trauma terminology implies the individual is accountable for the response, as opposed to the systematic abuse of power by the state (Blackwell, 2023; Linklater, 2014). This implication has allowed the government and society to avoid responsibility and liability for colonialization and the trauma caused by it (Linklater, 2014). In my study, *trauma* referred to an individual's reaction or response to an injury. In separating the term trauma from psychiatric diagnosis, I defined trauma not as a disorder (Mauritz et al., 2013; Sibrava et al., 2019), but as a harm to the soul or soul wound (Bryant, 2022). Trauma is a real response to extremely harmful events and circumstances in the actual world (Vance et al., 2022).

Although I am not a licensed therapist or psychologist, I did prepare this literature review to be trauma informed from a western perspective. Again, the intent of defining terminology and reviewing concepts was not for use in diagnosing or assessing individuals or participants; rather, I sought to understand how colonization has shaped

current mental health models and frameworks, and how I might rethink my own process as a practitioner doing decolonizing work. Understanding trauma is significant when considering how individuals' bodies respond to (a) the physical, emotional, and mental abuse of internalized oppression (Blackwell, 2023; Bryant, 2022; van der Kolk, 2015); (b) the emotional fatigue caused by internalizing microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2014); and (c) the oppressive trauma passed down historically through intergenerational trauma (Menakem, 2017; Valeii, 2021; Yehuda et al., 2016) and genetics (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2022; Rumbaut, 2018).

Trauma Defined by the American Psychological Association

The American Psychological Association (2021b) defined *trauma* as an emotional reaction to a traumatic event, such as an accident, rape, or natural disaster. Shock and denial are typical reactions immediately following a traumatic event. Long-term effects include erratic emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships, and physical symptoms (e.g., headaches or nausea; American Psychological Association, 2021b).

Various Types of Trauma

Although the aforementioned emotions are typical, some people struggle to move on with their lives (Carter, 2006). Trauma research (McCleary & Figley, 2017; Perzichilli, 2018) has contributed to expanding the diagnostic definition to include discoveries relevant to understanding the contextual factors in interpersonal traumas (i.e., traumas related to physical, emotional, racial, and sexual abuse; Bryant-Davis & Comas-Díaz, 2016; Menakem, 2017).

Sexual Trauma

Sexual trauma refers to the physical and psychological difficulties or reactions resulting from sexual violence or gynecologic trauma (Plumptre, 2022). Sexual violence or trauma can consist of any sexual act or behavior imposed on a person without their consent or when agreement is not openly given (Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network, n.d.). This behavior or act may include force; coercion; or violation of a person's sexual boundaries, identity, or body (Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network, n.d.). Sexual trauma can have various effects on individuals, including fear, anxiety, depression, dissociation, melancholy, and spiritual and cognitive difficulties (Szymanski et al., 2009). Sexual trauma can affect anyone, regardless of gender, but in the United States, it is more prevalent among Women of Color (National Organization for Women, 2018).

Racial Trauma

Racial trauma contributes to ethnic and racial disparities in the United States (Mental Health America [MHA], n.d.-b). Racial trauma considers the symptoms that may arise due to racism. Some examples of contributors to racial trauma include microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2014), institutional racism (Goldsmith et al., 2014), ethno-violence (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2019), and the constant threat of racial or ethnic violence (MHA, n.d.-a).

Trauma-related symptoms can occur when a person feels threatened or suffers physical harm or injury, directly or indirectly (Ford & Gómez, 2015). According to researchers, more subtle forms of racism cause constant vigilance or a pervasive fear or suspicion of the dominant culture (Grier & Cobbs, 1969), which could function as a

defense mechanism. Even when experiencing nonphysically violent racism, such as microaggressions, accumulating race-based trauma over time may lead to traumatization (MHA, n.d.-a).

Traumatization

Symptoms of sexual and racial trauma can look similar to symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Porges, 2017), including feelings of anxiety, fear, depression, humiliation, low self-esteem, irritability, and poor concentration (Lane, 2016). A recent study found racial discrimination can even increase risks to brain health (Fani et al., 2022). Using literature from educational foundations, higher education, sociology, psychology, and health psychology, Smith proposed the conceptual framework of racial battle fatigue in higher education (W. A. Smith et al., 2011).

Racial Battle Fatigue

According to researchers, racial battle fatigue is the psychological, physiological (Porges, 2017), and behavioral stress reactions caused by the accumulation of microaggressions (Franklin et al., 2014). Racial battle fatigue is premised on the notion that institutions are traditionally dominated by white perspectives (Battiste, 2013; W. A. Smith et al., 2011). In this environment, “Whiteness and White privilege are embedded in the climate and culture resulting in endless microaggressions that accumulate” (Franklin et al., 2014, p. 46). In response, People of Color are physically and emotionally exhausted from preparing and experiencing daily microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2014). The pervasiveness of whiteness negatively impacts the daily lives of People of Color (Hill, 1997).

White Normativity

Being white sustains various perks and privileges that are exclusive to white people (Cole, 2019; Hill, 1997). Whiteness was primarily conceived as an examination of the detrimental impacts of white racial privilege on the lives; well-being; and freedom of People of Color, especially Black people (Matias & Boucher, 2021). As an example, Baldwin (1963) called on educators to resist whiteness rhetoric, which readily blamed Black parents, Black students, and Black culture for academic "failure" rather than the racial and systemic barriers prohibiting their academic achievement. The most crucial component of whiteness is the perception that being white is "normal" (Matias & Boucher, 2021). The idea that white is the status quo has fueled discrimination, prejudice, and the prevalence of microaggressions.

Microaggressions

Sue et al. (2007) described *microaggressions* as "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to People of Color because they belong to a minority group" (p. 273). Microaggressions can be verbal, behavioral, and environmental (Williams, 2021). According to Williams (2021), although microaggressions are devastating to mental health outcomes among People of Color, the concept has not been embraced by all scholars.

In one study, Saleem et al. (2020) sought to explore how racial stress manifests into trauma symptoms among Children of Color. Saleem et al. discovered clinicians often overlooked and unacknowledged racial trauma. Additionally, the researchers found children at different ages exhibited distinct trauma symptoms in response to traumatic experiences (Saleem et al., 2020). Further, the children's perceptions of racial

discrimination suggested that cognitive abilities, situational factors, and individual differences influenced how youth perceived and interpreted racially sensitive situations. When applied to racial trauma, as children develop cognitive skills and learn, their social position, comprehension, and coping behaviors will likely change in response to racially traumatic situations (Saleem et al., 2020). Saleem et al.'s research was essential when considering current literature on coping strategies among Communities of Color and the high prevalence of stress and depression among young adults (Carter & Pieterse, 2020).

Intersectionality of Microaggressions. As Crenshaw (2019) asserted, "The tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive in categories of experience and analysis" (p. 57) is problematic. As an example, People of Color do not enter spaces as either Black or as women, but enter spaces with the likelihood of experiencing double and sometimes multiple oppression (hooks, 2014). Intersectional microaggressions become evident in society when a person (a) is treated as a second-class citizen due to their gender, color, or sexual orientation; (b) experiences judgment based on their religion, age, or class; (c) is not given the respect of using chosen pronouns as a transgender person; or (d) faces continual underrepresentation in their diverse ethnicities, sexual orientations, and impairments in the media (Psychology Today, n.d.).

Understanding the possible stress responses (Porges, 2017) caused by racism and sexism may help higher education leaders better understand and address the sexist and racist structures that permeate higher education institutions (Franklin et al., 2014). Additionally, the mental and emotional harms of oppression can be passed down generationally, a concept known as intergenerational or transgenerational trauma (DeAngelis, 2019; Phipps & Degges-White, 2014).

Transgenerational or Intergenerational Trauma

The Canadian psychiatrist Rakoff et al. (2019) observed significant rates of psychological distress among the offspring of Holocaust survivors in 1966 (as cited in DeAngelis, 2019). This research was one of the first studies to recognize the occurrence of intergenerational trauma (DeAngelis, 2019). Since then, researchers have evaluated anxiety, sadness, and PTSD among trauma survivors and their offspring, with Holocaust survivors and their offspring being the most researched and for the longest time span (DeAngelis, 2019; Phipps & Degges-White, 2014).

According to Valeii (2021):

> Intergenerational trauma is the theory that trauma can be inherited because there are genetic changes in a person's DNA . . . The changes from trauma do not damage the gene (genetic change). . . . Instead, they alter how the gene functions (epigenetic change). (para. 1)

Intergenerational trauma may be ambiguous, quiet, and covert, arising via subtleties and being accidentally taught or suggested throughout a person's life beginning in infancy (Menakem, 2017; Phipps & Degges-White, 2014).

Intergenerational trauma symptoms can be passed down to future generations when a parent's unresolved grief, depression, anxiety, or other symptoms interfere with their ability to form healthy or secure attachments with their children and consistently meet their children's emotional needs (Carter, 2006; Gillespie, 2020; Menakem, 2017). Some groups are more susceptible than others according to their history and experiences, especially when factoring in multiple identity markers such as class, gender, age, ability, sexual orientation, and race (Crenshaw, 1991; Gillespie, 2020; Menakem, 2017).

Transgenerational and intergenerational trauma can also be a product of one's personal or collective history.

Historical Trauma

The term historical trauma originated in the 1980s and is associated with the colonization, relocation, and assimilation of Indigenous people (Lazali, 2021; Mullan, 2023; Narvaez & Topa, 2022). Historical trauma absorbs into a group's cultural memory and is passed down from generation to generation (Mullan, 2023). Historical trauma is how nontraumatic aspects of the culture regenerate (Lazali, 2021; Mullan, 2023). As members continue to witness the effects of trauma on previous generations, traumatic stress (Porges, 2017) may be altered in each generation (Gillespie, 2020).

Historical trauma also includes an individual's or a community's subjective recollection and reexperiencing of traumatic events over multiple generations (Lazali, 2021). As a result, each succeeding generation may begin to exhibit distinct trauma symptoms (Ford & Gómez, 2015). Systemic exploitation, recurrent and continuous maltreatment, racism, and poverty are traumatic enough to trigger genetic modifications (Jiang, 2016). Consequently, Black and Indigenous groups in the United States and across the globe are particularly susceptible to historical trauma (Mauritz et al., 2013). Black, Indigenous, and Other Minority Women (BIWOC; Bryant-Davis et al., 2021) are at a heightened risk of systemic oppression when race and gender are considered and are more likely to be victims of hate crimes and other types of racism than white women (Bryant-Davis et al., 2021), which can further exacerbate existing trauma.

Systemic Trauma

Despite these various contexts of traumatic experiences, many forms of socially relevant trauma are not always regarded as traumatic, even by licensed providers (Goldsmith et al., 2014). The invisibility of trauma as a mental health concern has demonstrated the importance of understanding and identifying systemic or institutional trauma (C. Smith & Freyd, 2014). C. Smith and Freyd (2014) defined systemic trauma, or institutional betrayal, as institutional action and inaction that can amplify the impact of a traumatic experience.

Systemic trauma refers to the environmental factors that cause, maintain, and influence trauma-related responses (Goldsmith et al., 2014; C. Smith & Freyd, 2014). Interpersonal trauma and institutional trauma have parallels. To better assess, diagnose, and treat trauma, trauma psychologists in the field have suggested recognizing the aforementioned factors and incorporating approaches for interventions (Bryant-Davis et al., 2021; Goldsmith et al., 2014; C. Smith & Freyd, 2014), which researchers have suggested can even take place on a genetic level (Jiang, 2016; Rumbaut, 2018).

Trauma and Genetics

The effects of interpersonal trauma on genetic processes have been researched and shown to be exacerbated in populations more often exposed to traumatic events and experiences, increasing the likelihood of trauma reactivity (Menakem, 2017; Rumbaut, 2018; Sibrava et al., 2019). Extending trauma paradigms can be difficult, but both scientifically and ethically, a broader conceptual framework is required to include the impact of epigenetics (Jiang, 2016; Lipton, 2015; Meccariello, 2019; Yehuda et al., 2016).

Genetic Determinism

Genetic determinism, or the notion that genes are fixed, immutable, and beyond an individual's conscious control, was the prevailing viewpoint in the scientific community for decades (Schiebinger, 1993); however, current research in epigenetics has suggested that nutrition, stress, and emotions can alter genes, and these modifications are heritable (Jiang, 2016; Lipton, 2015; Meccariello, 2019; Menakem, 2017). As an example, Yehuda et al. (2016) discovered Holocaust survivors and their children exhibited changes in the same location of the same gene—a stress-related gene linked to PTSD and depression—whereas the controls did not.

Epigenetics

Epigenetics is the study of how the environment affects the expression of genes (Meccariello, 2019). Modern research has demonstrated that cells consist of proteins that help regulate what, when, and how genes express, activate, and subsequently deactivate; these same proteins respond to environmental stimuli (Lipton, 2015). In the book, *Biology of Belief*, Lipton (2015) took this notion one step further by suggesting energetic messages coming from individuals' positive and negative thoughts can also influence their physiological responses to stress and anxiety. According to Lipton, the nature of reality is that everything is energy, and individuals change constantly. Because individuals' vibrational frequency can alter them at the atomic level, energy waves are crucial (Lipton, 2015). Emotions are the subconscious mind's language, influencing cells in ways researchers have only begun to comprehend (Graham-Engeland et al., 2018).

The central concept to epigenetics is that energetic messages emanating from individuals' thoughts are some of the most potent external signals that influence the

health of their cells (CDC, 2022; Lipton, 2015; Murgatroyd & Spengler, 2011); if humans can alter the cell's environment with their thoughts, subsequent behaviors and genetic characteristics will also change (CDC, 2022; Lipton, 2015; Murgatroyd & Spengler, 2011). In other words, the cell's environment is significantly more important than previously believed (Lipton, 2015; Yehuda et al., 2016). This significance is important when considering the detrimental emotional effects caused by racism, which are directly linked to poor health outcomes such as stress and anxiety. By developing coping and resistance skills—such as hypnotherapy (guided meditation), which has the potential to work at a spiritual and emotional level—then through the process of hypnotherapy (guided meditation), individuals might have more power over their health and wellness than initially believed.

