From Their Own Voices: The Lived Experiences of African Americans Exposed to Jim Crow

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FROM THEIR OWN VOICES: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICANS EXPOSED TO JIM CROW

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ABSTRACT

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December 2015

Dissertation supervised by Professor Lisa Lopez Levers

Researchers have become increasingly interested in the impact of racism on African Americans; however, because interactions involving racism are highly subjective, it can be difficult to assert the presence of trauma in a social science context. Thus, whereas literature regarding the effects of racism is abundant, few studies have explored the effects of being exposed to the laws of the “Jim Crow” era. This study sought to illuminate the lived experiences of African Americans who were exposed to the racial caste system known as Jim Crow. This inquiry looked at transgenerational trauma, exploring exposure to decades of legal discrimination, while also illuminating experiences of resilience and posttraumatic growth. These lived experiences were
examined within the theoretical frameworks of Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model, existentialism, and critical race theory.

This qualitative, phenomenological investigation was conducted through two focus groups comprising nine African Americans, ages 64 to 86. The participants were recruited from various communities in Western Pennsylvania, and all of them reported some exposure to the Jim Crow era. Data were collected via videotaping of the group interviews, which later were transcribed, and by means of a reflexive journal. The findings of this study identify themes that address risk factors present and protective factors used during the Jim Crow era, the sense of helplessness and despair evoked by Jim Crow, and the desire to teach younger generations of African Americans about Jim Crow. Notably, resiliency was identified as the chief factor enabling the participants to survive their encounters with Jim Crow and even to thrive throughout their lives. This study lays the foundation for future research regarding the effects of Jim Crow, and the results may be especially useful to counselors who work with the African American population.
DEDICATION

First and foremost, this is dedicated to my mother, Kimberlyn Renee Jenkins Carter-Goliah. You were my best friend and my confidant. You guided me and gave me a foundation that will carry me through life. Though you are not physically here, your impact on my life is monumental. I yearn for you to be here with me, to hear your voice, and that iconic laugh, but I trust that God knows best. I love you and miss you. This is for you. To the man who raised me as his own, Charles Goliah, what a figure you were, strong, intimidating, and soft as a teddy bear (smile). You took Bobby and me in and raised us as your own and for that I will always be grateful. To my grandmommy, Ruthie Jenkins, what a strong Black woman you were! A woman well before her time. You were loyal to your family, made sure they were cared for and protected, all while chasing your dreams and nursing the sick back to good health. I will always love you. Uncle Cutty, Albert Jenkins Jr., you were such a fun and loving spirit and so genuine and honest, someone I could have a real conversation with and was always honest with me. I wish you could be here to share this moment with me. To my paternal grandparents, Junius and Olive Carter, what trailblazers! You both fought for the very thing I am writing about. The response I receive when I say I am Cannon Carter’s granddaughter shows me that you all touched so many lives, and though you are no longer here, your memory will live on forever. I hope I have made all of you all proud!
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CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM

Those who have been the victims of years, decades, and centuries of oppression first must heal from injuries received first-hand, as well as those passed down through ages. Those who have been the perpetrators of these unspeakable crimes, and those who continue to benefit from those crimes, have to honestly confront their deeds and heal from the psychic wounds that come with being the cause and beneficiaries of such great pain and suffering (Leary, 2005).

The experience of African Americans is unique among American ethnic minorities (Marger, 2003). No other minority group entered the society as involuntary immigrants and endured several hundred years of slavery (Marger, 2003). These unfortunate facts account for the continued conflict between Whites and Blacks as well as the agonizing struggle of Blacks to adjust and conform to a predominately White society (Marger, 2003). The history of the Black American is complex but there is no disagreement that it is a history marked by the stress of trying to conform to the culture and institutions of a White dominated society (Marger, 2003).

African Americans have been victimized and continually oppressed by the dominant society. In 1865, after the ending of slavery, there were numerous attempts to establish laws relegating African Americans to second-class citizenship. For this inquiry, the focus will be on the racial caste system known as Jim Crow. Because there are African Americans still living who vividly can remember “Whites only” signage and can recall stories regarding the enslavement of their family, it is critical that they be given the opportunity to tell their stories. Often, African Americans are told to “get over it,” referring to slavery and Jim Crow. But is that possible? Is it possible for individuals to
“get over” a trauma that continues to plague them? Attitudes must change from African Americans and society as a whole. There must be a willingness to understand the experiences of African Americans, and African Americans have to be willing to share experiences. Individuals who have first-hand experiences of Jim Crow are dying, but their stories and experiences should not die with them. Their stories and experiences should be shared, appreciated, and learned from.

**Background of the Problem**

W.E.B. Dubois was the first African American to earn a doctoral degree from Harvard University. He researched African American social organizations and culture and was interested in social change. Dubois felt other scholars should study the issue of racism in America (Young & Deskins, 2001). “One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (DuBois, 1903, p. 9). This quote speaks to the racial climate in the United States for centuries and provides a glimpse into the struggles of African Americans. Not only is there an internal struggle, of which Dubois speaks, but the external struggle came in the form of the discriminatory state laws know as Jim Crow. These laws restricted many aspects of the African Americans’ personal and social lives.

Although Jim Crow laws are now null and void, institutional racism has persisted. Of special significance here, little attention has been given to elderly African Americans who lived through that period in history, and little resolution has been offered concerning the historical trauma from previous generations. Being able to provide a platform for African Americans who were exposed to these unjust laws may offer some emotional and
psychological peace to those individuals. Since there is little significant research exploring the affects being exposed to Jim Crow laws has on an individual, a study of this nature can add to the field of counseling.

Jim Crow laws are a shameful part of the United States history, and the foundation of those laws (racism, discrimination, and intolerance) are so deeply rooted in the American fiber, that it is often unacknowledged and treated as an issue of the past (Mosley, 2012). Although progress has been made to improve race relations and the racial climate from the early to mid-1900, the continued exposure to racism are lasting and traumatic. Leary (2005) explains trauma as:

an injury caused by an outside, usually violent, force, event or experience. We can experience this injury physically, emotionally, psychologically, and/or spiritually. Traumas can upset our equilibrium and sense of well-being. If a trauma is severe enough it can distort our attitudes and beliefs. Such distortions often result in dysfunctional behaviors, which can in turn produce unwanted consequences. If one traumatic experience can result in distorted attitudes, dysfunctional behaviors and unwanted consequences, this pattern is magnified exponentially when a person repeatedly experiences severe trauma, and it is much worse when the traumas are caused by human beings. (p. 14)

This excerpt speaks directly to the African American experience. When strides and accomplishments were made for the improvement of African American life, there were setbacks. When unjust laws were deemed unfair and unjust, another law would be put into place attempting to achieve the same discriminatory goal: second-class and unequal to those of the White-dominated society. There was a vicious cycle of hope and
then despair from Blacks for generations. It is not common for racism to be viewed as a trauma, but many African Americans’ experiences in this society have been very traumatizing. The trauma did not cease with the end of the Jim Crow laws; it was just redesigned (Alexander, 2010), and African Americans have been on the receiving end of that trauma for hundreds of years.

When examining the need for a study of this caliber in which elder African Americans can “unload” feelings regarding racial mistreatment, it is vital to recognize that older African Americans may not enlist the assistance of professional counselors for several reasons: 1) they may feel others are uninterested in their stories (Shellman, 2004), 2) lack of diversity in the field that can cause feelings of being misunderstood or misinterpreted, and 3) lack of understanding of cultural beliefs. These three factors can cause elder African Americans to abandon any ideas of developing a therapeutic relationship, and they are left to reconcile the feelings of continued racial discrimination on their own. To understand the trauma that has occurred to African Americans, it is necessary to understand the historical context of the culture that influences how people make meaning of trauma (Hyatt-Burkhart & Lopez-Levers, 2012).

**Historical Perspective**

The mid-Atlantic slave trade also known as the Middle Passage was the kidnapping and transport of people from Africa to various parts of the world that lasted over 500 years (Evans, 1962). Slaves were exposed to diseases and malnutrition, causing many to die before reaching their final destination (Evans, 1962). Once in America, slaves were engaged in agriculture work that included crops of cotton, hemp, rice, tobacco, and sugar cane (Evans, 1962). Evans also stated the slave industry consisted of
two types of firms: one owned or rented the capital goods (slaves) and used them as factors of production to produce a marketable commodity (labor services) or combined them with other factors to produce marketable commodities (cotton, railroad services, gold, etc.). The other owned those capital goods (female slaves) that were used to produce new capital goods (slaves) and some firms, usually plantations, engaged in all three, producing labor services, agricultural products, and new slaves.

The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 freed the slaves in the confederate states and in 1865, slavery was considered unconstitutional (Alexander, 2010). According to Alexander, without the labor of former slaves, there was no longer a formal mechanism for maintaining racial hierarchy and preventative measures for separating African Americans from society. Many believed a new system of racial control was needed now that there were 4 million newly freed slaves in the country (Alexander, 2010). It was unclear what laws would be established for Whites to maintain control now that slavery was abolished, but as a result of the end of slavery, White supremacy flourished (Alexander, 2010).