Hypnotherapy (Guided Meditation)

Contrary to what hypnotherapy (guided meditation) is often mistaken for, hypnotherapy (guided meditation) is not as frightening, silly, or potent as it is portrayed in popular culture (Lynn et al., 2020). In contrast to dramatic depictions of hypnosis in films, on television, and on stage, participants do not lose consciousness, fall asleep, or lose control of their thoughts and actions (Barker et al., 2010).

Who Invented Hypnosis?

The term "hypnosis" was coined in the 18th century by the English physician James Braid (Krippner, 2009). Braid detested the term "mesmer-ism," which was named after its creator, Austrian physician Franz Anton Mesmer (Krippner, 2009). Braid concluded Mesmer's alleged cures were not the result of "animal magnetism" as Mesmer had claimed, but rather the power of suggestion (Krippner, 2009).

Braid created the eye-fixation technique (also known as “Braidism”) for inducing relaxation and named the process “hypnosis” (i.e., after Hypnos, the Greek god of slumber) because he believed hypnotic phenomena were a form of sleep (Krippner, 2009). Later, upon realizing his mistake, Braid attempted to change the term to “monoideism” (i.e., the influence of a single idea), but the original name persisted. In other words, semantics played a significant role in the history of hypnosis and guided the practice of this modality (Krippner, 2009).

Decolonizing Hypnotherapy (Guided Meditation)

Although there remains fear and stigma about hypnosis, it is a naturally occurring state (Lynn et al., 2020) and has been practiced for thousands of years (Krippner, 2009). According to historical accounts, hypnosis was used as a therapeutic technique in China 3,000 years ago, and Sufi practitioners in Afghanistan have continued to use this technique as of 2023 (Krippner, 2009). In addition, Apache and Washo Indian physicians employed it as a therapeutic technique (Torrey, 1986).

The Origins of Hypnotherapy (Guided Meditation)

In the Great Lakes region of North America, Ojibway Indigenous healers frequently induce hypnosis through chanting, rattles, and rhythmic percussion (Grim, 1988). Additionally, archeologists reported ritual trances as essentially identical to hypnosis in Bali, Haiti, Puerto Rico, and Brazil (Richeport, 1992). Erickson (1970), the preeminent hypnotherapist in the United States, investigated the hypnotic phenomenon in other cultures and wrote, “The Chinese, Hindus, Greeks, and Egyptians all had temples where suggestion and hypnosis were used to alleviate pain and suffering. Undoubtedly,

there are undiscovered ancient civilizations that utilized hypnosis as mystical sleep, rites, and incantations" (p. 71).

What Hypnosis (Guided Meditation) Is Not

Despite the fact that hypnosis (guided meditation) has continued to be stigmatized (Du Plessis et al., 2021; Lynn et al., 2020; Stein et al., 2022) or used as a side show at carnivals, I was committed to reclaiming hypnosis (guided meditation) for what it truly is. Hypnosis (guided meditation) is far from being a tool for mind control, inducing silly chicken dances, or outrageous behavior from more than willing participants; conversely, hypnotherapy (guided meditation) is a ritual and sacred practice that incorporates mind, body, and spirit (Narvaez & Topa, 2022). What I have learned and practiced is not rooted in the teachings or the likes of mesmerism, animal magnetism, or what Baird falsely identified as "sleep" (Krippner, 2009). As a hypnotherapy (guided meditation) practitioner, my practice has remained rooted in a healing art that has existed for thousands of years before men like Mesmer or Baird appropriated it for their own benefit.

What Hypnosis (Guided Meditation) Is

Most techniques for inducing hypnosis (a meditative state) involve rhythm (Rama, 1993). Guided meditation while concentrating on one's respiration or chanting a mantra or other words can induce hypnosis (a meditative state). The hypnotists (guided meditation coach) will often use a constant, measured tone of voice to help induce the meditative, or often called trance state (Rama, 1993). The synchronization of brainwaves with external stimuli (e.g., music or light) is fundamental to all altered states of consciousness (Rama, 1993). As such, rhythm is used in both hypnotherapy (guided meditation) and ritual healing to increase suggestibility. Hypnotherapy (guided

meditation), imagination (visualization), emotions (feelings), and beliefs (thoughts) can then create positive change and transformation (Barker et al., 2010; Du Plessis et al., 2021; Lynn et al., 2020).

Hypnotherapy (guided meditation) may also be a therapeutic practice that employs guided imagery and imagination to induce a trance-like state of focus, concentration, diminished peripheral awareness, and increased suggestibility in a participant (Barker et al., 2010; Du Plessis et al., 2021; Lynn et al., 2020). This condition is comparable to being completely engrossed in a book, movie, piece of music, or even one's own musings or meditations (Barker et al., 2010; Du Plessis et al., 2021; Lynn et al., 2020). In this state, a trained hypnotherapist (guided meditation coach) can help the participant relax and focus inward to discover and use internal resources that can assist the participant in achieving desired behavioral changes or better pain management (Barker et al., 2010; Du Plessis et al., 2021; Lynn et al., 2020).

All Hypnosis Is Self-Hypnosis

Eventually, the participant learns how to address their own states of awareness and gains greater control over their physical and emotional responses (Barker et al., 2010; Du Plessis et al., 2021; Lynn et al., 2020). Since 1958, the American Psychological Association and the American Medical Association have acknowledged hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as a valid technique, and since 1995, the National Institutes of Health has recommended the practice as a treatment for chronic pain (Du Plessis et al., 2021). Participants of hypnosis (guided meditation) also retain complete free will (Du Plessis et al., 2021). A hypnotherapist (guided meditation coach) can make suggestions, but it is the participant's decision whether or not to implement them (Lynn et al., 2020). During

hypnotherapy (guided meditation) sessions, participants remain fully conscious and should be able to recall every detail of their experiences (Du Plessis et al., 2021). Suppose a hypnotherapist's (guided meditation coach) suggestion is practical—in that that case, the suggestion is something the participant wishes to achieve. In their calm state, the participant can better visualize and use their imagination to commit to a suggested positive path to change (Barker et al., 2010; Du Plessis et al., 2021; Lynn et al., 2020).

Imagination

Imagination is essential to understanding hypnotherapy (guided meditation). Reddan et al. (2018) wrote, "Imagination may influence belief formation" (p. 1002). Imagination is a remarkable gift that allows humans to transcend the boundaries of reality and explore the realms of creativity and innovation. Through the power of imagination, individuals can envision new possibilities, create works of art, and solve complex problems (Ekstrom, 2004; Jung, 1997). During active imagination, the mind stills, and a spontaneous mental image is eventually permitted to enter consciousness (Ekstrom, 2004). The mind emphasizes the image and permit it to play out (Jung, 1997).

When the active imagination process occurs, a record is created (e.g., a drawing or a narrative) and the lessons learned from the experience are incorporated into daily life (Jung, 1997). This exercise is often practiced during hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as a way to create a new mental framework or model (van der Kolk, 2015). The capacity to form mental images, ideas, and concepts that do not exist in an individuals' immediate surrounding is imagination, and imagination can be used to rewrite past narratives in a way that brings healing, comfort, and reconciliation to past traumatic events (van der

Kolk, 2015). Imagination can be a powerful tool for safely confronting those who have caused injury and harm in a way that brings closure and healing for the affected individual (van der Kolk, 2015). Aside from the wonderful work of the imagination, hypnotherapy has many other applicable uses.

Hypnotherapy (Guided Meditation) Has Multiple Uses

Hypnotherapy has multiple applications as a treatment for anxiety (Anlló et al., 2020; Roberts et al., 2021), pain management (Caron-Trahan et al., 2022; Dumain et al., 2022; Sine et al., 2022), weight loss (Bo et al., 2018; Milling et al., 2018), hemophilia (Paredes et al., 2021), irritable bowel syndrome (De Benedittis, 2022; Markin et al., 2022; Wan & Ng, 2022), and other emotional or cognitive behavioral needs (Entwistle, 2019; Huynh et al., 2008; Mener & Mener, 2022; Oakley & Halligan, 2013). Unfortunately, as mentioned previously, there still exists a wide range of stigma associated with hypnotherapy (guided meditation; Du Plessis et al., 2021; Lynn et al., 2020; Stein et al., 2022), posing a barrier for people to benefit from its potential benefits for whole-person health (Levine et al., 2022).

Barriers to Coping Resources Among Communities of Color

Research has indicated that in the United States, individuals from Communities of Color are less likely than white individuals to seek outpatient treatment services (American Psychological Association, 2021a). Many Communities of Color may feel more comfortable seeking support for mental health problems from their primary care doctors, family members, or from church (Bryant, 2022) than from mental health practitioners (American Psychological Association, 2021a; Eno Louden et al., 2022; Grafft et al., 2022; Novacek et al., 2020). Fear and distrust of government organizations

may also hinder seeking mental health therapy (American Psychological Association, 2021a).

For example, due to the long history of—and ever-present acts of—prejudice, racism, and maltreatment experienced by Communities of Color, especially among Black communities at the hands of U.S. service providers (Pederson et al., 2022), Black families may be hesitant to seek mental health counseling (Samari et al., 2022). Instead, Communities of Color may prefer an active, independent, and direct approach to overcoming adversity (Children's Hospital of Orange County, 2020; Eno Louden et al., 2022; Pederson et al., 2022). Many Communities of Color also rely on spiritual resources for emotional support (Harris et al., 2021). As a Woman of Color, I value the importance of honoring spiritual practices that facilitate greater health and wellness, acknowledge culture, and create a safe space for holistic healing. Spiritual health typically consists of four components: (a) a person's relationship with themselves, others, and the environment; (b) their beliefs; (c) the capacity to surmount adversity; and (d) the meaning of life. As one of the pillars of life quality, spiritual health is of paramount importance (Seidl, 1993).

Spiritual Health

Spiritual health is a component of human well-being that gives meaning, fosters community, practices ethics, and is founded on individual perceptions of the self (Seidl, 1993). Spirituality can assist in coping with illness and suffering, hasten recovery, and boost emotional and social well-being (Blackwell, 2023; Menakem, 2017; Narvaez & Topa, 2022). Spiritual health is also the ultimate objective of many holistic healers, as it results in a heightened awareness of God and an increased capacity for unconditional

love (Hu et al., 2019). The study that inspired my critical action research design demonstrated the importance of incorporating spiritual and cultural values into healing spaces (Bryant-Davis et al., 2021) by approaching and designing healing spaces from a Womanist therapy paradigm (Bryant-Davis & Comas-Díaz, 2016).

Through an informed Womanist group therapy paradigm, Bryant-Davis et al. (2021) addressed intersectional oppression and trauma from a Womanist perspective among adult Women of Color. Their study demonstrated the significance of self-disclosure, consciousness-raising, and incorporation of art and spirituality. The concept of *Spirita* "refers to Women of Color's spirituality that encompasses cultural values and a reconstruction of identity, and also promotes racial gender empowerment and women's awareness of oppression" (Bryant-Davis et al., 2021, p. 14). Bryant-Davis et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of a decolonized therapeutic process that extends beyond awareness and coping strategies, but empowers survivors to use their "voice, power, and agency" (p. 17). Further, the researchers emphasized the importance of consciousness-raising as an act of resistance. Conscientization (Freire, 2018) can be a therapeutic way to foster "resilience, self-determination, and liberation" (Bryant-Davis et al., 2021, p. 10).

Chapter 2 Summary

In this chapter, I presented an extensive overview of various forms of trauma explicitly experienced by Communities of Color. I included concepts such as decolonization, epigenetics, and the importance of whole-person models for addressing mental health issues among Women of Color. Furthermore, I explained how previous research influenced this study by discussing current literature on racial trauma, interpersonal trauma, and intersectional oppression wounds. The following chapter

discusses how I used critical action research to design my study. I also include the theoretical prism by which I centered my work.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

The purpose of this study was to answer the following question: How can I use hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as a liberatory praxis for confronting, transforming, and resisting internalized oppression among Women of Color in education? To answer this question, I designed my study using critical action research (Ledwith, 2007).

The prism through which I approached my project consisted of critical pedagogy (Freire, 2021) and critical feminist theory (Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 2000). During my data analysis, I used arts-based analysis (Bhattacharya & Payne, 2016). In doing so, I also borrowed from van Meer's (2022) concept of imaginal knowing by which imagination and creativity are reflexive practices that inform conscious awareness beyond language and discourse. Like van Meer (2022), my compositions as an artist–researcher were imaginative reflections of lived experience. Similar to other arts-based practitioners, I discovered engaging with the imaginal allowed for a holistic and organic experience, a process with unexpected insights, and knowledge (Bhattacharya & Payne, 2016; van Meer, 2022). As an artist and researcher, I also incorporated a constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2012) to identify themes as they began to emerge.

Why Critical Action Research

Critical action research is a process centered on "transformative social justice" (Ledwith, 2007, p. 597). Like Ledwith (2007), I agreed that "emancipatory action research committed to the practice of social justice, with the intention of bringing about social change, is a necessary component of critical practice" and "binds critical praxis in a unity of theory and action" (p. 597). Critical action research was important for my study

because my aim was not to contextualize the experiences of my participants as incidences fixed in individual experiences, but to make "critical connections with the structural roots of oppression from which inequalities emanate" (Ledwith, 2007, p. 597).

Critical action research seeks to empower the voices of disadvantaged groups by recognizing there are multiple truths as opposed to one universal truth (Ledwith, 2007). The approach places social and environmental justice at its core and prioritizes the diversity of the human experience over the requirement of economic advancement. Critical action research attempts to identify and transform oppression's root causes, which was critical to the work of my project. Additionally, by using a critical action research framework, respect, dignity, mutuality, and reciprocity served as an ideological prism through which I presented each phase of my process (Ledwith, 2007). As a critical action researcher, I remained committed to identifying and challenging unequal power relations in my process (Ledwith, 2007). Critical action research is rooted in "dialogue attempting to work with, not on, people and intends that its process should be empowering for all involved. More than this, it is committed to collective action for social change" (Ledwith, 2007, p. 599).

As a critical action researcher, I was influenced by Freirean pedagogy (Freire, 1998), which posits it is not sufficient for individuals to engage in discussion to obtain an understanding of their social reality, but that theory must be put into practice (Freire, 1998). Together, individuals must act upon their surroundings, critically reflect upon their reality, and modify social reality through additional action and critical reflection. Freirean pedagogy is a continuous process of theory and action as praxis (Fanon, 2021; Freire, 2021; hooks, 1994). Because social justice was at the heart of my critical action

framework, feminist theory also influenced my study, specifically hooks's (2000) concept of revolutionary and radical feminism. Additionally, as a Woman of Color, with multiple identity markers, my theoretical prism was influenced by identity politics (Combahee River Collective, 2016) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991).

Researcher Positionality

I identify as a cisgender, Indigenous, Woman of Color. I live in southern California and have experience working with both the public and private education sectors. I approached this work through a critical feminist lens that viewed powerful colonial institutions—whether educational, social, or economic—as purveyors of systemic harm and violence that has resulted in internalized woundedness (Magee, 2019). I also took the stance that viewing the world through the lens of what scholars have called "whiteness" (Cole, 2019; Hill, 1997; Matias & Boucher, 2021) is inextricably linked to the reality that People of Color are othered in society (Cole, 2019; Matias & Boucher, 2021; Morrison, 2017). Such othering has persisted to maintain white supremacy, oppression, and subjugation over Communities of Color (Morrison, 2017).

This is not to say that my contempt for whiteness (Cole, 2019; Hill, 1997) was an admission of prejudice against all white people. I argue combating internalized oppression is an act of social justice, restoration, and spiritual recovery (Narvaez & Topa, 2022), and white people who stand in solidarity to eliminate systems of oppression are allies. As a survivor of both sexual and racial trauma, I believe in the healing power of both God and medicine, as they have continued to be a part of my healing journey. I believe in miracles, the power of the mind, and the infinite possibility within each human.

My positionality, life experience, and passion for serving others shaped the design and approach to my research.

My Critical Action Research Project

As mentioned previously, an integral part of this study was also concerned with decolonizing my processes as a hypnotherapist (guided meditation coach). As I considered my research design, I went through all my training materials and scripts to see how I might create a more inclusive approach. In doing so, I realized many of the scripts I had been using did not consider the experiences of people with diverse abilities. As a critical action researcher committed to decolonizing spaces, being mindful of my own privileges and not falling into traps of perpetuating white normativity was and has continued to be an important reflexive praxis.

Internal Data Collection: Critical Reflective Praxis Journal and Art

Throughout the course of my research, I embarked on a journey of critical reflection and introspection, as I diligently maintained a praxis journal in line with the guidance of Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) and Ledwith (2007). In doing so, I sought to delve deeper into the intricate interplay between my research endeavors and the broader societal context. This journal provided me with a unique vantage point from which to examine the profound ways my worldview, as delineated by Narvaez and Topa (2022), shaped not only the lens through which I perceived the world, but also the manner in which I engaged with it (Freire, 2021). As I documented my experiences, challenges, and revelations, I observed the organic evolution of my research process and the adaptive transformations I made to serve the needs of my participants.

My Journal

I kept a critical reflective praxis journal to think more analytically and reflexively (Badwall, 2016) about my research within the broader societal framework (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Ledwith, 2007). Being reflective helped me make sense of how my worldview (Narvaez & Topa, 2022) influenced the way I interacted with the world around me (Freire, 2021), and those with whom I collaborated. My journal also helped me understand how my process changed organically, while adjusting my techniques to adapt my process to meet participants' needs. My goal was to maintain my journal throughout the length of my project, which I did. Figure 1 depicts an image of my journal(s).

Figure 1

Critical Reflective Praxis Journal

My Art

In addition to my journal, I found meaning through art and poetry. The use of art helped me to make sense of what I felt and experienced when words were not enough. Art is an integral part of who I am as a human, and being able to use art as a medium to create is one of the many ways in which I make sense of the world. Figure 2 is comprised of my art and poetry, and Figure 3 is a clay heart I made during the dissertation process.

Figure 2

Poetry and Freehand

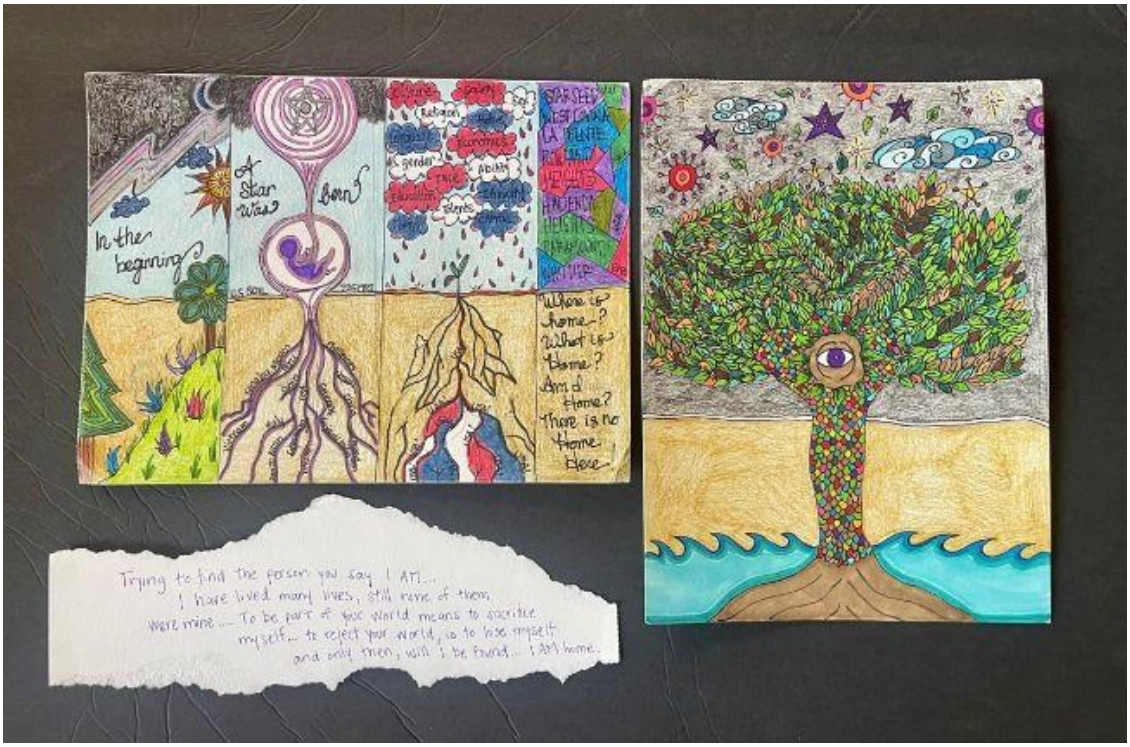


Figure 3

Clay Heart

Organizing This Project to Support My Learning Needs

As mentioned previously, I was diagnosed with ADHD. I knew I needed to organize my study in a streamlined process that would make sense for the way my brain works while also playing to my strengths with platforms such as Zoom, JotForm, and Calendly. I decided to automate my process as much as possible. First, I believed doing so would make the process more convenient for my participants, and second, it would help me stay on track and organized.

I used a software program called Calendly that allowed for Zoom integration. I used the programs together to automatically send an email invitation to each participant upon completing each session. The email contained a link to schedule their next session,

along with a link to complete the optional postsession reflection exercise, which I created and uploaded to JotForm. Once I had the mechanics in place for the automated process, along with the revised hypnotherapy script, I was ready to recruit participants.

Recruiting Participants

I recruited participants for this study using snowball sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2022). Snowball sampling is a research technique that involves the recruitment of initial participants for a study, who are then requested to refer additional participants they know who meet the study criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2022). I shared the invitation to participate on various education network platforms (e.g., Teachers Connect, Women in Higher Education Network, National Association of Student Personnel Administrators) and social media platforms (e.g., LinkedIn and Instagram).

I included the criteria to participate in the consent form, which was required to participate. I started with 10 participants, but one participant was not able to participate. In total, the study included nine participants (i.e., collaborators). Each participant attended an introduction to hypnotherapy (guided meditation) session, three hypnotherapy (guided meditation) sessions, and a closing interview. In total, I met with each of the nine participants via Zoom four times over 8 weeks.

Participant Demographics

This study consisted of nine Women of Color who identified as either African American or Black, Black Indigenous, Hispanic and Filipina, Latina, Mexican, or Mexican American. Each participant had worked in the higher education sector, from public to private. The time working in higher education among participants ranged from less than 1 year to 25 years. Participants selected their pseudonyms during their

introductory session. Before sharing my participants' experiences, I introduce each of them (with their pseudonyms) to offer context and provide a glimpse into some of their struggles while dealing with the simultaneity of racism, sexism, and internalized oppression.

External Data Collection

In the pursuit of a comprehensive understanding of my research, I undertook a multifaceted approach to external data collection that encompassed a diverse range of methodologies. My external data collection consisted of hypnotherapy (guided meditation) sessions, structured interviews, and participant reflections. The inclusion of hypnotherapy (guided meditation) sessions allowed for me to explore each participant's thoughts, feelings, and emotions in a relaxed state. Simultaneously, the structured interviews provided a structured framework to elicit specific insights and perspectives, whereas participants' reflections served as a pivotal channel for self-expression and introspection. This combined methodology not only enriched the depth of my findings, but also underscored my commitment to a holistic and de/colonial approach to understanding the research.

Introduction to Hypnotherapy Session

The introductory session served to confirm consent and to answer any questions the participant had about the hypnotherapy (guided meditation) process. In this session, I used a PowerPoint to frame the process. After the PowerPoint presentation, I conducted a structured interview to learn about a time the participant experienced racism, sexism, or both while working in education. After this session, participants received an automated email to schedule their first hypnotherapy (guided meditation) session, which included a

link to my Calendly calendar and a link to a postsession reflection exercise that I made available through JotForm.

Hypnotherapy (Guided Meditation) Sessions

Each of the three hypnotherapy (guided meditation) sessions lasted approximately 60 minutes. As a follow-up procedure, I asked the participants a series of semistructured interview questions before each session. If the participant had no questions or concerns, the hypnotherapy (guided meditation) session consisted of the following variation: a countdown to relaxation hypnotherapy (guided meditation) script, where I assisted the participant in entering a state of meditative calm and self-awareness.

Relaxation

Following this relaxation technique, I worked with each participant to identify the origin (i.e., person, circumstance, or incident) of a specific unwanted sensation or emotion (e.g., fear, dread, anxiety, rage) stemming from a racist or sexist experience. During this segment, I encouraged the participants to imagine confronting the source of the unwanted emotion or feeling in a manner that felt secure and familiar to them.

Inner Child Work

The hypnotherapy (guided meditation) sessions included inner child work (Bradshaw, 1992) and extensive use of the imagination and visualization. According to Davis (2020):

> Inner child work involves self-discovery of all the emotions and memories one is forced to repress. The idea of inner child work is to get into contact with, listen to, and nurture inner children to find and heal the issues one may be facing in adulthood. (para. 4)

Inner child theorists have suggested most often, the inner child does not have access to the adult "self" reality and may be unaware of how life has changed (Bradshaw, 1992; Davis, 2020). According to Goldstein (2021), fear; perfectionism; anxiety; and avoidance of particular people, places, and activities are all attempts by the inner child to feel secure.

Imagination

Employing the use of imagination, I also worked with participants to transform their unwanted feelings and emotions into a feeling or emotion they desired (Mener & Mener, 2022); for example, one participant wanted to assign a new role and behavior to an emotion (i.e., anxiety) so that it would change its function in a way that supported her meaningfully. The goal was not to eliminate the participant's emotion, because emotions are important (Curtice, 2023), but to facilitate a space for the participant to confront, transform, and resist beliefs rooted in internalized oppression (Bryant, 2022; Menakem, 2017; Narvaez & Topa, 2022).

Optional Postreflection

After each hypnotherapy (guided meditation) session, participants received an email with a link to a postsession reflection exercise. The postsession reflection exercise was optional but allowed participants to reflect on their overall experiences if they felt comfortable doing so. I invited participants who had completed all three individual hypnotherapy (guided meditation) sessions to participate in a semistructured exit interview. The structure of this interview was open-ended, allowing participants to elucidate, elaborate, and address follow-up questions if and when appropriate.

Structured Interviews

The purpose of the structured interview was to collect information from participants about a time when they experienced racism and sexism as educators—while ensuring they felt comfortable discussing this experience. I also asked each participant questions to ensure they felt as secure and respected as possible (e.g., if they had preferred pronouns or identified with a specific race, ethnicity, or culture). It was vital to gather information that considered the identities and abilities of each participant when thinking about how to use inclusive imagery and affirmations during each participant's hypnotherapy (guided meditation) session (Bryant, 2022). In addition, I asked each participant if they felt anything was essential for me to know and cover during the interview process. Participants received an automated email with a link to a postsession reflection exercise after completing the hypnotherapy (guided meditation) introduction session.

Participant Reflections

The purpose of the "Introduction to Hypnotherapy (Guided Meditation) Participant Reflection" postsession reflection exercise was to provide space for each participant to reflect on their overall experience, if they so wished. Upon submitting their reflection, each participant was redirected to the Calendly scheduling platform to schedule their next hypnotherapy (guided meditation) session. Participants who did not wish to complete the postsession reflection exercise were automatically redirected to the Calendly scheduling software to schedule their next session (i.e., hypnotherapy [guided meditation] session). The structure of the three hypnotherapy (guided meditation) sessions was identical.