Jim Crow was a racial caste system that operated primarily, but not exclusively, in southern and Border States between 1877 and the mid-1960s (Alexander, 2010). Jim Crow was more than a series of rigid anti-Black laws; it was a way of life by which Americans were expected to abide (Alexander, 2010). Jim Crow represented the legitimization of anti-Black racism, and once again African Americans were relegated to the status of second-class citizens. According to Pilgrim (2012), the Jim Crow system had the following beliefs:
Whites were superior to Blacks in all important ways, including but not limited to intelligence, morality, and civilized behavior; sexual relations between Blacks and Whites would produce a mongrel race which would destroy America; treating Blacks as equals would encourage interracial sexual unions; any activity which suggested social equality encouraged interracial sexual relations; if necessary, violence must be used to keep Blacks at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. (para. 2)

African Americans endured nearly 100 years of Jim Crow laws following slavery. As African Americans protested the unjust treatment, the Ku Klux Klan reasserted itself committing murders, castrations, and bombing Black homes and churches (Alexander, 2010). Although there is some uncertainty regarding the beginning and end of Jim Crow, what is known is that the dismantling of Jim Crow began with the historic case of the Brown vs. Board of Education of the City of Topeka, Kansas decision in 1954 (Alexander, 2010). Blacks had become outraged over the oppression and discriminatory laws, which eventually led to the Civil Rights Movement (Alexander, 2010).

The Civil Rights Movement was a pivotal time in the 20th century with goals to outlaw discriminatory laws that oppressed African Americans (Morris, 1999). This movement had countless supporters who agreed that the treatment and laws that oppressed African Americans were unconstitutional. People of all races and ethnic backgrounds rallied, marched, and protested together for the abolishment of the Jim Crow laws. African Americans were so vilified that the individuals who supported equal rights, regardless of color, were subjected to the same treatment as African Americans (Alexander, 2010). After the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 the focus shifted
from segregation to poverty, class, and crime, with race still being an underlying issue (Alexander, 2010). The purpose of providing a rich historical context for this inquiry is to illuminate the oppression of African Americans that will allow for a deeper understanding of the experiences for those who lived through Jim Crow and the posttraumatic growth that has occurred as a result of it.

**Statement of the Problem**

The phrase “post-racial society” has become a common statement with the election of the nation’s first African American president. With the escalating amount of serious threats, many racial in nature, received by President Barack Obama as well as the mass incarceration of African Americans at extraordinary levels (Dawson & Bobo, 2009), our society may not be as “post-racial” as some would think. There seems to be a discount of racism in contemporary society and a disregard of racism in the past. This contrived feeling of living in a “post-racial society” can deny many African American elders the opportunity to share their stories and discuss the magnitude of being invalidated and disrespected as a human being. Ignoring the trauma this population faced as it pertained to the legal caste system known as Jim Crow does not nullify it; it actually serves to further traumatize the individual.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to capture the narratives of still-living African American survivors of the Jim Crow era. Specifically, the research will be able to document the lived experiences of elder African Americans who lived with the overt racism during the time that Jim Crow laws were enforced. Through this research, I will provide a rich historical overview and explore the concept of transgenerational trauma. I
also will examine the coping strategies developed to assist in overcoming these experiences. A secondary purpose of this study is to provide a foundation of research that illuminates the racism experienced by the elder African American population in ways that can contribute to the field of professional counseling, with a special emphasis on enhancing counselors’ understandings of racism and the transgenerational effects of historical trauma.

**Objectives to Be Investigated**

**Transgenerational Trauma**

Transgenerational trauma is when the traumatic experiences of one generation are unconsciously transmitted to future generations (Mendelssohn, 2008). Levers (2012) notes that when such trauma, also referred to as historical trauma, goes unaddressed, it continues across generations. The premise behind historical trauma is that subsequent generations are affected by the experiences of previous generations through a variety of ways, such as parenting, expression, and mental illness (Sotero, 2006). Sotero also suggests that subsequent generations experience “vicarious victimization” through storytelling and oral traditions of the population. The retelling of the stories may cause the trauma to become embedded in the social memory of the population (Sotero, 2006). Connecting the past with the present is woven into the fiber of many cultural traditions (Sotero, 2006). The subjugation and loss of important contributors to a culture, such as language, culture, and tradition, are also traumatizing.

When examining the state of the Black community, there is often a tremendous amount of blame placed on external factors. The urban community is often blamed for its offensive statements and emphasis on material possessions, such as cars, rims, and
money. Movies and other streams of visual media are blamed for the disproportionate number of children born to single Black mothers and which can cause the over-sexualized depiction of Black women. The stereotype of the shiftless, lazy, and unintelligent Black man is the reason for the number of unemployed Blacks; however, the historical trauma that Blacks have suffered is rarely viewed as a contributor (Prier, 2012). Prier then goes on to discuss this in the contemporary realm as it relates to urban youth and hip-hop culture. He talks about hip-hop being a scapegoat and the importance of recognizing the significance of the centuries of trauma.

**Post-traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS)**

Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome exists when a population has experienced transgenerational trauma resulting from centuries of slavery and continues to experience oppression and discrimination (Leary, 2005). Leary discusses three patterns of behavior that arise as a result of PTSS: vacant esteem, ever-present anger, and racist socialization.

Vacant esteem is when individuals have little or no self-worth and is the result of three spheres of influence: society, community, and family. It actualizes when the three influences present a very negative and limiting identity (Leary, 2005). Because vacant esteem is a symptom of PTSS, it is passed down through generations. This belief that one has little or no value produces behaviors that devalue others (Leary, 2005).

According to Leary (2005), ever-present anger is the most common behavior patterns associated with PTSS. Feeling anger is a large part of the African American experience. For centuries, Blacks have been lied to about freedom, inclusion, civil rights, housing, happiness, security, education, and jobs (Leary, 2005). When the historical component of slavery is added, Blacks learned that anger and violence were necessary to
ensuring their needs (Leary, 2005). Taking all of this into consideration, Leary states, “Even when we’re feeling good, an ever present anger resides just below our surface” (p. 138).

Racist socialization is described as the adoption of the slave master’s value system (Leary, 2005). This is the belief that White and anything associate with White is superior and all things associate with Black are inferior (Leary, 2005). This is manifested in various ways, such as beauty, success, and violence (Leary, 2005). Some African Americans have been systematically and traumatically programmed believe and accept inferiority and little has changed since the abolishment of slavery, and this belief continues to infiltrate all aspects of American life (Leary, 2005).

**Race**

The evaluation of race is crucial to this study. The biological meaning of race classifies humans based on certain hereditary characteristics that differentiate them from other groups (Marger, 2003). The term *race* has also been used to categorize humans by groups, such as by skin color, religion, and nationality (Marger, 2003). Although there have been attempts for centuries to classify race, there has been very little resolve or agreement among biologists and scientist. For the purpose of this study, race will be used to describe Americans of African descent whose ancestry is traceable to the Mid-Atlantic slave trade, and because race is such an exhaustive topic and debate, I will centralize my focus on the social meaning of race which is the significance people attach to race that affects their interrelations with others (Marger, 2003).

The concept of race is a changing construct that reflects the social, political, and economic climate of the time (Humes & Hogan, 2009). According to Humes and Hogan,
there is no firm distinction between race and ethnicity because both are used to identify groups. During the 19th century, it was believed to be important to measure the degree to which a person was “pure White” or “pure Black” because there were permanent differences that relegated Blacks to an inferior status (Humes & Hogan, 2009). In societies that are multiethnic, individuals of various groups are treated differently, which is not done by chance but by a well-established set of cultural rules (Marger, 2003). This happens because the dominant groups are favored and given preferential treatment by the economy and the state, while the minorities are relegated to lower positions (Marger, 2003). It is also important to note that the “social classification of races is that the perceived physical differences among groups are assumed to correspond to social or behavioral differences” (p. 23). This is what leads to groups being discriminated against and judged based on physical characteristics.

The concept of race often causes division in societies. As long as the belief exists that there are differences in selected physical traits, those beliefs will be acted on, thus, affecting interrelations with other (Marger, 2003). For example, if Blacks are believed to be less intelligent and inferior by the dominant culture, they will be treated as such (Marger, 2003). This mindset also speaks to the concept of “self-fulfilling prophecy,” a concept used by Robert Merton (Isaksen, 2012). This refers to the process by which individuals act on the basis of expectation and often has (Isaksen, 2012).

**Racism**

According to Marger (2003), ethnic groups are ranked in a hierarchy creating a system of inequality. Groups ranked highly in a hierarchy maintain dominance over those lower in the hierarchy, and the belief system required to rationalize the dominance is
known as racism. Marger then goes on to define racism as “the belief that humans are subdivided into distinct hereditary groups that are innately different in their social behavior and mental capacities and that can therefore be ranked as superior or inferior” (p. 25). Racism has been used for the social control of minorities, particularly African Americans, for centuries (Alexander, 2010). According to Harris and Majors (1993), the values of Caucasians have formed the rules of institutions. Those rules have been accepted and used to set the standard that Americans should follow despite race, culture, and historical background.

Mosley (2012) states that racism can be classified into four categories: individual, institutional, cultural, and liberal. Individual racism is the act of an individual against another individual or group. Institutional racism is woven into the fabric of an institution, and an individual does not have to be individually racist. Cultural racism is when individuals in control use cultural difference as proof of inferiority. Liberal racism is when individuals with racist beliefs camouflage his or her ideology with liberal rhetoric (Jackson, 2014).

Racism is a part of many aspects of daily living, and racial discrimination is a common experience in the United States (Carter et al., 2013). Ignoring the experiences of culturally diverse groups can be detrimental to the members of that group, which, as Carter (2006) states, is a form of subtle racism. The idea that other races are innately superior to African Americans was developed during slavery in the belief that the slaves were uncivilized, unintelligent, lacked human qualities, and, therefore, were inferior (Alexander, 2010).
Effects of Racism

The impact of racism on African Americans has become an area of increased interest for many researchers as evidenced by the many of research studies conducted that examine psychological distress, depression, and hostility that occur when exposed to racism (Carter, 2006; Kohatsu et al., 2000; Vontress, Woodland, & Epp, 2007). Despite the findings of the studies on the effects of racism, Carter suggests that some researchers are hesitant to list racism as interactions that can lead to trauma because the experiences are subjective. Failure to acknowledge the detrimental effects of racism on an individual can hamper efforts of healing from the experience and is also a form of racism in itself (Carter, 2006).

There has also been attention given to the psychological effects of perceived racism and discrimination (Pieterse, Todd, Neville, & Carter, 2012). Current literature on the effects of racism on African Americans shows that the consequences of experiencing racism are devastating (Carter, 2006; Schulz et al., 2006). Carter (2006) explained that encountering racism is a traumatic experience for individuals. He defines race-based traumatic stress as the consequence of emotional pain one feels after encountering racism and further states that if an individual who experiences racism interprets the encounter as emotionally painful, he or she may begin to exhibit symptoms of stress and possible trauma.

In examining the psychological effects of racism, Brondolo et al. (2008) reported that racism is a significant stressor and has negative health and psychological effects. They further explain that “racism has been hypothesized to act as a psychological stressor, potentially contributing to racial/ethnic disparities in the health status and to
variations in health within racial/ethnic groups” (p. 151). In the same study, they found that perceived racism was positively associated with feelings of anger, nervousness, and sadness during the course of the participants’ day. Brondolo et al. also suggest that the coping skills that could be used to respond to racism are depleted when exposed to higher levels of stress because of the toll it takes on the psychological well-being.

Another study by Vontress et al. (2007) had similar findings and discussed the idea of cultural dysthymia. They suggest that cultural dysthymia is reflected in the African American community in the form of sadness, anger, hostility, self-hate, hopelessness, and self-destructive behaviors, resulting from discrimination. Vontress et al. believe that dysthymia is the underlying pathology of many African Americans and is manifested by behaviors, such as hostility and self-injury. Another study examining the effects of racism was a five-year longitudinal study conducted by Schulz et al. (2006) in which they found that over time, discrimination is associated with poorer physical and mental health status.

Yancy (2008) talks about the confiscation of the Black body. He discusses how the treatment of African Americans during slavery and the brutal treatment they endured while enslaved causes a feeling of self-hatred and self-alienation. Yancy goes on to suggest that the psychological and emotional effects enslavement had on Africans continues in contemporary society. What all of these researchers, philosophers, and educators have in common is the belief that what started hundreds of years ago still plagues African Americans today.
Rationale of Theoretical Framework

This study was an exploration of the lived experiences of those who have been exposed to a particularly overt type of racism, during a particular historical era in the US; although the inquiry is centered on the period of American history in which Jim Crow laws were the way of life, it traces the effects of this racism from its historical context to the contemporary landscape and through the lens of elderly African Americans who experienced Jim Crow. I am probing the experiences of the disenfranchisement of a group of people to discover how those who have experienced Jim Crow laws internalized the traumatic effects and social injustices.

As I mined the literature for explanations of the struggles of African Americans elders in a post-Jim Crow society, I noticed a conspicuous absence of explanations from African American elders discussing their thoughts and feelings regarding the discriminatory treatment. In other words, the most relevant voices were missing. Instead, I found consequences of experiencing racism and the affect it has on the individual but not specifically regarding Jim Crow. Consequently, I began to develop a conceptual framework that would allow me to approach this work without the pre-conceived notions of those who attempt to speak for and about this generation of African Americans. I solicited the stories of elder African Americans to unearth narratives that may conflict with the dominant narratives of the experiences of African Americans.

Delineations of the Research Problem

When embarking on any study that pertains to African Americans or any group that is not a part of the dominant culture, it is crucial to do so with an informed and intentional cultural lens. As a researcher, one must possess a theoretical background to
examine the literature and the targeted population; therefore, existentialism, Black existentialism, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model, and critical race theory will be used to ground both the interview questions and the examination of the data.

**Existentialism**

One of the theoretical underpinnings for this study will be hermeneutic phenomenology. van Manen’s (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological research explores the structure of the lifeworld. He suggests that the lifeworld is composed of structures and meanings that are concerned with the lived experiences of humans. He identifies four “existentials” that ground most human lifeworlds and that will be used in the data collection and analysis of this study. The first, lived space or spatiality is the way people experience their environments in which they find themselves. For example, walking alone in a busy city may cause a sense of loneliness or vulnerability. The second, lived body or corporeality, is how one experiences his/her body, for example, a person in love blushing from the glance of her/his loved one. The third, lived time or temporality, for example, is when time appears to speed up when enjoying oneself or slow down when feelings of boredom arise. Finally, lived others or relationality is the connections we have with other human beings, for example, a child experiencing a sense of security from an adult that ultimately allows her to become a mature and independent woman.

**Black Existentialism**

Black existential philosophy is the philosophical discourse that critiques domination and affirms the empowerment of Black people in the world (Bassey, 2007). It essentially explores the issues of existence that are caused by the complex history of Black people. Black existentialism raises philosophical questions premised upon
concerns of freedom, anguish, responsibility, embodied agency, sociality, and liberation (Bassey, 2007). The theory addresses concerns, themes, issues, and problems, such as existence, consciousness, trepidation, meaninglessness, hopelessness, fear, despair, servility, abasement, and love (Bassey, 2007). Black existential philosophy is predicated on the liberation of all Black people in the world from oppression (Bassey, 2007). Africana critical theorists are concerned with the way human oppression has hindered Black people from achieving their freedom. The essence of Black existentialism is the ability to deal with human beings in their existence as human beings.

**Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory**

In this study, it will be imperative to consider Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model (figure 1) during the data collection and data analysis. Bronfenbrenner (1994) argues that in order to understand human development, you must understand the entire ecological system where growth occurs. In this model, development is defined as the phenomenon of continuity and change in the biopsychological characteristics of human beings, both as individuals and as groups (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This idea extends over the course of one’s life and through past and present historical time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Specifically, this model will be used to assess “risk factors” and the variety of conditions and factors that work against healthy development in individuals as well as how the environment that a child is reared in affects his/her development. There are five “systems” in the ecological model: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The microsystems are activities, social roles, and interpersonal relationships experienced by the developing individual in settings, such as

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1 Matters relating to Africa
school, family, peer groups, and work place. The mesosystems are the linkages between
the micro system, such as the connection between teacher and parent. The exosystems are
the larger social systems that the individual may not have direct contact with but still
affect the development because it affects the microsystem. Examples of this are the
parent’s workplace and community resources. The macro system is the outermost layer in
the individual’s environment and includes belief systems, cultural values, and lifestyle.
Lastly, the chronosystem encompasses time as it relates to the individuals development.
This includes changes in socioeconomic status, employment, and place of residence. By
examining elder African Americans through the ecological model, we can gain
awareness, develop new perspectives, and offer culturally aware interventions to this
population.

Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model (Yingst, 2011).
Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) is the study of the relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Though critical race theory initially was developed as a movement in law it has since spread to other disciplines and began to “illuminate and combat root causes of structural racism” (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010). It began to be used to examine White privilege (Price, 2010) and White supremacy in society. The movement shares many of the same issues that the civil rights and ethnic studies take up however, it places them in a broader perspective (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). CRT has also been applied to such topics as school desegregation, incremental approaches to achieving racial equality, and supposed natural principles of constitutional law (Brown, 2003). Brown identified five fundamental themes that support the methods, research, and pedagogy of critical race theory:

1. Racial stratification is ordinary, ubiquitous, and reproduced in mundane and extraordinary customs and experience, and critically impacts the quality of lifestyles and life chances of racial groups;
2. The race problem is difficult to comprehend and possibly impossible to remedy because claims of objectivity and meritocracy camouflage the self-interest, power, and privilege of Whites;
3. Races are categories that society invents, manipulates, and recreates;
4. Blacks and other subordinated groups are competently able to communicate and explain the meaning and consequences of racial stratification because they are oppressed, thus experiential knowledge is legitimate and appropriate; and
5. More than academic or purely scientific advances, critical race theorists should seek to propagate social justice. (p. 294)
Counter-narratives will be used to allow these individuals to use their voice as an alternate perspective. According to Schneider (2014), “Counter-narratives are important to push back against the Dominant Discourse (the language of those in power) of history that celebrates only the ones who were able to ‘win’” (p. 25). Counter-narratives celebrate those who were forgotten as time moved on, who were never in power (Schneider, 2014). Historically, African Americans’ views and voices have been silenced. The stories of African Americans are not told, and when they are, they are often void of critical and important dates, people, and experiences. Providing counter-narratives will allow the participants to discuss their experience with the racial caste system. It is my hope that this will not be a watered-down version of their experiences but a factual and accurate account of what it was like being Black in America during Jim Crow.