Data Analysis

The first phase of my data analysis involved data organization. After each session, I downloaded the recording and filed it electronically in a folder indicating which session it was and to whom it belonged. Initially, I planned to analyze and transcribe each session immediately upon completion. What I did not anticipate was the emotional fatigue I would experience after each session. The emotional and often spiritual depletion I felt proved to be a barrier until I became intentional about self-care and self-regulation practices.

Transcription Software

To aid in the transcription process, I uploaded the recordings to a transcription software called Otter.ai. This platform helped generate a thorough transcription process, as I could read the autogenerated transcription while listening to the recording. Such a process made for more accurate edits, with the ability to pause and replay. I transcribed nine introductory sessions, 27 hypnotherapy (guided meditation) sessions, and nine closing interviews.

Transcribing and Discovering Themes

After transcribing the interviews, I used the constant comparative method to search for themes that arose. Using the constant comparative method, I carefully evaluated each participant's session and identified recurring themes (Charmaz, 2012). Finally, I compared the themes of each participant to those of the others. I narrowed down a set of themes, then went back to cross-reference any other themes that developed; or, if I noticed a recurring topic that I did not see in other participants, I would reanalyze to determine whether the theme emerged (Charmaz, 2012). After identifying the

emergent themes, I began my coding process. A critical part of my data analysis was organizing the data in a way that made sense to me.

(He)Arts-Based Analysis

To help make sense of underlying themes that emerged, I used art to guide the process (Bhattacharya & Payne, 2016). I challenged myself to not think about what I thought the data were saying, but to rely on my intuition to draw what I was feeling in a way that conveyed what this project meant to me and the Women of Color with whom I collaborated (Bhattacharya & Payne, 2016; van Meer, 2022). I would be remiss to forgo mentioning the encouragement I received from the chair of this study, Dr. Tabatha Jones Jolivet. Without Dr. Jolivet's commitment to decolonizing education and her willingness to encourage the use of art as a part of the way I know and make sense of the world, I do not believe this project would have evolved in the way that it did. By using art, I was able to organize my thoughts and themes through a constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2012; Kolb, 2012) and design an artistic rendering of how these themes manifested within a framework around the heart. I have included my art pieces in Figures 4, 5, and 6.

Figure 4

The Four Chambers of an Oppressed Heart

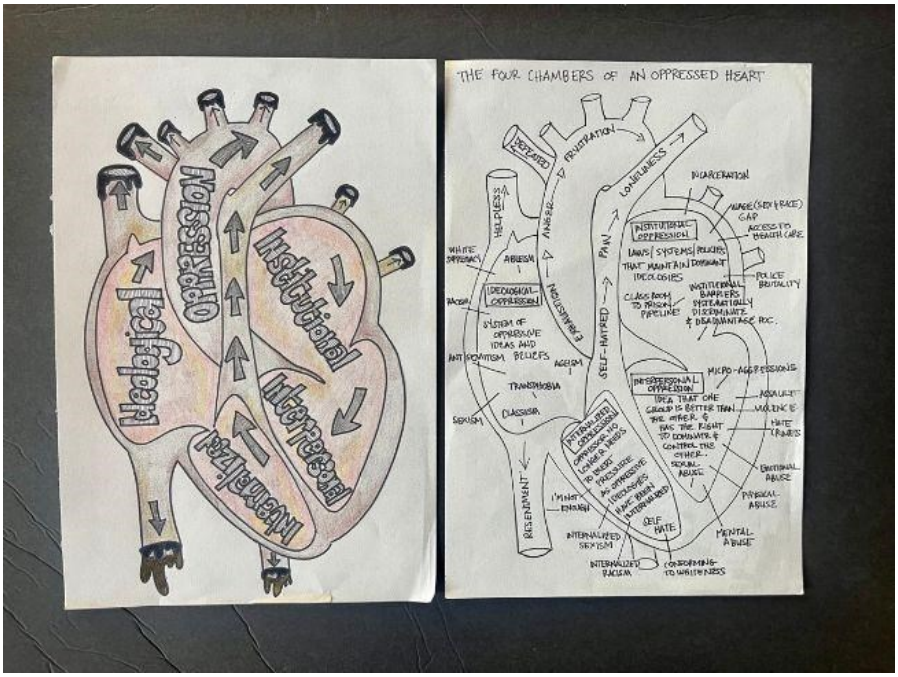


Figure 5

The Four Chambers of a Liberated Heart

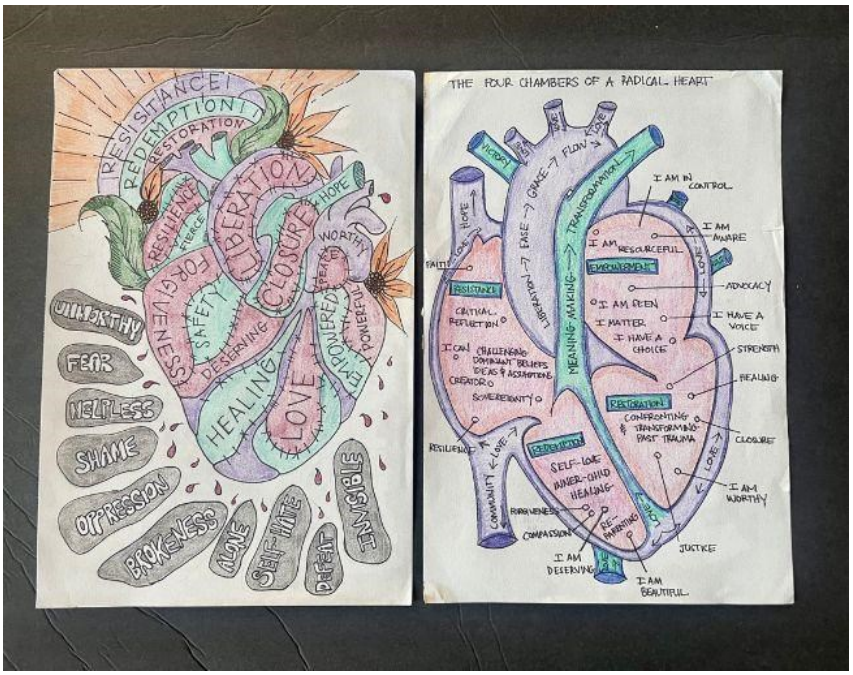
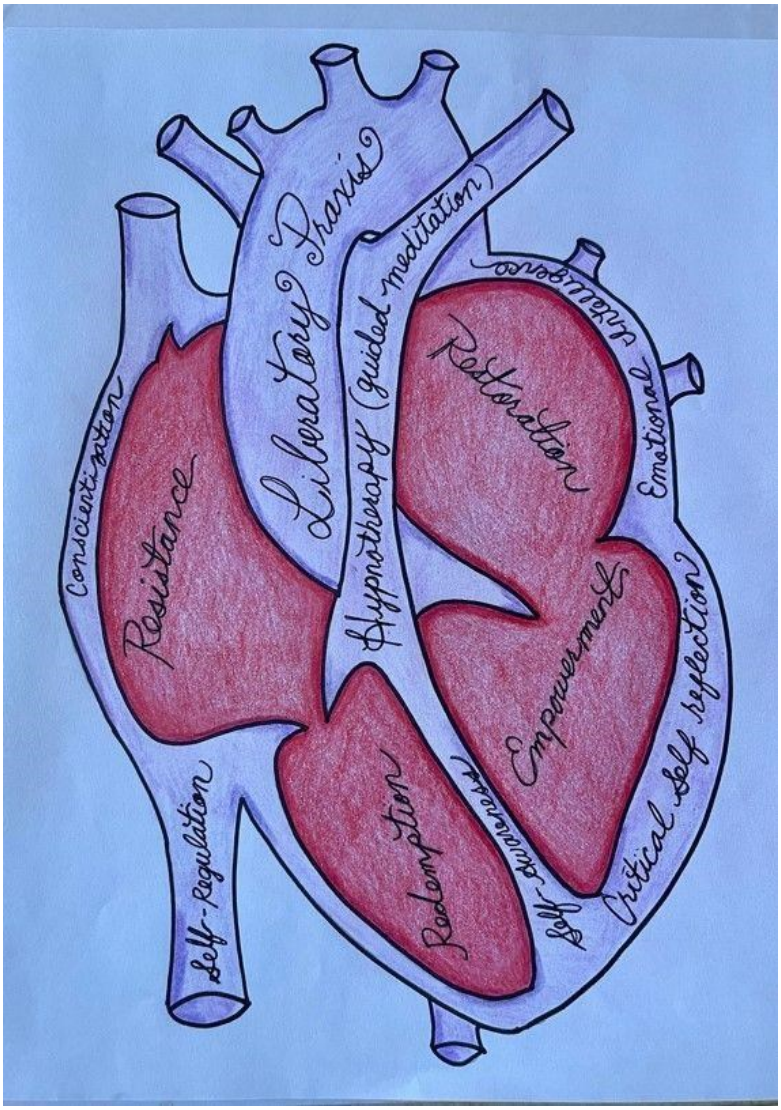


Figure 6

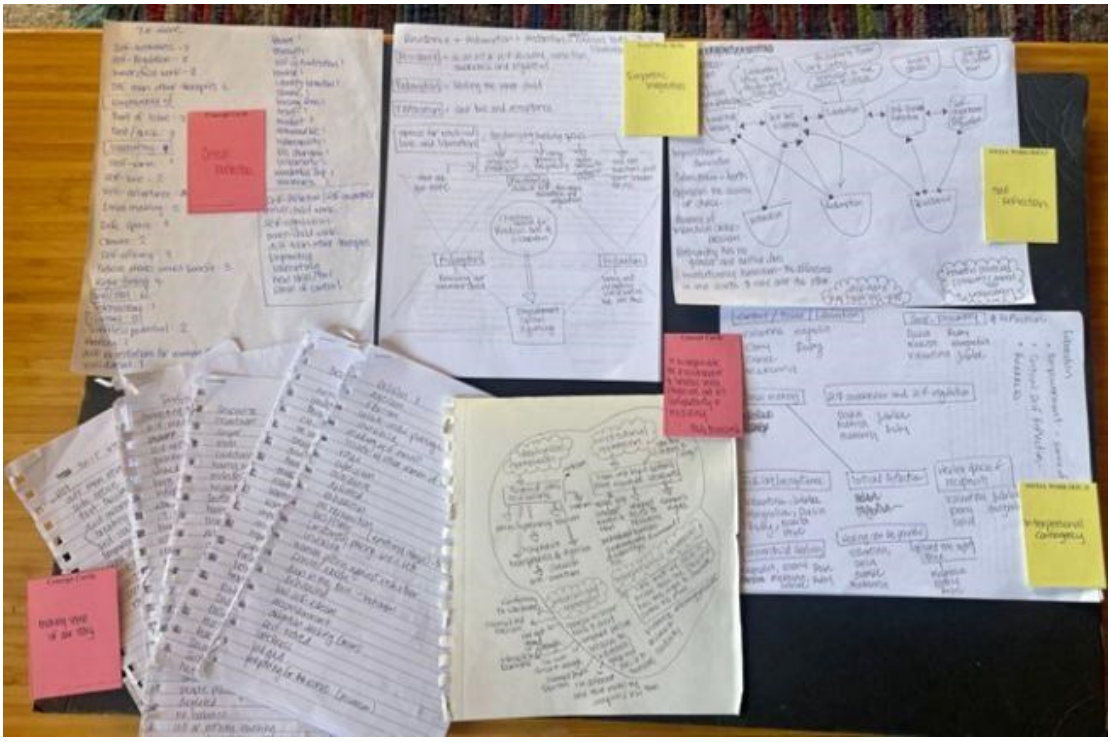
The Four Chambers of a Radical Heart



As a part of decolonizing spaces, which includes decolonizing Eurocentric approaches to conducting research (Battiste, 2013), I included an illustration of how my living resistance with ADHD shaped the way I conducted research. My process might look messy, but for me, it was simply the way my mind processed and made sense of the data. I included a glimpse into my process in Figure 7.

Figure 7

Making Sense of my Themes and Transcriptions



Chapter 3 Summary

In this chapter, I described my position as a researcher, the nature of my study, and the action taken to complete the study. In the following chapter, I discuss the findings from my project and insights gleaned from working with nine other Women of Color in education as we explored ways to confront, transform, and resist the false narratives of internalized oppression. In the following chapter, I use the metaphor of a heart and its four chambers as a visual for framing the findings of my study. The four chambers of a radical heart include empowerment, resistance, redemption, and restoration, which were core themes to the participants' experiences and their ways of describing acts of resistance.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In this critical action research project (Ledwith, 2007), I explored hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as a liberatory praxis for confronting, transforming, and resisting internalized oppressions rooted in sexism and racism among Women of Color in education. The participants in this research came from various California institutions and universities, both private and public. My research was guided by a critical feminist prism (Crenshaw, 2019; hooks, 2000), and Freire's (1998) concept of praxis, which served as a means for building critical awareness of individuals' circumstances while working toward liberation via thought and action. This chapter includes the findings of my project, sources of evidence, and critical conclusions from the qualitative data gathered throughout. In addition, I discuss credibility components that explain why this study's outcomes were reasonable and fair.

Sources of Evidence

For this action research, I collected four data sources, three external and two internal. External data sources included (a) transcripts from individual zoom sessions, (b) transcripts from one-on-one semistructured interviews, and (c) participant reflections. Internal data sources included a researcher journal and artwork. For confidentiality, each participant assigned themselves a pseudonym. In the first phase of this study, nine individuals participated in a 30–60-minute intake session.

During the second, third, and fourth phases, each of the nine participants engaged in one-to-one, Zoom-based hypnotherapy (guided meditation) sessions lasting 45–60 minutes. I recorded these sessions with their permission. After each session, I uploaded

the audio recording to a transcription software called Otter.ai. I used these transcripts while employing constant comparative coding and data analysis. Additionally, I engaged each participant in an individual, 20-minute, semistructured closing interview. I conducted all interviews using Zoom and uploaded and transcribed the audio recordings using Otter.ai. My qualitative data included one introductory session (i.e., nine transcripts), three individual hypnotherapy (guided meditation) sessions (i.e., 27 transcripts), and one-on-one closing interviews (i.e., nine transcripts). I used the constant comparative method and arts-based analysis to analyze the data.

Participant Vignettes

Rose

Rose identified as Black and Indigenous and was a single mother of two. Rose was a social worker for a school in northern California. During our time together, she shared and recounted her experiences with racism and sexism, which she described as "salient and inseparable," while also explaining that she was much more aware of racist instances. She described these racist experiences by saying:

> I think a majority of what I experience is more racial . . . more covert. And so, I'm heavily sensitive to racial situations that arise at work. It puts me in a place of high anxiety, highly obsessive over ensuring that all the details about my work is perfect.

Rose later explained the mental and emotional toll having to be "perfect" takes because it "literally means [her] job," which is nonnegotiable as a single mother and main support for her family.

Ruby

Ruby identified as Hispanic and was vibrant with high energy. Ruby described her role as a receptionist at a private school of nursing. There was excitement in her voice as she thanked me for the opportunity to participate in my project. During our time together, Ruby expressed her feelings of fear, shame from her struggle with weight loss, and feelings of invisibility. She was passionate when describing all the instances in which she had felt invisible at work when her white male chief executive officer (CEO) ignored her or called her by the wrong name, even though she had worked with him in different capacities for over 2 years. Ruby went on to describe her experiences working in an office "driven" by men, noting:

> I think for us, at least for me, like, you get the hard work with no credit. And it's just, you see, you don't see minorities in the top field of like the CEOs, it's all male driven. And if it is a woman in the field, it's, you know, they're not minorities or not Women of Color. So, I think overall, the people that I've worked with, and the women that I've worked with that are, you know, Women of Color, there's always this drive of just having to constantly prove themselves, trying to feel like equals to be taken seriously. You know, me and my other coworker, she's also a receptionist, we're both Mexican. And I feel like they have us just running around doing all the dirty work, heavy lifting, you know? And the men just stand around and do whatever they want to do.

Jubilee

Jubilee identified as Hispanic and Asian and added she is part of the LGBTQ community. Jubilee worked in the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM)

field of education in the private sector. Jubilee had a reserved personality at first, but became more open once I shared some of my own experiences with sexism and racism. She described her experiences with sexism and racism as "convoluted" because they were "always present at the same time" and so she experienced them simultaneously. Jubilee expressed the challenge of not only being a woman, but a Woman of Color "doing science." She described the feelings of judgment and not feeling "good enough" in the spaces she occupied, noting:

> It's like, because I'm a woman, people don't take me seriously, or they want to talk someone else or, you know, and being Hispanic and a woman, it just makes it worse. And then when you bring in a male colleague, all of a sudden, you know, they're much more receptive. Just, it makes me feel inadequate, sometimes. Even though I know I have the same degree, probably even more experience, but it's solely based off of how I look.

Ebony

Ebony identified as Black or African American. Ebony was a single mother and said she had spent most of her career working with children with different abilities in public education. Ebony described exhaustion and feelings of defeat as she explained, "I think from an emotional standpoint, it's really defeating, especially in terms of education, right, we go in with lower pay and high expectations." Ebony then described the systemic issues she had experienced with her students, stating:

> A lot of [the issue] is rooted in numbers and test scores, and not really in full development of our youth. And so, it's really hard when you choose a job out of love and appreciation for pouring into children, and then you get stopped by

> people who only see them as numbers and opportunities, and so it's defeating. And, you know, especially as an African American woman, it's hard because a lot of these spaces that I take up are not with people who look like me. And so that always is a hard issue. Because even in my anger, my defeat, I have to still be cognizant of how my voice is and how it fluctuates. And am I coming across too intimidating, am I coming across, you know, too harsh and mean. And so on top of just my own personal feelings as a collective and a Woman of Color, from trying to pursue a career and trying to, you know, also simultaneously pour into my community, it's a lot to carry. It's a big, almost burden to carry solely from an emotional standpoint. That is what adds to the defeat of like, you know, damned if I do, damned if I don't.

Makenna

Makenna identified as Latina and was a high school teacher for a school in an urban community. Makenna was quiet and polite while describing the exhaustion she felt daily from the lack of support from upper administration at her school. She was proud while telling me that she served her community by working in the city in which she was raised, but also felt her commitment to her community had been weaponized against her. She explained, "It's as if they expect me to do all these extra things with no pay and no support because, like, they know that I am passionate about my community. It's like it's used against me." Makenna said she is often the person to whom her colleagues and students turn for support. She felt a great responsibility for their safety. Makenna also described her experiences with sexism and racism as causing a lot of fear and anxiety, but

often changed the subject to not focus on her own needs, but rather the needs and safety of her colleagues and students.

Magnolia

Magnolia identified as Black, was a mother of two, and worked in an administrative role at a nonprofit in the education sector. During our time together, Magnolia shared how her son had recently passed away. He was survived by her daughter, of whom she spoke proudly, lighting up as she reflected on their time together. Her joy was contagious. Magnolia described her experience with sexism and racism as the root of the negative ways she often viewed herself and constantly questioned her self-worth, along with the internalized tone-policing she experienced on a regular basis. She told me about an experience when a student turned in the wrong paperwork, recalling:

> When interacting with students—and the story I would tell myself is what's going through their mind is—"my God, this Black person is not about to tell me what I can and cannot have." It just so happened at that time, I had people around me that supported me. And when they went back there to talk to the director, the director would tell them the same thing that I told them. And then the director would purposely walk them back out to me and say, "Magnolia will take care of you." So in that retrospect, there was times that it worked out like that. But I have had times where I've been told I'm aggressive. Whereas an associate could come and say the same thing I said, same tone, and they're just being assertive."

Dalia

Dalia described herself as a Latina and single mother of six. Delia shared feelings of self-doubt, feelings that she was not enough, and feelings of rejection. Delia worked in

student services at a local community college and described how she had recently experienced something that she did not know how to identify, saying, “I’m not sure if it’s racism, or discrimination, or what, I just know it made me feel like crap.” She continued, noting:

> I just feel really betrayed. And by another Latina, she was a mentor. I was working under her, but I felt some tension or something. Like, I wasn’t doing something right. I asked her, I said, teach me, like I, what am I doing wrong? I don’t know what I’m doing wrong, but I want to learn. And you know what she said to me? I will never forget this. And this wasn’t coming from a place of care. I know the difference. She had just earned her PhD, and she knew I still had one more requirement to earn my BA, which was already something she knew I had a lot of shame about. Well, anyway, she said . . . how did she put it? “If you want to learn, then you go back to school. You get the degree, you go back to school, you do the work, you get the degree, but you and I both know not anybody can do it.”

Delia described how she felt devastated and even contemplated checking herself into a mental health facility, as hearing something like that from her mentor almost made her want to restart using drugs after being sober for 10 years.

Nekita

Nekita identified as Latina and was a single mother of two. Nekita worked for a private college in southern California. She described her experiences with sexism and racism as something she had always experienced, especially in higher educational settings, which in her experience had been taken up predominantly by white men. Nekita

described her feelings as “frustration, anger, and rage,” especially because of the current political climate on campus, where she felt invisible. In describing the objectification she felt as one of the few Latina women in a director position, Nekita described a “simultaneous necessity to shrink [herself] and make [herself] invisible” to avoid the discomfort. At the same time, she recalled:

> Having to speak out because clearly, I am hyper visible by being you know, the only [Latina]. And then obviously, the power dynamic of like, you know, you have a tenured professor versus me, an at-will employee who is perceived as being younger, inexperienced, or being, in so many words, the “hired help” right there to clean up after them to clean up after the meetings.

Nekita also described having severe insomnia, which may or may not be attributed to her experiences.

Valentina

Valentina identified as Latina and shared her experiences with immigrating to the United States at a young age. She described the obstacles she endured to achieve her educational goals while an undocumented student, such as overcoming language barriers and counselors telling her not to aim so high, or that she should “clean houses like [her] mom or join the military.” Valentina shared that when she was promoted—despite working overtime, sacrificing personal time, and helping her institution receive accreditation—another male professor stood up at the same time as she was being celebrated and shouted, “Who did you have to sleep with to get this position?” Valentina shared she felt humiliated and angry because of his sexism. Valentina was a curriculum

developer for K–12 and had since started her own business in education as a response to the fatigue and burnout she experienced from her previous role.

Honoring My Participants by Not Perpetuating Further Harm

In honor of my participants, and out of respect to their personal stories, I chose not to go into detail about their personal accounts of trauma, which included accounts of physical, emotional abuse, sexual assault, and violence. Additionally, the sources of trauma that emerged across all participants included feelings of anxiety, fear, depression, humiliation, invisibility, low self-esteem, irritability, and poor concentration (Lane, 2016). Participants also identified exhaustion, fear, resentment, frustration, and anger (W. A. Smith et al., 2011). Physiological indicators of fatigue were also reported, including a racing heart, insomnia, and headaches (Porges, 2017; W. A. Smith et al., 2011). Evidence of intergenerational trauma (Yehuda et al., 2016) also emerged for each participant sharing instances of unresolved grief, depression, anxiety, or other symptoms that formed during an event in childhood in which an emotional need was unmet by a parent or guardian (Carter, 2006; Gillespie, 2020) or a traumatic experience took place.

Although these experiences were a part of our work together, my choice was to exploit the privilege I had to join in community with each participant in a space where each of us felt safe to share. I do, however, share their experiences by using their own words. The following narratives provide insight into the experiences each participant had exploring the use of hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as a tool for confronting, transforming, and resisting beliefs of internalized oppression rooted in racism and sexism.

Honoring My Participants by Celebrating Personal Growth

Although I could not include every excerpt, the following provide examples of how hypnotherapy (guided meditation) helped facilitate the space for empowerment, resistance, redemption, and restoration. I list the four chambers in numerical order for organizational purposes only, not to demonstrate steps or ranking. I believe we are all at different points in our healing journey. Healing is not a "one size fits all." I met my participants (i.e., collaborators) where they were and made space for the process to happen organically.

External Findings

While analyzing my data, I discovered four distinct themes, each akin to a chamber within a radical heart, pulsating with unique narratives and experiences. These chambers, or themes, offered profound insights into the collective consciousness of my participants (i.e., collaborators), representing both the challenges and triumphs woven into their stories. The first chamber, empowerment, illuminated the transformative process of individuals finding their voices, gaining agency, and transcending limitations. In the second chamber, resistance, participants explored courageous acts of defiance, challenged systemic inequities, and prevailed against adversity. The third chamber, redemption, chronicled the remarkable journeys of personal growth, healing, and the reclamation of selfhood. Finally, the fourth chamber, restoration, revealed the restorative processes that engendered renewal and rejuvenation, fostering a sense of wholeness and belonging.

Empowerment: First Chamber of a Radical Heart

Several participants found power and freedom in our work together because they felt a sense of empowerment through personal agency, power to make their own choices, and control over their own narratives. Valentina described her experiences confronting internalized oppression using hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as she noted:

> I think for me, what has changed a lot, is with hypnotherapy, I'm learning how to process information and how to categorize it and how to change it so that it's my story now, and no one else's. And I know the pain, it's always gonna be there. You don't just let it go. But I think the way I see it now, is now, I have a choice. I have control. In one of our sessions, I had the choice to decide how a person that hurt me gets to live in my mind and my memory, and it's liberating, because now I have control, I have the power, I decide when I close my eyes, and when that memory comes up, I get to decide how I see it. I get to take control of my story. I'm tapping into that energy, that power that I have to change my narrative and to not be stuck in that pain. You know, because it happened, I can't change that, but I can change the way I see it. And now I know how to do that. I think for me, that was the most powerful part of the whole process, being able to acknowledge it, and face it, and have the courage to face it. But also being able to look back at it and be like, I decide now.

Valentina described her experience as one in which she gained greater control over her emotions so that she was not trapped in her suffering; she also recognized that despite having suffered injury, she had the option and ability to confront her anxieties while also regulating her own narrative (Bryant, 2022; Narvaez & Topa, 2022). Similarly,

Ebony described how a sense of control and authority over her destiny gave her a sense of independence, noting:

> I think it's interesting. The things that were bothering me in those moments don't really hold so much power. The rejection from others that was making me experience a lot of self-doubt regarding my own intuition and self-worth? It's not like these things aren't still existent. It's just not something that is inhibiting me anymore. I feel a lot more liberated and free in my choices. I feel a lot more free in my personal intuition. I feel a lot more free in just having affirming self-talks. Also, identifying my thoughts, and also just kind of recognizing that the place that I'm in, it's not a forever thing. I have choices. This session reminded me that my self-worth isn't rooted or tied to whether someone accepts me or rejects me or not. So, yeah. It gives me a sense of power and control over my choices and my future.

Similar to Ebony, Jubilee described how liberating it can be to detach self-worth from specific instances and emotions of rejection (Blackwell, 2023). Here, Jubilee demonstrated how applying what she had learned to resist internalized oppression aided her in overcoming instances of self-doubt. She stated:

> Instead of wanting to crawl under a rock, or feel those negative feelings, I went back to our sessions and was like, this is why you feel this way, and I took the power away from the situation to kind of reframe it. Now I have ways to figure out why I'm feeling what I'm feeling, so yeah, it's been very liberating. I mean, I feel like instead of allowing that emotion to take control, of course, I still get bothered, it's gonna be a journey of growth and continuous practice, but I don't

> feel so helpless now. At least now, I know what questions to ask myself, even if I don't want to know the answer [laughed], you know, at least I know how to start asking the questions instead of feeling helpless.