Being able to understand the self-concept of African Americans during the Jim Crow era will be impetus for this study; therefore, William Cross’s Nigrescence model was used to unearth the stage of black identity the participants experienced. Though there are several Black Identity Models, this particular model was used because each stage is characterized by self-concept issues that have implications for a Black person's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors (Helms as cited in Constantine, Richardson, Benjamin, & Wilson 1998). This model was used as a reference when analyzing the emerging themes. The overall goals of racial identity models are to assist individuals in developing a positive sense of self (Connerly & Pedersen, 2005). Given the history of displaced Africans in America, it can be very challenging to possess a positive sense of self. The constant reminders of second-class citizenship and the “separate but equal” doctrine damaged
Black identity. In the 1960s among the racial turmoil, Cross developed the Nigrescence Model that describes the various phases of Black identity development:

The first stage of the model, Pre-Encounter, is characterized by (a) the belief that Blacks are basically inferior to Whites, and (b) the tendency to internalize Eurocentric values, definitions, and concepts. The next stage, Encounter, is marked by a shift from the anti-Black sentiments of the first stage toward a posture that is pro-Black. This shift is believed to be brought about as a result of some type of external event that challenges the Eurocentric perspective previously expressed by the individual. Immersion-Emersion, the third stage, reflects an all-consuming engagement in the Black experience, accompanied by the denigration of Whiteness and Eurocentricity; an individual in this stage is generally involved in activities or organizations that endeavor to improve the present conditions of Black people. The next stage, Internalization, characterizes an individual who has achieved a positive and personally relevant Black racial identity. The last stage of Cross's (1971) model, Internalization/Commitment, reflects a behavioral style that seeks to challenge and eliminate systems of oppression for Blacks and other people (Constantine et al., 1998, p. 96).

**Statement of Research Questions**

The questions that drove this research study were defined after reviewing the existing literature related to the effects of repeated exposure to racism as well as my personal experiences with elder African Americans in a community setting. There is a copious amount of empirical research that focuses on the negative effects of exposure to racism. While researchers continue to look more at the potential for growth from direct exposure to racism, little work has been done to document the lived experiences of elder
African American who experienced Jim Crow. The guiding question for this inquiry is: What are the lived experiences of African American elders who were exposed to the Jim Crow era? The following subsidiary questions will assist in answering the guiding question:

1. How have elder African Americans been able to exhibit positive psychological change, despite being faced with adversities, such as transgenerational trauma and racism?
2. How have the participants been negatively affected by the ethos of Jim Crow?
3. How has being exposed to Jim Crow affected African Americans in their present lives?
4. What area of African Americans’ lives Jim Crow has impacted, negatively or positively?
5. What coping mechanisms have African Americans developed as a result of exposure to Jim Crow?

**Importance of the Study**

Discussion of the enslavement of African Americans and the Jim Crow laws are avoided because of the shame associated with that period in history (Alexander, 2010), and racism is not a topic that is openly discussed. It is so deeply rooted in the culture that it often goes unnoticed or unexamined (Mosley, 2012). Failure to acknowledge the trauma experienced by an individual may cause more psychological damage than experiencing the trauma itself (Carter, 2006). Racism can be an uncomfortable topic to discuss, and though the Jim Crow laws are now null and void, racism still exists and needs to be a part of our dialogue. More specifically, I believe elderly African American
should be provided with the opportunity to discuss how they have been able to overcome the injustices faced during the Jim Crow era.

There is often a lack of appreciation of elders in contemporary society, as evidenced by the percentage of elders mistreated by family, friends, and trusted individuals (Falk, 2012). Capturing their stories and acknowledging their lives and experiences are crucial to maintain positive mental and physical health. Given the heinous treatment of African Americans, one can understand the lack of desire to discuss slavery and the Jim Crow era. As Mosley (2012) states, “The lasting legacy of slavery in America leaves a horrible stain on our collective image” (p. 285).

African American elders represent a growing segment of the geriatric population, and by the year 2030, this group will represent the highest number of elders in the United States (Shellman, 2004). Shellman also states that racial segregation, neglect, and disregard experienced by African American elders have yielded negative effects. Because of this, many elders have not shared their narratives regarding the discrimination that they faced simply because they felt people were not interested in hearing them (Shellman, 2004). After years of discrimination, individuals can develop a sense of helplessness as it pertains to their current situation. Gathering their stories and providing an outlet to these elders is impetus for this study.

**Summary**

This chapter provided a framework for examining the experience of African Americans who were exposed to racism during the Jim Crow era. Additionally, a brief overview of the current literature regarding trangenerational trauma and racism was highlighted, along with an examination on the current literature regarding the effects of...
racism. The importance of examining the elderly African American population was introduced as well as the theoretical orientation that will be used. This chapter included the significance of the problem, definitions of key constructs in the current study, the research questions that will be addressed, and the rational for the study.

**Definition of Terms**

Jim Crow Laws: A racial caste system that operated primarily, but not exclusively, in southern and border states between 1877 and the mid-1960s (Alexander, 2010)

Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS): A condition that exists as a consequence to centuries of chattel slavery (Leary, 2005).

Racism: The idea that other races are innately superior to African Americans, which was developed during slavery in the belief that the slaves were uncivilized, unintelligent, lacked human qualities, and, therefore, were inferior (Alexander, 2010).

Transgenerational trauma: The traumatic experiences of one generation that are unconsciously transmitted to future generations (Mendelssohn, 2008).

**Organization of the Dissertation**

In Chapter 1, I have described the background of the study, the importance of the study, and its significance. Chapter 2 offers a review of the literature that includes a history of race relations between African Americans and the dominant culture, an examination of how continuous exposure to racism effects individuals. The chapter concludes with an in-depth discussion of the theoretical grounding for the study. Chapter 3 explains the methodology and design of the study. Also included is a discussion of the procedures by which the data will be gathered and interpreted, the specifics of the
methodology of the study, and the approach to research design. The chapter concludes with a detailed review of the attention paid to considerations of ethical treatment of the participants. Chapter 4 provides the results of the data collection. Chapter 5 provides an explication and analysis of the data, the implications for the field of mental health treatment, and suggestions for further study.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Being aware of the history of African Americans and the historical significance of racism and its impact are essential to the theoretical framework that underlies this inquiry. Chapter 2 provides a review of the related literature regarding the history of African Americans and the exposure to racist laws and attitudes. The discussion of history in this chapter emphasizes the enormity of the influence of slavery and subsequent laws, practices, and attitudes on all Americans and is a necessary element in any discussion on African Americans. There are five foci of this review of the literature. The first is the history of the African American experience and how Jim Crow laws came to be. The second is the value of Black life. The third is the relevance of an inquiry of this magnitude in contemporary society. The fourth is how elders cope with mental illness, more specifically, how African American elders cope with continued exposure to racism. The final focus explicates why these stories need to be told.

History

Middle Passage

Slavery is a brutal institution in any society but America chattel slavery was different from most varieties of enslavement that preceded it. The American slavery experience was exclusively based on the notion of racial inferiority.

In few societies, if any were so large of people considered to be less than human based upon physical appearance. Yet Europeans concluded that Black Africans were fitted by a natural act of God to the position of permanent bondage. It was this relegation to lesser humanity that allowed the institution of chattel slavery to be intrinsically linked with violence, and it was through violence, aggression and dehumanization that the
The institution of slavery was enacted, legislated and perpetuated by Europeans. (Leary, 2005, p. 51)

Leary (2005) provides historical background of the Middle Passage. Before the European slave trade in 1440, most people became enslaved as a result of a war, winners would enslave losers. Sometimes a dominant society that needed more laborers would engage in war on a weaker state and take the manpower they needed. Europeans turned the capturing, shipping, and selling of human beings into a business. The first slaves arrived from Africa to the Americas in the early 1500s and was made illegal in the United States in 1807 and continued in other parts of America until 1870. Slaves in ancient Greece, Rome, and some countries in Africa were considered property of their slave masters but had legal status. Slaves were able to gain citizenship and freedom depending upon the role in which they served. In American chattel slavery it was rare for a slave to be freed or for them to buy their freedom. In most societies there was a fixed amount of time a slave held service to her or his owner, and after that time, he or she would be granted freedom, but in America, generations were born and died in slavery.

The term Middle Passage derived from the fact that each slaving voyage was made up of three passages—from the home port to the Slave Coast, the Slave Coast to the market, and from the market back to the home port (Spears, 1978). It was during the middle of the three passages that the slaves were on board. Slaves were forced onto cargo ships bound for unknown lands that included Brazil, the West Indies, Europe, and the United States among others. They were loaded onto ships with sometimes less than 18 inches between them (Spears, 1978). They would be on board for several weeks to
several months, and this is the place where they slept, ate, defecated, urinated, menstruated, vomited, gave birth, and died.