It was empowering for Jubilee to pivot and reflect on her emotions, which helped her feel less helpless and better equipped to confront her feelings without judgment (Magee, 2019). Dalia also described how increased self-awareness enabled her to self-regulate her emotions and exert greater control over her responses to situations that would otherwise be provoked by her past experiences (Bryant, 2022). She noted:

> Every session has always felt like the best hour spent [laughed]. I end each session feeling like I'm on top of the world. But, you know, I think it's because I keep learning more about myself and maybe just gaining a lot more self-control over my emotions. I tend to react before thinking things through, and I end up, like, regretting something I said, or, you know. But for me, this experience has really helped me to be aware of what I am feeling, and wait before reacting quickly. There was one point during the week where I was like, dang, before, that would've, that would have really gotten me upset, but this has really helped me to—it's changed the way I look at things. I've definitely seen the benefits of it [hypnotherapy] and see how it has enhanced my life. You know, it has helped me a lot.

Dalia described her experience with using hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as a tool for resistance as one that had enhanced her overall quality of life (Paredes et al., 2021). Similarly, Makenna discussed the relief hypnotherapy (guided meditation) provided for

her as she dealt with feelings of fear and anxiety (Roberts et al., 2021) in the classroom. She noted:

> I think we've focused on fear the first time. And I feel like that has been very helpful. Because now, when I have issues in my classroom, like, I feel like better equipped to handle them, like I just don't react. I think now I have, like, more time to process and to really figure out like, what's going on before I react. And even today, I had an incident where a student walked out, and she was very upset. And like, I let her do whatever she needed. And I kind of like stopped and then wrote her a referral. And then, you know, but I think old me would've reacted in a different way. And just being able to process information. Slower, and in a safer way. So I really appreciate that. And I feel like my anxiety and picking on my skin, like, I feel like I'm more conscious about when I do it.

Nekita described her experience as providing space to discover parts of herself that she had never acknowledged (Blackwell, 2023; Bryant, 2022; Davis, 2020), which in turn helped her reclaim her power; she often felt trapped within what she described as the "white gaze of patriarchy."

Resistance: Second Chamber of a Radical Heart

The following participants described how hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as a liberatory practice fostered self-love as a form of resistance against internalized oppression. hooks (2018) noted that the greatest power individuals can wield against oppression is love. Magnolia similarly discussed the love and acceptance she had gained toward herself after learning how to confront, transform, and resist oppressive thoughts

anchored in how she previously perceived herself as a Black woman experiencing internalized oppression. She noted:

> Usually in my past when I would experience racism, I felt bad. I felt bad that I was Black. I hated being Black. You know, to have someone call you the N word or have someone—because you're passionate and you know what you're talking about—tell you that you're aggressive. That you're just an angry Black woman. It's happened to you so often that you just conditioned yourself for it and you took the labels and you just felt that that was your destiny. This process has helped me identify it, to notice it, to be able to call it out in a positive way. But I think the best thing that I get from this whole experience is that me being Black has nothing to do—me being Black is not the problem. I don't have to carry that anymore. So it has helped me be able to let that baggage go and to really see it for what it is. You know, when you experience those things, you tend to carry them and you tend to expect them in every area of your life. And everywhere you show up so you're on guard. I don't have to live my life like that. And if I do encounter it, that's a problem, but it's not my problem. And I don't have to carry it for you.

Similarly, Ebony wielded love as an act of resistance (Curtice, 2023). She described being rooted in herself, and who she is as a person, as an act of self-love, stating:

> So I think that one of the most important things about dealing with the outside forces is really being rooted. And so as a Black woman that's living in a society that's not changing significantly anytime soon, to be very rooted in myself and grounded is very important, especially if the goal is success, if the goal is to move past these barriers, because the reality is, racism isn't going anywhere, it's still

> going to be here. And sexism is happening. And it just happened to me a few weeks ago in the workplace, sexual harassment, that's why I just left my last job, right? So like I'm living in this reality that as a Black woman in society, I have to live in and come into spaces that are not necessarily open to me as a Black woman. And if I'm not rooted in myself, and what my identity is, and all of the many, many, many layers and depths of who I am, if I'm not rooted and grounded in that, I can be shifted very easily and that's not going to work out in my favor. That's not creating the legacy that I'm talking about manifesting with you, right, like that's not bringing me to that space.

As with Ebony and Magnolia, Ruby claimed self-love for herself and shared her excitement to connect with and get to know herself more by stating the following:

> I think just having a deeper understanding of myself, and how those areas that we've been able to go to, and really see how that's formed, who I am as a person, and how that can easily go into the level of the workforce and being you know, a woman and seeing how those, you know, situations can really tie into who you are and, and to get a better understanding of yourself. And I feel like everything that we've done leading up has definitely been able to help me to connect with myself more and have more appreciation and an understanding, and I feel like moving forward, I'm excited to be able to use these tools. I feel like they are tools of just better understanding myself. So if, let's say, a certain situation would come up, I can kind of know why I might be triggered in some areas or why that might make me feel some type of way when before, I wouldn't be able to tie that together.

Valentina described how this praxis (Freire, 1998; hooks, 1991), by taking the time to reflect on her past, helped her to realize that she deserves the same love and attention that she has poured into her career. According to Valentina:

> Thinking back as to, like, my whole trajectory, like professional trajectory. It's so painful. It's so painful, because it makes me realize, like, damn. I've worked so hard. And I never got paid what I deserved. And I think as Women of Color, like we go in, like I went into teaching wanting to change the world. And man, did it change me. You know, because we face so many obstacles. And it's like, we're expected to not only sacrifice our time, but sacrifice our whole entire life. Teaching becomes our life. And yet, it's never enough. And so it's so painful, because I love the profession so much. But I think I'm learning to love myself more.

Jubilee described self-love as rebuking the feelings of shame and rejection, stating:

> It was interesting to see how feeling shameful, especially in terms of my sexuality and how it stems from feeling rejection, was rooted in an experience I had back from when I was 8 years old. Not being given a chance for someone to get to know me and rejecting me anyway has manifested into me subconsciously worrying about that and thus hiding parts of myself. But, becoming aware of the root cause of this feeling, it was amazing because I realize my shame and fear of rejection, it actually has nothing to do with me and my sexuality. How people choose to accept or reject me is not my problem. I know people will judge me regardless if they take the time get to know me or not—and I can't control that, but again, that's on them. I love and accept me, all parts of me.

Redemption: Third Chamber of a Radical Heart

Participants described redemption found by working with their inner child to transform, heal, and bring closure to past experiences to make them feel whole again (Bradshaw, 1992; van der Kolk, 2015). Dalia discussed visualizing and imagining her deceased mom whom she missed immensely as a moment to reparent her inner child, provide closure, and heal (Bradshaw, 1992; van der Kolk, 2015). Dalia described the following:

> Since last week I had been dealing with different emotions and it was causing me to cry out of nowhere. I was sad and I was feeling hopeless. Given that I was in the right mindset going into the session, I was able to benefit from the session. A day later, I felt like a big weight had been lifted off my shoulders. The hypnotherapy allowed me to reconnect with my mom and bring closure, speaking to my mom because I was so scared to tell her how I really felt. At that moment, I could feel my mom's touch and hug. And definitely the end, where I could speak freely about it and not feel judged. For the first time in a long time, I felt like I got the closure or close to that, for my mom. I felt like I get to be okay with how I feel towards her. One day I will see her again. "Every day above ground is a good day." I think talking to the little girl in me. Letting her know that it's okay and that I was and am good enough. I think for me, it was bringing closure to a lifetime of pain inside. Like, knowing life will still be okay and that I do fit in, that I am good enough. I am enough.

Makenna described the pain and fear she felt revisiting some of her inner child moments, but also noted she had learned to visualize giving her inner child the love, protection, and

comfort she did not receive as a child (van der Kolk, 2015). There was redemptive and healing power of giving back to herself what she felt she needed emotionally (van der Kolk, 2015). According to Makenna:

> Going back to "the first time I felt fear," I didn't know where my mind was going to take me. Being back in that moment brought up a lot of mixed emotion; at some point, I thought about opening my eyes and not staying in that place. I wanted to avoid the feelings that were coming up, the physical symptoms of fear that came up felt like too much to handle. My breathing changed, I began crying, I felt nauseous, I didn't think I was going to be able to verbalize anything and could feel myself picking on my fingers. I've thought about that moment [the first time I felt fear] a lot throughout my lifetime, but never had a way to address it or change the story. I didn't know how much it had affected me. Now, when I think back to that moment, I think about me hugging myself as a child. I can see myself soothing, comforting, and protecting myself. I'm not afraid anymore.

Ruby described the redemptive power and agency she experienced by connecting with her inner child to rescue her from someone who caused immense harm and interpersonal trauma. She noted:

> Confronting my abuser and facing that fear of being alone with him again, feeling the ugliness that was him, and the pain that he inflicted on me, being that scared little girl who was trapped and alone but then, it was empowering to be able to speak up to my abuser and use my voice; to let out the pain and anger that has consumed me for many years. I loved being able to connect to my inner child and

> hold her. To let her know, she is no longer alone. I see her, I love her, and I will protect her.

Rose described the redemptive power experienced while identifying the motivation to work from a place of spite and how working with her inner child brought a sense of self-worth (van der Kolk, 2015) and recognition that she does not need to be driven by spite, but is worthy and capable of success. As Ruby stated:

> I think it was rewarding checking in with my inner child on feelings of confusion and anger towards being held accountable for a mistake I didn't make. Realizing that many of the challenges in my life that I have overcome have been fueled by spite brought some clarity as to why I feel unmotivated to do other things in my life that I want to do. Working only out of spite, or to prove someone wrong, or with the driving factor of like, I'm not fueled unless someone tells me I can't do something, it's been interesting to make that connection. I deserve to work towards my goals without spite as a motivator. I am worthy and capable of success.

Magnolia described the redemptive power of putting what we learned together into practice to help her "show up" for herself and not feel as if she has to hide who she is (Bryant, 2022); as she noted:

> When things come up in my life, for example, so, my niece, she had the Christmas party, and there was going to be a lot of people there that I know of, but I don't actually know them. And sometimes when I'm in that type of environment, I tend to seclude myself. And there was a couple of times that I found myself in the house and I had to talk to, you know, little Magnolia, like

> why are you hiding in the house? Because that's what you're doing? Why are you secluding yourself? And, of course I always want to give the generic answer, like it's cus [*sic*] it's cold outside [laughed]? It's like no, what are you doing? And after I had that conversation with her and let her know that she's safe, I'm going to protect her. We went back outside and we joined the party. I feel stronger in showing up as who I'm destined to be and not trying to hide or shelter myself. So yes, I'm showing up.

Ebony described the redemptive power of inner-child work as a space for connecting the dots and making sense of her life to move past the things in life that have kept her from her goals. She stated:

> I think for me, what was really liberating was having guided conversations with myself during very monumental moments of my childhood that, I think with the guidance of your leadership, and the conversations that we were having, really kind of helped me connect those dots, right? And in those dots, connecting and having, you know, conversations with my childhood self and having conversations with my teenage self, really just helped me to have a full-circle moment, like to move past the things that were hidden within my psyche that I didn't know were really kind of holding me back.

Restoration: Fourth Chamber of a Radical Heart

The following quotes are examples of how the participants experienced restoration as part of the liberatory praxis by reviving integral parts of themselves either physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually (Blackwell, 2023; Bryant, 2022; Bryant-Davis & Comas-Díaz, 2016). Nekita provided an example of how releasing "baggage"

during one of our sessions helped restore her sleep and rest. It is important to note that prior to our sessions, Nekita suffered from severe insomnia. Nekita shared the following:

> The session really helped me visualize and feel what it's like to give people their baggage back. I don't need to carry it. The night after my session, I slept like I haven't in my adult life! Since then, I have experienced a deep sense of serenity. Once I was deep into my envisioning, I just let go and could clearly see myself in the situation as I was being guided. I am learning more and more that I am intuitive and attuned to my inner knowing, I always have been, even when I was a young child. Some people have felt uncomfortable and even threatened by that, and that includes my mother. This has helped me to recognize the importance of honoring my inner knowing without the weight of other people's baggage holding me back.

Ruby also experienced restoration in the sense of restoring visibility, and the belief that she is worthy to be perceived in the world. Ruby described her experience as one where she knew she had a voice, regardless of what others might think or say. She added when she began this project, she felt like she was "nothing and nobody," but eventually realized she deserves to be seen. According to Ruby:

> I feel like this experience allowed me to realize I really do have a voice. You know, just because I'm not as educated as most, you know, most people in my workforce, I still have a voice, I still deserve to be seen and appreciated for what I do contribute. Because it really does take all sorts of roles to make something work, especially in the workforce. So I definitely feel like this gave me a sense of, honestly, confidence. I do deserve to be seen and recognized and heard. So I think

> this kind of gave me a sense of like, a value of appreciation for what I do. And you know, to not let others, even if let's say the higher ups can't see that, then that's okay. I think the main thing was for me to see that within myself along this journey, and I think that's what happened. And for me, that was so rewarding, because I came into this feeling like, well, I'm nothing, I'm nobody, like it's okay that they can't see me. Maybe I need to be such and such and such in order for them to notice me. And at the end of this, I'm like, no, it doesn't matter that I may not have a certain title. I'm here and I deserve to be seen.

Unlike Ruby, who felt invisible in her workplace, Jubilee felt hyper-visible as one of the few Women of Color in her sector. Jubilee described the freedom she felt by rejecting the lie that she does not belong, or that she is an "imposter" (Bernard et al., 2017). Here, Jubilee described restoring her self-worth by affirming that she is enough and that she does belong, stating:

> I have suffered with imposter syndrome what feels like most my life. It has been paralyzing. When I discovered a key source of the trigger goes back to my childhood, it all made sense. I never realized it because I shoved the memory away. But with our sessions, I was able to peacefully approach this issue and talk through something I didn't know had such an impact on me. Doing so allowed me to confront the people and incidents in my life where I was made to feel inadequate, or as if I wasn't enough. But, I am enough. I belong. This all brought a sense of healing. I feel like the more I do hypnotherapy, the more liberating it becomes, and the more open I am to dealing with trauma.

As with Jubilee, Magnolia confronted oppressive internalizations about self-worth and belonging. Magnolia shared the restorative power of inner-child work and how it had helped her "show up" in the world, noting:

> I think being able to go and talk to little Magnolia and help her process some of the things—I'm sorry, I'm trying not to cry—some of the things that she's experienced, and really let go of that trauma and be able to really say with authority, that I deserve that love that I've dreamed about, I deserve that life that I've dreamed about. I deserve that house that I've dreamed about. I am worthy. So being able to talk to little Magnolia, and then show up. And know beyond a shadow of a doubt that I am worthy.

Hypnotherapy (Guided Meditation) as a Space for Decolonizing Traditional Modes of Healing

During the exit interviews, several participants self-disclosed their participation with western therapy in comparison to their experiences with hypnotherapy (guided meditation). Their responses demonstrated the significance of decolonizing hypnotherapy (guided meditation) approaches as a means of providing liberatory therapeutic spaces that meet the needs of historically marginalized groups by confronting sexism, racism, and interpersonal oppression (Comas-Diaz et al., 2019; Grafft et al., 2022; Lee & Boykins, 2022; Saleem et al., 2020). Ebony described her appreciation of a mind, body, and spirit (Bryant, 2022; Linklater, 2014) approach to healing, noting:

> For me, you know, some people like the clinical part of healing, and I really like a mixture of both, so I appreciate that hypnotherapy is backed by research, you know? But, there's this side of me that is very holistic, and I don't really

> subscribe to straight, direct therapy because it doesn't touch into the holistic part that really is a large part of who I am. And so, I need science, but I also need the space that is really directed at my body, my mind, my spirit, the trinity of who I am.

Jubilee described her experience with hypnotherapy (guided meditation) in contrast to her experience with talk therapy, stating:

> I've done therapy before, talk-therapy, things like that. But this genuinely has been, it's been life-changing. Like, it's been a way for me to actually discover more of the root causes of how I feel. I think it's really fascinating, I mean, it's hard work to face some of those things, but it's also fun because I know I'm gonna learn something new about myself after.

Valentina discussed her experience with hypnotherapy (guided meditation) in contrast to the many years of clinical therapy in which she had been participated. Valentina noted:

> I've been in therapy for so many years. And I have never felt so liberated as I am feeling now. And I don't mean like, okay, I'm healed or you know, like that, but like, I honestly even like after the first session, I felt so, how can I say it? Like, if some, like heavy weight I was carrying for so many years was just suddenly removed. And I felt so light, you know. And I think the fact that we never ended the sessions where I was like in mid crisis but I was able to just close that cycle. Right? Bring closure to that event that happened that was still so relevant to who I am today. Even though it's been so many years, so definitely, it felt very liberating. Very, very healing, like, for the first time, I felt like, Okay, this is what it's supposed to feel like, to actually face my fears, to face my, my past traumas

> and, and be like, okay, I got it, you know, I got this and I can keep moving forward without having to carry so much pain.

Nekita compared her experience with hypnotherapy (guided meditation) to behavioral therapy and other wellness practices she had experienced over the years of her healing journey. According to Nekita:

> After our very first session, like, I slept, and I've been sleeping really, really well since. And it was almost, the best way I would describe it, it's almost like well, I've done behavioral therapy for a number of years. And I've tried different like, you know, wellness practices. But this in particular felt like I was purging something from like my innermost depths, if that makes any sense? And nothing had ever worked to this level. Because, I mean, after you explained to me and I did more reading, working with my subconscious is not something that I had engaged with in the past, in a thoughtful way. I had, I think I had shared with you I did maybe one, maybe two experimental sessions, and I didn't feel like I was taken to like my, my subconscious awareness. And this time since the beginning, I really felt like I had spoken to like my inner-most, inner-most layer of myself.

Like Jubilee, Makenna compared her experience with hypnotherapy (guided meditation) to talk therapy, noting:

> You know, I've been to talk therapy before, and a lot of the times, it left me with this feeling of like, okay, so what's next? Or like, unresolved issues too because before I would bring them up, and they [past therapists] were kind of like, oh, yeah, let's brush them off. And let's focus on this instead. You know, and I feel like this was like, no, like, we really got to the bottom of what the issues were. So

> realizing that and addressing the core issues was very helpful, like, it helped me immensely. So for me, like, I feel that I was able to work with a lot of the feelings that I never addressed before. And I was very grateful for that.

Dalia described her experience with hypnotherapy (guided meditation) to the many years of clinical and rehabilitation therapy she had experienced. She stated:

> I've done therapy for years, right? And yeah, it feels good to have a therapy session. But this was different, a different type of therapy, a different type of like, connection. Like, if you go to the psychotherapist to talk about, maybe something that happened in your childhood, right? But then the next session, you're still talking about it. And I felt like with you, every session was a different topic. And every session, I walked out saying like, okay, there were actual connections made or I got some type of closure. It wasn't like next week, we're still going to be talking about this.

Internal Sources and Findings

There were two internal sources of data integral to my project, which I briefly discussed with illustrations in Chapter 3. One source of data included my researcher journal. I used this journal before and after each hypnotherapy (guided meditation) session to self-reflect on my own experiences, and how I perceived the experiences of my participants (i.e., collaborators). The other source of data was my art.

Researcher Journal

The journal component of internal data collection was important for building critical awareness for an ongoing praxis committed to decolonizing my process (Battiste, 2013). Additionally, journaling helped me to join in communal healing (Narvaez & Topa,

2022) as I actively worked to confront, transform, and resist my own internalized oppressions and triggers (Blackwell, 2023).

One key finding I discovered while reading my notes was when I attempted to rely on rigorous and strict protocols (i.e., the antithesis of de/colonial work; Battiste, 2013), I felt less confident, my anxiety skyrocketed, and I began to experience a loss of control; however, as I collaborated with my participants to resist, confront, and transform these oppressive emotions, feelings, and beliefs, I began to feel more empowered. I started to believe in myself more. I began abandoning the scripts and allowing the process to develop in an organic and holistic manner.

As our sessions began to evolve, I meditated more frequently; centered my mind, body, and spirit with more fluidity; and connected with my ancestors genuinely and lovingly. Since then, my worldview has expanded more deeply into one grounded in the spiritual self, nature, and the unknown (Ermine, 1995). This finding was also evidence of the power of de/colonial spaces as communal sites for whole-person emotional and spiritual healing (Bryant, 2022; Curtice, 2023; Narvaez & Topa, 2022). As mentioned, my second source of internal data included art and poetry.

Art and Poetry

I used art as an outlet to express my thoughts throughout the process. The art emerged organically in response to some of my participants' shared experiences with sexual assault and violence, as I am also a survivor of sexual abuse. Engaging with art was a meditative process for me, and often helped me to focus—not on the effects of our experiences, but on ways in which we had the power to transform them (Baird et al., 2019).

One of my art projects included clay. I used the clay to mold a heart. The process of creating something as intricate as a heart out of a piece of clay reminded me of the power of transformation. On particularly tough days during the research process, and even while writing this study, my clay heart remained a constant reminder to rely on the one power that kept me going: love.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of my study, I used multiple data sources to support my findings (Fine & Torre, 2021; Ledwith, 2007). These sources included relevant literature, structured interviews, session data, postsession reflection exercises, and exit interviews. To ensure participants' true responses were reflected, I employed member checking (L. T. Smith, 2023). Member checking provided the opportunity to correct anything I may have incorrectly transcribed.

Limitations and Challenges

There were few limitations to this study. One challenge that emerged with several participants was finding a quiet and private space. Several of my participants were single mothers and identified that finding a quiet and private space to complete their sessions was often tricky. Two participants had to use their car as a space away from noise and distractions. Flexibility and ability to pivot while facilitating a hypnotherapy (guided meditation) session is important.

Disclaimer: I Am Not a Psychologist or Licensed Therapist

It is also important to note that although I am a certified practitioner of hypnotherapy (guided meditation), I am not a psychologist, but an educator, artist, and researcher. My aim in this project was not to make psychological claims, but rather to

focus on my collaborators and their embodied experiences with a de/colonial approach to hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as a liberatory praxis (Freire, 2021; hooks, 1991).

Chapter 4 Summary

In this chapter, I used participant narratives to provide thick descriptions of their individual experiences using hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as a liberatory praxis for confronting, transforming, and resisting internalized oppression. Their experiences provided context and examples into some of the ways hypnotherapy (guided meditation) might be used to build upon important skills such as emotional authenticity, self-awareness, critical reflection, and self-love, which can contribute positively to spiritual and emotional health. In the following chapter, I discuss my findings in greater detail, along with implications to this study. I also discuss some of my findings in relation to existing literature, and how this research can contribute to future policy.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

When I began this dissertation, I described the research as living resistance (Curtice, 2023). I set out to discover how I could use what I knew of hypnotherapy (guided meditation); what I learned (i.e., leadership in higher education); and my passion for social justice to promote new ways of decolonizing the heart, mind, and body (Blackwell, 2023; Linklater, 2014; van der Kolk, 2015). My guiding research question was: How can I use hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as a liberatory praxis for confronting, transforming, and resisting internalized oppression among Women of Color in education? In this chapter, I discuss my findings and relevant literature. In addition, I discuss the implications of this project for practice, policy, and future research, along with its influence on my leadership. I conclude this discussion with my next steps.

Discussion

First, it is important to explain that when I began my literature review, I aimed to understand the numerous ways in which systemic oppression negatively affects the health and well-being of Women of Color (Chancellor, 2019). As a Woman of Color attempting to make sense of my own experiences and a researcher preparing to engage in decolonizing work (Battiste, 2013; Manion & Shah, 2019; Mullan, 2023), this objective was essential for me.

I believed if I was to truly commit to hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as a liberatory practice for Women of Color in education, it was my responsibility to conduct a thorough analysis of race- and sex-based trauma to better inform my practice. Although I confirmed these experiences were widespread among all participants, I intentionally did

not include specific details in the data or in this discussion. Each participant shared personal accounts of sexual assault, violence, rape, or other emotional and physical harm; thus, I committed to not giving racism and sexism additional power or attention, nor exploiting the participant's experiences or the sacredness of the safe place we created together. Instead, I decided to focus on the compelling stories of my participants (i.e., collaborators) as they demonstrated personal growth, development, and liberation through their experiences with hypnotherapy (guided meditation).

Findings

For this discussion, I continue with my arts-based analysis and interpretations by using my metaphor of the four chambers of a radical heart. What I witnessed from my collaborators was a "third world" (paperson, 2017, p. 55) of transformation that began from within the spiritual heart. The findings of this study suggested the four chambers of a radical heart work together, as with the anatomical heart, to confront, transform, and resist internalized oppression. According to the themes that emerged through my arts-based analysis, transcriptions, and interviews, the four chambers of a radical heart included resistance, empowerment, restoration, and redemption.

Resistance

Freire (2018) suggested a radical approach to transformation requires entering fully into one's reality via internal dialogue to better understand the constructs shaping the way an individual perceives their existence. Several collaborators expressed that hypnotherapy (guided meditation) provided a space to reflect critically about their own lived experiences and the systems that exist to oppress, which Freire (2018) asserted can further build the capacity to resist.

It is important to clarify that, as seen with my participants (i.e., collaborators), "resistance goes beyond coping. Coping helps [to] manage distress in the moment, but it is not a long-term solution" (Bryant, 2022, p. 215). Resistance is an active fight, so that "oppression does not have the final say in [one's] life" (Bryant, 2022, p. 215). Although many participants had experienced ways to cope with feelings of anxiety, depression, sadness, and unworthiness in past therapeutic experiences, none of them had ever addressed the root cause of those emotions, namely oppression. As they developed resistance skills through hypnotherapy (guided meditation), participants were able to take empowered action to transform and resist their internalized oppression by practicing what they learned during the sessions (Barker et al., 2010; Du Plessis et al., 2021; Lynn et al., 2020).

As one participant, Jubilee, described, hypnotherapy (guided meditation) helped her in the following way:

> Become aware of where certain feelings and emotions are rooted, because I stop to think about it, and really try to go back deep. Now I know the root cause and can tackle that for what it is. I just never really had a tool, or knew how to do that before, so it's pretty amazing.

Being able to stop and pause before reacting, thereby cultivating deeper self-awareness, can also be very empowering (Bryant, 2022; Palmer, 1993; Stromquist, 2015).

Empowerment

Scholars have described empowerment as reclaiming one's "voice, power, and agency" (Bryant-Davis et al., 2021, p. 17). Many participants described feeling empowered when using skills such as emotional authenticity, which was "not only about

recognizing what [they] feel but also about learning to express and regulate those feelings so that [they could] be at home with the emotions without drowning in them" (Bryant, 2021, p. 78). My participants (i.e., collaborators) also found power in facing emotions and fears, which was not always easy, as "dominator culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk" (hooks, 2003, as cited in Eagle, 2022, para. 7). By pushing themselves past their comfort zones and resisting fear, participants discovered the power to confront past trauma and the emotion associated with fear to disempower the oppressor still in their minds. In some of these cases, the oppressor was an individual who harmed them when they were a child, to which such growth was not only empowering, but redemptive (Curtice, 2023; Mener & Mener, 2022).

Redemption

Using hypnotherapy (guided meditation), each participant used their imagination to confront their childhood oppressor, acting as their own hero to their inner child (Bradshaw, 1992). Many participants described the transformative influence of the inner child work that took place during our sessions. As one participant, Ruby, described:

> It was powerful to remind my inner child how far we have come and that we will be okay moving forward. It brought so much relief to feel like a whole person again, no longer needing to see my past self as an enemy.

This exercise was one way in which the participants and I practiced decolonizing the mind while thinking critically and reflectively about the roles of socialization, identity politics, and the freedom to reject. As Bryant (2022) described:

> The lies we have been told about our worthiness and to take the radical step of claiming and reclaiming our identity as an inheritance, a gift, and a treasure. To

> be a marginalized person and still know that you are beautiful, intelligent, and significant is revolutionary. (p. 210)

The claiming and reclaiming of identity was not only an act of redemption, but an act of restoration and homecoming for both my participants and myself.