The ships during this time usually had two decks. The space between the keel and the lower hold was called the lower deck and the space between the two decks was called the upper hold but was sometimes referred to as the “tween decks,” and that is where the slaves were held (Spears, 1978). This space was 3 feet 10 inches high. The men were joined together at the ankles by iron chains that were connecting to the ships, but women and children were not joined together (Spears, 1978). They were so tightly squeezed together that the average space each slave had was about 16 inches wide and 5 and a half feet long (Spears, 1978). Some slaves were forced to lie on their sides, breast to back to increase the number of slaves on deck. The odor from the slave ship was unmistakable at a distance of five miles downwind (Spears, 1978).

Many of the slaves died during this passage. Some slaves refused to eat, starving themselves to death, and others jumped overboard and drowned. When slaves refused to eat, the captors would resort to cruelties, such as burning their lips with hot coals or using force-feeding devices smashing lips and teeth until the food could be forced down the throat (Horton & Horton, 2005; Spears, 1978). In cases of widespread diseases, the captain would throw ill slaves into the sea to save those who were “well.” Slaves were permitted above the deck twice a day for food and exercise, not because of sympathy or kindness, but rather as a means of protecting the value of the slave cargo (Horton & Horton, 2005). Even still, about 15% to one third of the slaves died during the Middle Passage (Horton & Horton, 2005). Some of the captors would mutilate the bodies of the slaves, and use it as tactics to taunt and torture the slaves.
Life on the Plantation (1619-1865)

As soon as the slaves arrived in America they were sold at slave markets, and then were sent to plantations. Life on the plantation varied depending on the state. Although there were differences in the conditions of enslavement, the one thing all slaves had in common was that their lives were controlled by the slave master and were considered property. They could be bought, sold, starved, raped, beaten, or worked to death at the whim of their owners (Jordan & Schomp, 2007). To a slaveholder, the value of a slave was the quantity of work he/she could produce, and additionally for women, the number of children she could bear (Diouf, 2001). Plantation owners believed slavery benefited Blacks, and without it they would fall into laziness, thievery, and drunkenness (Jordan & Schomp, 2007). In their view, Blacks were inferior and incapable of caring for themselves. Slave masters used violence to impose their will, they would also withhold food, or privileges (Jordan & Schomp, 2007). Some slave masters would force their slaves to wear iron collars, arm and leg shackles, or a device known as the “iron muzzle” which was clamped over the mouth to prevent eating, drinking, and speaking (Jordan & Schomp, 2007).

Slave masters were never able to obtain the total domination over their slaves that they sought (Kolchin, 2003). Slaves were able to develop their own semi-autonomous way of life, interacting with each other based on shared customs and beliefs (Kolchin, 2003). The slaves were heavily regulated and watched while they worked, but when away from work they existed in a world that was largely unknown to their masters (Kolchin, 2003). Although the slaves came from different ethnic groups, spoke different languages, and practiced different religions, there were commonalities along with the shared
experience of slavery that facilitated their creations of families and communities (Horton & Horton, 2005). Music and dancing were integral parts of these African cultures as well as storytelling. Since slaveholders thought the slaves’ singing represented passivity and contentment, the slaves used music to pass along messages to control the pace of work or to placate a suspicious master, for example (Horton & Horton, 2005). This allowed the slaves to build a syncretic African American culture that preserved parts of their American and African culture (Horton & Horton, 2005).

Slaveholders knew it was to their advantage to create a slave hierarchy. The master divided the slaves by relegating a few to the plantation home, and they were known as “house slaves,” and the overseer who was known as the “slave driver.” House slaves were the advantaged few whose treatment was superior to that of the slaves who worked in the fields. They often lived in the plantation house and had better living conditions, such as being supplied with second-hand clothes from the master’s family (Horton & Horton, 2005). The slave drivers acted as his eyes and ears among other slaves. The driver was in charge of maintaining the work pace, schedule, and even disciplining the slaves to enforce the rules of the plantation (Horton & Horton, 2005). The master wanted the slaves to direct their anger against the slave driver instead of to him.

Slave owners also asserted control over their slaves by not allowing them to read or write because they felt it would make them harder to control. Some slaves would barter with White children to teach them how to read and write in exchange for food or other items (Diouf, 2001). When slaves did learn, it was necessary for slaves to hide their ability to read and write (Diouf, 2001). Slaveholders used fear to discourage slaves from
learning to read and write by saying in some states slaves’ hands were cut off or were killed when seen writing. Slaves still attempted to learn to read and write, believing that they could be just as good as anyone else. Slaveholders felt education would cause slaves to become dissatisfied and to revolt (Diouf, 2001).

**Slave Revolts**

While slaves resisted slavery in mostly peaceful ways, it sometimes erupted in violence. Most acts of violent rebellion were individual and unplanned (Jordan & Schomp, 2007). Subtle resistance was less likely to evoke such an intense response (Horton & Horton, 2005). Organized rebellions involving a large number of people were uncommon, but the talk of slave rebellions was enough to keep the slaveholders in a constant state of anxiety (Jordan & Schomp, 2007). Slaveholders and overseers2 used violence to induce fear and obedience in slaves. Slaves who managed to plan an uprising had to worry about betrayal. Fellow slaves might betray those leading a slave rebellion in an effort to show their loyalty to a White master or in hopes of earning a reward (Jordan & Schomp, 2007). After any type of force against the slave master, the slaves usually ran away to avoid punishment. Slaves could be executed for wounding or killing a White person even if it were in self-defense (Jordan & Schomp, 2007).

**End of Slavery**

Slavery was a commercial success, but eventually the slave system came under attack from reformers in Europe and North America and from slaves and ex-slaves in revolt against their oppressor. The shift in the opinion of slavery had various roots. One of the factors was the change in attitude of Christians. Slavery also contradicted the ideas

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2 An individual who supervises the plantation slaves; a hired White man or another slave
of individual freedom, equality, and universal human rights. Many Whites also feared their safety because of continued slave revolts. However, there were Whites who opposed the slave trade but supported slavery because the abolition of slavery raised more complex issues, such as how to compensate slave owners for the loss of property and what to do with the freed slaves.

The first half of the 19th century saw a split between Northern and Southern states. In the North, slavery was abolished everywhere by the 1800s, but in the South, slavery was rapidly expanding (Grant, 2003). As pressure to abolish slavery increased, slave owners presented themselves as benevolent and stressed their paternal role toward the slaves (Grant, 2003). The divide between the North and South is what ultimately lead to the Civil War, and by the end of the war, the North had turned overwhelmingly against slavery. After the Unionist victory in 1865, the 13th amendment to the U.S. Constitution formally abolished slavery in the United States (Grant, 2003).

The Aftermath of Slavery

The abolition of slavery left America with a large population of free citizens of African origin. Instead of a determined effort to help former slaves build successful lives, Whites took measures to exclude Blacks and ensured that they continued to serve the economic interests of their slaves masters (Grant, 2003). White on Black violence intensified in the North and South when the 13th amendment was introduced (Carson, Lapsansky-Werner, & Nash, 2005). In the North, Historically Black Colleges and Universities were burned down, Black trolley riders were repelled by White riders as they attempted to board the train, and Black workers were so badly menaced that they often left their jobs and changed careers. In the South, the Ku Klux Klansman terrorized Black
leaders and their supporters who attempted to vote, become economically stable, and who failed to show deference to Whites (Horton & Horton, 2005). Whites would go to extreme measures, such as dragging Blacks from their homes, whipping them, and torturing them (Carson et al., 2005). Sometimes they were mutilated, set on fire, and hung from trees, a practice that became known as lynching.

The reconstruction era was the period after slavery ended and was marked by a change in attitude by many of the former slaves. During this time Blacks began to demand respect from southern Whites, but long-standing customs and laws governing interracial contact in the South were designed to reinforce White supremacy (Horton & Horton, 2005). Whites addressed a Black man as “boy” and a Black woman as “girl” regardless of their age, and they might be addressed as “nigger.” Some Blacks challenged this, but it was a constant struggle for African Americans to seek dignity and respect, and southern Whites attempted to maintain White supremacy. Land ownership was also important to many freed people. The reconstruction era also gave way to promise of self-sufficiency, independence, and the opportunity that freedom represented in the form of ownership of land was important to ex-slaves (Horton & Horton, 2005). On January 16, 1865, U.S. General William T. Sherman along with Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton issued Special Field Order 15 declaring that Black families would be issued 40 acres and an army mule from White former slave owners to use as cultivation (Horton & Horton, 2005). However, in 1865 when vice president Andrew Johnson became the president, White southerners needed simply to swear their loyalty to the U.S. and support the abolitionist provisions of the 13th Amendment to have their property and general citizenship restored (Horton & Horton, 2005). Thus, most of the land was returned to its
pre-war owners, and the Blacks who were cultivating the land were quickly expelled and were forced to depend on former slaveholders to employ them or rent them land to farm (Horton & Horton, 2005).