Restoration and Homecoming

Homecoming, or "coming home to yourself, doesn't mean there won't be any more difficult days or seasons, but it does mean that you are better equipped to honor yourself and not abandon yourself on the journey" (Bryant, 2022, p. 220). The findings of my project suggested the participants experienced hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as a resource to build skills to honor themselves through self-acceptance, and used self-love as a way of honoring themselves as whole people.

One participant, Magnolia, described her hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as a way to accomplish the following:

> To really let go of that trauma and be able to really say with authority that I deserve that love that I've dreamed about, I deserve that life that I've dreamed about. . . . And know beyond a shadow of a doubt that I am worthy.

Significance of This Study

Through an arts-based analysis and a de/colonial reconstruction of hypnotherapy (guided meditation), my findings suggested that hypnotherapy (guided meditation) can be a transformative and liberatory praxis for confronting, transforming, and resisting internalized oppression among Women of Color. My findings also suggested hypnotherapy's (guided meditation) potential as a resource not only among Women of Color, but also among Communities of Color. Hypnotherapy (guided meditation)

practitioners and educators who are committed to decolonization should consider the following implications for practice, policy, and future research.

First, this study was significant because the findings highlighted the existence of systemic oppression that has continued to subjugate Women of Color through sexism and racism in education (Bryant-Davis & Comas-Díaz, 2016; Comas-Díaz et al., 2019; Rosenwasser, 2002). Further, the findings reinforced the need to decolonize education as an act of social justice (Fanon, 2021; Garvey, 1938/2010). Lastly, the study emphasized the importance of incorporating spiritual health and wellness resources (Bhattacharya & Payne, 2016; Curtice, 2023; Menakem, 2017), such as hypnotherapy (guided meditation; Narvaez & Topa, 2022) into educational spaces as an act of resistance against internalized and systemic oppression (Crenshaw, 1991; Freire, 2018; hooks, 1994).

Implications of Decolonizing Hypnotherapy (Guided Meditation)

During the length of my project, I emphasized the importance of hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as a liberatory praxis for decolonizing westernized healing spaces to be more inclusive of diverse needs of Women of Color (Bryant, 2022; Menakem, 2017; Narvaez & Topa, 2022). What I came to realize is I may have had some of this prioritization backwards. It was not that hypnotherapy (guided meditation) created the space for de/colonial work to take place; rather, the process of decolonizing hypnotherapy and reclaiming hypnosis marked a return to its Indigenous roots as a spiritual, holistic, and therapeutic modality (Narvaez & Topa, 2022). The practice created the space for the connection between heart, mind, and body (Blackwell, 2023; Comas-Díaz et al., 2019; Levine et al., 2022).

Hypnotherapy (Guided Meditation) Is Not a Replacement Therapy

One of the goals of my research was to explore my role as a decolonizing agent (paperson, 2017) within the practice of hypnotherapy (guided meditation), though hypnotherapy is a complementary therapy, not a standalone treatment. Still, decolonizing hypnotherapy (guided meditation) has exciting potential as an additional source of spiritual healing, wellness, and restoration by and for Communities of Color and in social justice-oriented contexts.

Hypnotherapy (Guided Meditation) Is Not a One-Size-Fits-All Approach

When using hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as a liberatory praxis, it is essential for practitioners to remember that hypnosis (guided meditation) is not a one-size-fits-all approach, particularly when encountering emotive experiences rooted in sexism and racism. As an example, all participants in this study had encountered racism and sexism at the institutional level; however, the ways in which they navigated transforming and resisting internalized oppression differed in each hypnotherapy (guided meditation) session based on the intersection of multiple factors, personal histories, and contexts. It would be problematic for practitioners to generalize how Women of Color experience and manage sexism and racism.

Language, Imagery, and Context Matter for Decolonizing Hypnotherapy (Guided Meditation) Scripts

Additionally, scripts for hypnotherapy (guided meditation) should only be used as a guide, not as the actual process itself. It is important for practitioners working with diverse communities to be mindful of language, imagery, and context. Whether hypnotherapy (guided meditation) is delivered virtually, one-on-one while in person, or

in a group, a de/colonial framework for hypnotherapy (guided meditation) should consider the importance of creating a safe and sacred space for both the guide and participant.

Recommendations to Fully Engage in Decolonizing Hypnotherapy (Guided Meditation) as a Liberatory Praxis

To fully engage in decolonizing hypnotherapy (guided meditation), it is critical for practitioners to surrender to the process and allow the spiritual, holistic, and medicinal art of hypnosis (guided meditation) to reclaim itself by not conforming to scripts, but rather by allowing the process to exist within a sacred and ritual space (Narvaez & Topa, 2022). I discovered by doing so, both the practitioner and collaborators can cocreate a space in which the hierarchical structure and power dynamics typical of conventional healing spaces are abandoned to allow for a more egalitarian environment (Linklater, 2014). Such an approach fosters a heart-centered approach where participants can incorporate all aspects of themselves as whole people: mind, body, and spirit (Blackwell, 2023; Comas-Díaz et al., 2019; Levine et al., 2022).

For practitioners with a commitment to social justice, hypnotherapy (guided meditation) can be an excellent resource and instrument for discussing critical issues such as racism and sexism. One of the driving forces behind this belief is because of the capacity of de/colonial sites to foster community and belonging (Linklater, 2014; Narvaez & Topa, 2022). Designating spaces where de/colonial approaches to hypnotherapy (guided meditation) can take place within communities and perhaps even on school campuses might promote social change and transformation (Perfect & Champagne, 2019). As an educator, my position is that schools are underused

environments that should be used to provide resources, such as hypnotherapy (guided meditation), for both students and instructors.

Introducing Hypnotherapy (Guided Meditation) Into School Settings

I propose that hypnotherapy's (guided meditation) uses and benefits be viewed as a communicative instrument that can foster and create de/colonial healing spaces in educational contexts, which are often sites of struggle and resistance against oppressive forces. Senate Bill 577 (SB 577) may provide a pathway for schools to support and implement hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as an option for both students and teachers, as mental health and wellness efforts have continued to be of growing concern in the United States (Abrams, 2022; Lee & Boykins, 2022; Mental Health America [MHA], n.d.-b).

Policy and Future Research

Because the United States has not implemented a national health program with universal coverage, access to health care has remained frequently lacking (Abrams, 2022; Lee & Boykins, 2022; MHA, n.d.-b). Often, complementary and alternative medicine education provided within a school setting is intended to satisfy students' health care needs (Abrams, 2022). One study at the University of New Mexico–Taos implemented an innovative curriculum in holistic health and healing arts (Ellis-Sankari, 2009). This program allowed entry-level students, the majority of whom came from low-income and Indigenous backgrounds, to explore alternative therapies in a supportive, low-cost environment (Ellis-Sankari, 2009). Students acquired new health care behaviors and preventive strategies that lessened their reliance on allopathic medicine (Ellis-Sankari, 2009).

The work done at the University of New Mexico–Taos demonstrated the use of a de/colonial approach to finding resources for their students that fosters respect for the values and practices of Indigenous belief systems (Ellis-Sankari, 2009). The college corridor provided a safety net and a springboard for the underserved and an opportunity to address health disparities while promoting integrative approaches to health care from the standpoint of social justice (Ellis-Sankari, 2009). My hope for future research and policy is that my study might encourage more research into the use of hypnotherapy (guided meditation) in California schools.

In 2002, Governor Davis signed into law California SB 577 (California Legislative Information, 2002). SB 577, as Davis claimed when he signed it, "eases access to alternative and complementary health care alternatives for all Californians" and "provides proper protections for California consumers and allows them to make educated decisions on their own health care" (California Legislative Information, 2002, para. 4). With the backing of SB577, the use of complementary alternative health resources may acquire greater momentum and be met with less opposition and reluctance from those who see holistic health as taboo (Lynn et al., 2020).

In California, many people already opt to access alternative methods to health and wellness (California Health Freedom Coalition, 2002). The participants' experiences in this study can help debunk the fear and misconceptions associated with hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as a complementary therapy. Destigmatizing hypnotherapy (guided meditation) is especially important among Communities of Color who may benefit, as my participants showed, from the practice of hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as an act of resistance to internalized oppression. My project can serve as a springboard for future

research into offering a decolonized approach to hypnotherapy (guided meditation) as a means of confronting, transforming, and resisting oppression in educational institutions such as colleges and universities. Decolonizing the mind and uprooting internalized beliefs rooted in oppressive ideologies is a crucial step for developing agency, empowerment, and connectedness among Communities of Color (Bryant, 2022; Curtice, 2023; Seidl, 1993). In the following section, I discuss how this project shaped my growth as leader, along with the next steps I plan to take as an educator, artist, and critical action researcher.

My Growth as a Leader

In earlier versions of this manuscript, I was careful in describing how the completion of this dissertation enhanced my leadership; for example, this process enabled me to develop a more conscientious commitment to a vision of a more just world. Or, as a leader, I learned the task of constructing a just world occurs not only between communities, but also within oneself.

This caution was not to imply these statements were not true, they were; however, following my last draft, I discovered more about myself as a leader that I believe added a greater depth and level of authenticity than I was previously willing to share. My transformation as a leader was shaped by embracing my rage while also enacting love and accepting my whole self.

Growth as a Leader: Embracing Rage

What I learned during this process, as a leader committed to social justice, is how to embrace my rage without being ashamed of it. I used to be embarrassed of my anger. Once I made peace with this feeling, the anger no longer consumed and controlled me.

Rather, I channeled and controlled the power of this emotion so that I could harness and use this energy wisely and strategically. Doing so helped center my role and commitment to decolonizing education while in leadership roles, positions, and educational spaces. As a Woman of Color, I am confident that I will continue to encounter sexist and racist experiences in both my daily and working life. Not feeling the shame of my anger and rage, but knowing that I have the power and agency to pause before reacting—and the power to not allow anyone to trigger my rage because I have control—makes me feel more prepared to walk into predominantly white and male spaces as both a leader and advocate for social justice.

Growth as a Leader: Enacting Love

I believe the most powerful energetic frequency is love. I believe love, as with rage, is an emotion and energy that can be channeled, and humans are all conduits. When individuals take the time to heal their wounds and detach themselves from their obsession with the physical and material world, they are free to see the world as it is, without attachment. On this basis, it is possible to create an infinite universe in which anything is possible, such as decolonizing minds, bodies, and educational spaces. Having rage and love as leadership developments may seem contradictory, but as I reflected on my experience throughout this project, I imagined the scales of justice with rage on one side and love on the other.

On my scale, love will always outweigh rage. Even when I do not have enough rage to channel and propel me through particularly oppressive circumstances, love will always be my primary source of energy. One might ask: Why not get rid of rage altogether? Ideally, there would be no scale of rage and love, just love, harmony, and

peace; however, until all people are free from all forms of oppression, my rage will not cease to exist because social injustice will always perpetuate rage within me. I never want to lose that part of myself. I never want to become desensitized or numb to the injustices of the world. Although love is my primary source of energy, rage is my reserve battery. The point I am trying to make is this: at any moment, I can use the energy from rage or love to fuel my work to fight against colonial oppression. I have a choice. I have the power, whereas those in positions to oppress me do not. Lastly, I believe the third way I grew as a leader in this process is through the experience of accepting my whole self.

Accepting My Whole Self as a Leader

As far back as I can recall, I remember constantly desiring to belong but never feeling like I was enough. As I have continued my journey of self-discovery, I have reclaimed my Indigenous ancestry by rejecting colonial labels such as Hispanic and Latina (Reynoso, 2018); yet, I have continued to struggle to find a place in the community into which I so ardently wish to be welcomed. Language has created a divide between how I perceive myself and how others view me. Because I do not speak Spanish, I have been frequently excluded by my community. Nevertheless, I understand that this exclusion is also a consequence of colonialism. The colonial origins of oppression, which dominated my parents' lives in so many ways, had the ability to influence the decisions they felt were necessary to safeguard me. Perhaps they wanted to insulate me from prejudices they encountered or opportunities they believed I would miss. My parents endeavored to ensure that I was as Americanized as possible, which translated to English being the only language I would learn, despite my mother's and father's fluency in Spanish and Tagalog, respectively. Even though their intention was to ensure my survival

in a white world, I longed desperately for belonging, which I found in neither my Mexican American nor Pilipino American communities.

Instead, I found refuge in my German heritage by joining the German club in high school. To my surprise, I was well received by most of the blond-hair and blue-eyed students, although I could not identify with any of them, which maintained a layer of disconnection. Not to mention, I received glares of contempt from some of the girls, who clearly thought I was taking up space where I should not have been.

As of this writing, I am far removed from being a teenager; yet, I have continued to decolonize and undo the internalized pain and oppression I experienced from both my youth and generations of trauma—I say with pride and so much love that I am worthy. I belong. Still, I feel a deep sense of sadness. I cannot help but think about how many students might be going through something similar, just like I did, yearning for a sense of belonging and connection. As a leader, my experiences will continue to drive my passion for creating more opportunities to foster connection and belonging, especially in educational spaces.

This program and my study provided the space necessary for me to enter into community with my collaborators who also sought for a third place to call home. Together through hypnotherapy (guided meditation), we created a sacred and ritual space, our third space of the heart, to join in spiritual healing and community together.

Next Steps

As I continue my work in education and hypnotherapy (guided meditation), I intend to teach the praxis of a decolonized approach to hypnotherapy (guided meditation) in educational settings through workshops. I am confident that the skills that can be

strengthened and developed through my practice (e.g., critical self-reflection, visualization, self-awareness, empowerment, resistance, self-love) will be beneficial to educators and students alike. In addition, I plan to publish my research in various academic journals to raise awareness and create a space for dialogue regarding healing spaces that are intentionally designed to address oppression and include whole-person modes of spiritual healing to include the mind, body, and spirit.

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