**Sharecropping (1866-1955)**

By the late 1870s, three-quarters of the nation’s four million Black citizens lived in southern states. Most of them farmed or sharecropped someone else’s land (Carson et al., 2005). In post-reconstruction, many Black farmers found themselves in a viscous cycle of poverty. Three new forms of agriculture emerged following the war’s devastation and the plantation economy. The most common was sharecropping whereby the landlord provided seed, housing, and tools in return for a share of the resulting crop (Carson et al., 2005). Black families, having no money, would buy the seed, tools, mules, and supplies they needed on credit from local merchants. Merchants made it nearly impossible for Blacks to repay their debts by the high interest rates and the creation of false billings statements—due to high illiteracy rates among Blacks (Leary, 2005). When accounts were settled, Blacks still owed money and would be forced to remain on the farm to work in order to pay off debts creating “peonage”—“the unlawful pushing of Blacks back into slavery through debt servitude” (Leary, 2005, p. 86).

**Black Codes (1865-1866)**

The Black Codes replaced the slave codes, which were the laws that regulated slavery (Boyer et al., 2008). After the slaves were freed, Whites were unsure of what to do with the millions of freed Blacks. The solution to the problem, according to southerners was the introduction of the Black Codes in 1865 (Leary, 2005). This was the
result of White southerners attempting to regain control over Blacks and White Northerners’ fear that Blacks would overrun their communities (Leary, 2005).

The 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution granted Blacks basic rights on a national level, such as to marry and to own property, but the Black codes restricted Blacks’ behavior and activities statewide. Though the codes were worded differently in every state, the consequences were generally the same—regulation of Blacks’ lives (Leary, 2005). Some codes established racial segregation in public places, what work Blacks were allowed to do, prohibited interracial marriage, jury service, and court testimony by Blacks against Whites. There were some provisions that prohibited former slaves from leaving the plantations (Boyer et al., 2008); Blacks were no longer slaves but were not liberated either. Eventually Black Codes were ruled too harsh and were overturned. The federal courts claimed that Whites and Blacks should be subject to the same penalties (Leary, 2005) though some Northern states introduced exclusionary laws out of a fear by Whites that Blacks would marry Indians and form an army that would annihilate them (Leary, 2005). Even though the Black Codes did not last long, it was a glimpse into what was to come.

Convict Leasing (1846-1928)

The convict leasing system began in Alabama in 1846 and spread throughout the ex-slaves states after the Civil War (Leary, 2005). It was yet another attempt to control Blacks. Southern plantation owners were without a source of cheap labor after the overturning of the Black Codes (Leary, 2005). Southern states were also unsure of what to do with free Blacks who committed crimes. The solution, rather than imprisoning individuals convicted of crimes, they were leased to plantation and business owners, for
the remainder of their sentence (Leary, 2005). The labor was usually manual and backbreaking. Convicts were starved, beaten, brutalized, and sometimes even sodomized (Leary, 2005). A great number of the convicts died while still under lease, and when one died, the operator of the business would simply call the state for a replacement (Leary, 2005).

Blacks were often convicted of false criminal charges as a means of securing cheap human labor. Walking on the wrong side of the street could get Blacks arrested for disturbing the peace, and looking at a White woman could get Blacks arrested for sexual assault (Leary, 2005). Blacks were victim to a discriminatory judicial system, convicted at a much higher rate, and receiving harsher sentences than Whites. Although this system was not originally designed for Blacks, it became a tool for re-enslavement after the emancipation (Leary, 2005). Convict leasing ended in 1928 but was replaced by chain gangs, which was a similar form of forced labor until its final abolishment in the 1950s (Leary, 2005).

Lynching

The song *Strange Fruit* (Allan, 1939) was performed by Billie Holiday as a response to the lynchings that frequently occurred in America. The following lyrics remain a poignant reminder of the brutality of the era:

> Southern trees bear strange fruit
> Blood on the leaves, blood at the root
> Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze
> Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees
> Pastoral scene of the gallant south
> The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth
> The scent of magnolia sweet and fresh
> Then the sudden smell of burning flesh
> Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck
> For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck
For the sun to rot, for the tree to drop
Here is a strange and bitter crop.

Lynching is a vicious practice in which a mob takes the law into its own hands (Zangrando, 1980) and was used to reinforce racial inequality. Presumptions of innocence and proof of guilt were typically an afterthought if thought of at all, and the lynching was greeted with public acclaim (Zangrando, 1980). Dating back at least to the Revolution, lynching was used to punish suspected criminals for breaking local mores (Zangrando, 1980). Primarily, this practice was used to intimidate, degrade, and control Black people (Zangrando, 1980). Men and women were stripped of both their civil and political rights, flogged, dismembered, tortured with hot irons, and put to death by rope, flame, and gunshot (Zangrando, 1980). Mob members would torture a defenseless Black victim and even fight among themselves for souvenirs from the event (Zangrando, 1980). Between 1882 and 1968 3,446 Blacks were lynched in the United States (Tuskegee Institute Archives, as cited in Zangrando, 1980). Although very valuable, these statistics only report the recorded lynchings, and it is likely that the numbers were much higher.

Whites created the myth that lynching was necessary protection for White womanhood (Ames, 1973; Zangrando, 1980), but accusations of rape did not explain the lynching deaths of Black women. Once this claim was no longer accepted as a reason for lynching, supporters of lynching then claimed that the failure of the courts to convict and punish Blacks who committed capital offenses necessitated Whites taking the law into their hands (Ames, 1973). Because Blacks were unable to vote, hold public office, or serve on juries, 99% of mob members escaped arrest, prosecution, conviction, and punishment (Zangrando, 1980). Public officials either cooperated with the mob or sought refuge in silence and inaction.
Lynching was a sadistic ritual reinforcing the conventions of racial solidarity (Zangrando, 1980). Racism was never more blatantly displayed then when a mob of Whites roused themselves against defenseless Blacks whose ultimate crime was being Black in a White world (Zangrando, 1989). Eventually, organized pressures from outside the South along with public condemnation, lobbying, and threats of federal intervention were all inducements to reduce mob activity (Zangrando, 1980). The brutal practice declined in the 1930s but was replaced with the bombing of Black churches and homes, the murder of civil rights workers, and the assassinations of prominent figures, such as Martin Luther King Jr., and Medgar Evers.

**Jim Crow (1896-1954)**

Enslaved Blacks experienced freedom when slavery was abolished, but racist laws known as Jim Crow would soon enforce rigid segregation and overt discrimination laws (Diouf, 2001). Jim Crow, a term derived from a minstrel character, was ultimately a backlash against African Americans in the Reconstruction Era (Alexander, 2010). These state and local laws were put in place to separate poor Whites and Blacks and encourage poor whites to maintain superiority over Blacks (Alexander, 2010). They were also used as racialized social control and disenfranchised Blacks in almost all aspects of life. With these laws in place poor whites and Blacks were less likely to develop an alliance and topple the white elite (Alexander, 2010).

Those African Americans who were slaves were free from legalized physical bondage but were still not free nor would they taste equality. Prior to Jim Crow laws being enforced, many people supported the unfair and unjust treatment of African Americans. U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger Brooke Taney was best remembered
for his 1857 opinion in *Dred Scott vs. Sandford* in which he refused a Missouri slave's claim to freedom and denied the rights of citizenship to both slaves and freed Blacks (Huebner, 2010). The chief justice stated "Blacks altogether were unfit to associate with the White race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the White man was bound to respect” (p. 17).

There were several monumental cases that enforced this second-class treatment. The *Dred Scott* case ruled that neither slaves or their descendants where protected under the U.S. Constitution and could not be citizens of the US (Huebner, 2010) and *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Homer Plessy was an African American man who challenged segregation laws. In 1892 he violated the 1890 Louisiana Separate Car Act, which required separate sections for Whites and Blacks (Carson et al., 2005). After unsuccessful appeals on the local and state level, Plessy appealed to the Supreme Court, but the appeal failed when eight Supreme Court justices ruled against him (Carson et al., 2005). The Supreme Court concluded that as long as “equal” services were provided for Blacks, states could legislate those services could be “separate.” But they did not rule on how “equal” would be defined. The decision in Homer Plessy’s case would shape American racial policies and restrict and limit Black’s civil rights for more than half a century (Carson et al., 2005).

After the dismantling of the Black Codes and Convict Leasing, the ability to control Blacks and keep them separated from Whites was now enacted in a new legislative policy that became known as the Jim Crow laws (Leary, 2005). Many of the laws were the same as the Black Codes, such as banning Blacks from private and public institutions and interracial marriage. Every aspect of life in which Blacks and Whites might meet and interact was now segregated. Jim Crow was not limited to the South, and
by 1890, most Northern states also had laws segregating Black people from White people (Carson et al., 2005). In the North, communities segregated schools, libraries, prisons, hospitals, and cemeteries. Soon hotels, theaters, and restaurants were racially segregated. Urban neighborhoods in the North became either all White or all Black with Blacks residing in older areas and Whites in newer suburban areas (Carson et al., 2005).

Jim Crow laws also affected the political process. Many Southern states adopted a combination of grandfather clauses, poll taxes, literacy tests, and “understanding clauses” that required the potential voter to interpret a part of the Constitution (Carson et al., 2005). These tests were given unequally, sometimes requiring White voters to interpret a nursery rhyme while requiring Black voters to read the Bible in Latin (Carson et al., 2005). Some southern states prevented Blacks from getting on the ballot by passing laws, such as the “White primary,” which banned Blacks from running or voting in primary elections. By limiting Blacks from voting for White candidates who opposed the unequal treatment of Blacks as well as nearly eliminating the chance of Blacks running, the South returned to the hierarchy of pre-Civil War America.

**The Great Migration (1910-1970)**

I pick up my life, And take it with me,  
And I put it down in Chicago, Detroit, Buffalo, Scranton,  
Any place that is North and East, And not Dixie.  
I pick up my life And take it on the train,  
To Los Angeles, Bakersfield, Seattle, Oakland, Salt Lake  
Any place that is North and West, And not South.  
I am fed up With Jim Crow laws,  
People who are cruel And afraid, Who lynch and run,  
Who are scared of me And me of them

I pick up my life And take it away On a one-way ticket  
Gone up North Gone out West Gone! (Hughes, 1948)
Life in the South was still very difficult for African Americans after the Civil War ended in 1865. Most Blacks in the South were very poor and lived in small, run-down cabins (Halpern, 2006). They wanted to be able to earn a good living, own property, and have a safer life for themselves and their families, and many believed that moving to the North would make their dreams come true (Halpern, 2006). As the violence increased against Blacks, it was clear that African Americans were not safe in the South. Black people were fleeing the South to avoid murder, mutilation, and rape. Blacks began to migrate to the North, West, and to New Mexico by the hundreds and some even discussed migrating to the independent West Africa nation Liberia (Horton & Horton, 2005) as places of opportunity and safe havens. From 1915 to 1930 thousands of African Americans migrated from the South to the North (Halpern, 2006); however, Blacks were still met with resistance as they attempted to leave the South. White southerners attempted to sabotage Blacks leaving the South in an effort to retain the South’s cheap labor force by brutal means, such as grabbing Blacks and cutting off their hands (Carson et al., 2005), but that did not stop Blacks from leaving the South. The Great Migration, as it was called, produced a dramatic redistribution of the African American population (Tolnay, 2003). The Great Migration, also known as the Black exodus, began after the Civil War but accelerated during the 1920s (Carson et al., 2005), and by 1930, more than half of Black Americans left the southern countryside.

Aside from economic opportunities being the reason for the Great Migration, social forces, inferior educational systems, restrictive Jim Crow laws, and racial violence played a part on the migration of Blacks to the North. Black southern migrants were an urban population because the employment opportunities that attracted them were mostly
in larger cities (Tolnay, 2003). Black-owned newspaper spread the news about job opportunities in the North. The Chicago Defender became Black America’s most popular newspaper, and urged Blacks in the South to move to the North (Halpern, 2006).

An important factor of the migration was the availability of transportation. Since Blacks usually had little money, they chose the cheapest and most direct route (Halpern, 2006). Many Blacks traveled by train, so the existence of railroad connections influenced their choice of destination (Tolnay, 2003). Those who lived along the Atlantic coast usually traveled directly to cities, such as Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. Those who lived in Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana usually went to Chicago, Detroit, and Milwaukee (Halpern, 2006). The presence of family members and friends in the North improved the flow of information to Blacks still in the South and determined were individuals moved. As good news traveled from earlier migrants, the number of migrants grew and in some Northern cities, the African American population tripled (Halpern, 2006). Soon entire families, whole neighborhoods, and church congregations moved together. Doctors, clergymen, professionals, and business people followed their clients and customers north (Halpern, 2006).

Blacks were not exempt from violence and hostile attitudes from Whites in the North. There were many Northern Whites who objected to the newcomers. Some were threatened because of job competition, housing, and power (Halpern, 2006). Blacks were also restricted to certain neighborhoods because of segregation so they moved to areas where only African Americans lived, such as the Hill in Pittsburgh, the South Side of Chicago, Harlem in New York, and Paradise Valley in Detroit (Halpern, 2006).
The Great Migration caused African Americans to develop a sense of confidence, economic opportunity, and power. They were exposed to opportunities and a way of life that they would have never dreamed of living in the South; however, the Great Depression quickly turned this dream into a nightmare for Blacks in the North and South. Blacks had grown increasingly tired of the treatment endured before and after the Great Migration and soon a movement would be born that would forever change the lives of African Americans.

**The Harlem Renaissance (1917-1935)**

The tensions and the turmoil of the South during Jim Crow gave birth to the cultural and artistic expression known as the Harlem Renaissance. Between 1917 and 1935 many Black southerners fled the South to escape the caste system and settled in Harlem, New York. Harlem became the Mecca to Blacks, especially authors, artists, poets, and musicians. The New Negro Movement, as it was also called, introduced a new image of African Americans.

Alain Locke, a Black Rhodes Scholar, stated that Blacks had been a formula and not a human being (Carson et al., 2005). That formula was created by Whites and depicted Blacks as uneducated and lazy. The Harlem Renaissance allowed Blacks to create their own image instead of that created by White America. Blacks used their gifts of poetry, music, and art to express the angst of being Black in America during this time.

The following is a poem entitled “Merry-Go-Round” penned in 1942 by Langston Hughes and speaks of the racial climate.

Colored child at carnival
Where is the Jim Crow section
On this merry-go-round,
Mister, cause I want to ride?
Down South where I come from
White and colored
Can't sit side by side.
Down South on the train
There's a Jim Crow car.
On the bus we're put in the back--
But there ain't no back
To a merry-go-round!
Where's the horse
For a kid that's black?

The Harlem Renaissance itself did not change Jim Crow or lessen the severity of
the laws, but it did create a sense of pride for Blacks (Carson et al., 2005). Claude
McKay, a writer and poet, urged African Americans to stand up for their rights in his
powerful verses (Carson et al., 2005). Jean Toomer wrote plays and short stories as well
as poems to capture the spirit of his times (Carson et al., 2005). Some of the common
themes of the Harlem Renaissance were the experiences of slavery, institutional racism,
and the experience of the “new negro.” This movement sought to challenge the racism
and stereotypes that were all too common regarding African Americans (History.com
staff, 2009).

Civil Rights Movement

Legal slavery no longer existed; convict leasing was no longer an acceptable form
of punishment in society; the Black Codes were null and void but, Blacks were still
disenfranchised and “Jim Crow” on the local and state level still relegated Blacks to
second-class treatment. By the 1950s, many African Americans decided it was time to
experience democracy for themselves, a world where they would be treated with the same
respect as everyone else, and that was the birth of the Civil Rights Movement. Before the
mid-1960s, segregation was a part of the fabric of life in the United States (Brimner,
The African American Civil Rights Movement in the United States had a goal to end racial segregation and discrimination and to combat the disenfranchisement of Blacks using non-violence. There were many leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, A. Phillip Randolph, Martin Luther King Jr., Benjamin Elijah Mayes are just few of the leaders to aid in ending discrimination.

During the Civil Rights Movement, many people decided to join together to protest against segregation and one group that formed was the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). This group was formed to organize non-violent sit-ins and other actions against injustices. Nonviolent sit-ins were being led by students to bring about integration at such places as restaurants, bathrooms, parks, and schools. These protests would become the most visible, well-organized, and sustained demonstrations that eventually spread to over 100 cities (Bausum, 2006).

Freedom riders also become very visible during this time, and students rode buses across different states to test if bus companies were allowing integration in waiting areas and on buses (Sanders, 2000). Although the Supreme Court outlawed segregated seating during interstate travel with its decision in *Irene Morgan v. Virginia* in 1964, bus companies treated the decision as if it did not exist (Bausum, 2006). Freedom riders were met with intimidation and violence as they traveled. In some cities, the bus would be physically blocked by Whites long enough to slash the vehicle’s tires. Homemade bombs would be thrown into the windows of these buses, and when the passenger escaped the bus, they were brutally assaulted (Bausum, 2006). Between the sit-ins, bus boycotts, and the freedom riders, it was clear that the segregated ways of Jim Crow were no longer being tolerated, and Blacks continued to be passionate about change.
There were several monumental cases that aided the end of Jim Crow laws. In 1954 with the *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down “separate but equal” in schools that had been put in place by the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (Horton & Horton, 2005). In 1955, Rosa Parks’ refusal to move to the “colored section” of the bus and subsequent arrest along with discrimination faced by Aurelia S. Bowder, Susie McDonald, 15-year-old Claudette Colvin, and Mary Louise Smith sparked a 381-day boycott of buses in Montgomery, Alabama and eventual integration of buses in what became known as *Browder v. Gayle* (Brimmer, 2010; Fine, 2004). These cases caused civil rights groups to engage in a multitude of civil rights actions during the 1950s and 1960s. Under pressure from protests that includes the 1963 March on Washington, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed racial discrimination in public accommodations and employment (Horton & Horton, 2005). The following year, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 eliminated all qualifying tests for voter registration (Horton & Horton, 2005).

**Risk and Protective Factors**

Protective factors are characteristics and conditions that buffer exposure to risk (Jensen & Fraser, 2011). They are attributes that lower the probability of undesirable outcomes (Benard, 2004; Rutter, 1987; Werner & Smith as cited in Jensen & Fraser, 2011). The role of protective factors is important among African Americans (Kaslaw et al., 2005), and when present, social support can be a protective factor. The Black Church has long been considered a protective factor in the Black community (Halpern, 2006). Barnes (2005) suggests that groups possess a cultural repertoire or "tool kit" that reflects beliefs, ritual practices, stories, and symbols that provide meaning and impetus for
resource mobilization. For African Americans, such symbols as rituals, songs, sayings, sacred meetings, and biblical stories helped to provide meaning and clarity for historical events, such as slavery and present-day discrimination and poverty as well as possible avenues for collective redress (Barnes, 2005). With the racial turmoil in the United States, the Black Church had multiple purposes other than a place of worship. It was a place where individuals could learn to read and write, provided food for families, served as voting information centers, recreation centers, employment agencies, and savings and loans institutions (Carson et al., 2005). It also served as a meeting place for Black leaders, connected Blacks from across the US, and was used as a social mission. The Black Church was the heart of most Black communities.

Regardless of the sanctity of the Black Church, it was not exempt from violent attacks. Birmingham, Alabama became a focal point for civil rights leaders because of White supremacy that existed in the city. While imprisoned in a Birmingham jail, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote “Letters from Birmingham,” which brought attention to the racial climate in the city (Brimner, 2010). Homemade bombs had become such a common occurrence in Birmingham that the city had been nicknamed “Bombingham” (Painter, 2006, p. 270). Many of the protests that took place in Birmingham began at the 16th Street Baptist Church but on the morning of September 15th, 1963, a bomb detonated in the church, killing four girls ages 14, 11, and 10. This marked the first of 40 unsolved bombings in the city (Brimner, 2010). This senseless act of violence was yet another example of the treatment Blacks faced, and even though the legal system was slow to provide justice, the effect of the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church was
immediate and significant. Outrage over the death of the four innocent girls helped build increased support behind the continuing struggle to end segregation.

Risk predicts that a proportion of a population will experience adverse outcomes (Gilgun, 1996). Jensen and Fraser (2011) report that the presence of one or more risk factor increases the likelihood that problem behavior will occur at some point in an individual’s life. Risk factors do not operate separately from other influences of development. One of the risk factors that Blacks experienced was fear. Widespread intimidation kept most Blacks obeying the rules of segregation (Partridge, 2009). Some believed that fear was the key to keeping Blacks oppressed, and once they were no longer fearful they would be okay (Partridge, 2009).

**Fear**

Fear was used to keep slaves obedient to their masters and fear was still being used in the early and mid-1900s to keep Blacks submissive to those of the dominant culture. Blacks have been put in a constant state of fear since the 1600s when the first slaves arrived in the US. Fear is what kept most Blacks from taking a promotion at a company due to possible backlash from the White community, but that did not stop Wharlest Jackson. Though he was murdered on his first day after being promoted over his White colleagues, he refused to live in fear. That was a tactic that Whites used to keep Black’s “in their place.” There was a fear of bombings of Black churches, which served a major role during and before the civil rights movement of the mid 1900s, and the fear of lynching’s and murder were all tactics that were used against Blacks to keep them oppressed. However, individuals, like Medgar Evers and Martin Luther King, Jr. among countless others, refused to submit to this fear and lost their lives during the movement.
Value of Black Life

Thomas (1993) suggests that people are generally disposed to adopt a submissive attitude toward authority that is accepted as legitimate. He then goes on to imply that in order to respect authority, we have to trust it to be right. This respect for authority is especially significant as children and as people transition into adulthood, the submissive attitude does not pass away entirely (Thomas, 1993). However, for African Americans, it was authority that legalized slavery for centuries and subsequently enforced the Jim Crow laws that forced African Americans into a submissive attitude and disenfranchised them for decades.

At a time when African Americans were lynched for sport like America’s pastime or the inability to receive a fair trial against insurmountable evidence to the contrary, there was little value placed on the lives of Blacks. On March 25, 1931 a group of nine African American youth boarded a train out of Chattanooga headed for Memphis. The train traveled from Tennessee to Georgia and Alabama, and back into Tennessee (Norris & Washington, 1979). As the train went along, more people jumped aboard, Black and White men alike. Eventually a racially charged fight broke out as the White riders told the Black men to jump off the train, even though both groups of men were stealing rides. When the train stopped in Paint Rock, Alabama, a mob of White men that included the White men that the group of Black boys fought and threw off the train, lined the tracks with sticks, pistols, and shot guns. They were arrested and taken to Scottsboro, Alabama. Those Black men were: Roy Wright, Andy Wright, Eugene Williams, Haywood Patterson, Ozie Powell, Olen Montgomery, Charlie Weems, Willie Roberson, and Clarence Norris and they became known as the Scottsboro Boys.
While in jail, these men found out they were being accused of raping two White women. After three days and four trials, all of the men except Roy Wright were sentenced to death. Wright was sentenced to life in prison at just 13 years old (Norris & Washington, 1979). With incompetent attorneys and cross examination that lasted only minutes, the Scottsboro case is an American tragedy that shows how deeply rooted racism is in this country. The trial interrupted the lives of these innocent teens for the next two decades, but the effects lasted the rest of their lives. One of the most infamous examples of injustices in the Jim Crow South, this case dealt with racism and the right to have a fair trial.

Emmitt Till was a 14-year-old boy who was brutally murdered while visiting family in Mississippi after being accused of flirting with a White woman (Gralla, 2014); Lena Baker who after years of abuse from a White man killed him in self-defense and was put to death. So many faceless nameless Black lives have been lost because of the color of their skin.

Relevance in Contemporary Society

There is an eerie familiarity of the Civil Rights Movement as it pertains to the value of Black lives that has emerged in this “post-racial society.” Tactics, such as racial profiling and other unfair treatment, have cost individuals of African descent their lives. In recent years, there have been several slayings of young African Americans that are very reminiscent of the civil rights era. Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old, unarmed, Black male was murdered in his own community because he looked threatening. Under Florida's "Stand Your Ground" law, the man who killed him was found not guilty of second-degree murder (Gralla, 2014). Oscar Grant, a 22-year-old, unarmed, Black male
from California was murdered in a train station. The police officer who murdered him resigned his position and was sentenced to two years minus time served. Sean Bell, a 23-year-old, unarmed, Black male was murdered on the morning of his wedding by a barrage of 50 bullets from the members of the NYPD (Flegenheimer & Baker, 2012). The main outcome of these cases has been recognition of a racially prejudiced society and these deaths are just one chapter in a centuries-long series of catastrophic meetings that are more common than the public realizes.

The outcomes of these cases are eerily similar to those during the Jim Crow era. Although many of the unsolved murders during that period are being reopened, because of new technology, the fact remains that those who committed those acts of vileness and hatred were able to live out their lives while those whose lives they took were taken from their families, communities, and movement far too soon.

Another similarity between contemporary society and the era of Jim Crow is that according to W.E.B. Dubois (1903) Blacks are gifted with a second sight. Dubois discusses that through this second sight, Blacks see themselves through others lenses; the lens of the White dominant society. Dubois suggests this can be a challenge for Blacks as they attempt to merge themselves into the lens of White society. Dubois then infers that this second sight can be an advantage for Blacks and allow them to grasp the essence of the dominant culture. When examining the need for this study if historically African Americans view themselves through the lens of the dominant culture, how does that affect them psychologically, emotionally, and socially? If Blacks live in a constant and recurring culture of African Americans lives being valueless how does that shape them as individuals?
There is no doubt that the emotional toll that racism takes on its victims is high. Racism is everywhere and the sting of racism, whether it is a single incident or an accumulation of events over a lifetime, can have lasting effects on a person’s psychological and physiological well-being (Lowe, Okubo, & Reilly, 2012). How have elder African Americans who lived through decades of oppression and racism at the hands of Jim Crow and now this supposed post-racial society conceptualize what they have encountered?

**African American Elders and Mental Health**

According to the U.S. Census, individuals aged 65 and older have increased to 13.7% in 2012. Many seniors are now seeking psychological help late in life (Ellin, 2013). The fact that members of this generation would feel comfortable talking to a therapist, or acknowledging psychological distress, is a significant change (Ellin, 2013). Many grew up in an era when only “crazy” people sought psychiatric help (Ellin, 2013) and would never admit to themselves—and certainly not to others—that anything might be wrong (Ellin, 2013). Aside from the lack of significant research relating to elder Blacks and racism, elders are being diagnosed with depression (Ellin, 2013). Research shows that depression and dementia are two of the most common disorders in old age and that ethnic elders experience poorer physical and mental health (Bhattacharyya & Benbow, 2013). According to The National Alliance on Mental Illness, more than 6.5 million Americans over age 65 suffer from depression, but many are grappling with mental health issues unaddressed for decades as well as contemporary concerns about new living arrangements, finances, chronic health problems, the loss of loved ones and their own mortality (Ellin, 2013). Elder African Americans have had a unique experience
in the United States with the combination of unresolved racial issues and the natural aging process; elder Blacks may feel besieged.

This population may be hard to reach for several reasons other than those listed previously. With the number of minorities increasing (Richeport-Haley, 1998) there is an increase in minorities receiving counseling services; however, the counselors rendering the services remain White, European Americans (Day-Vines et al., 2007) who may not understand the history of African Americans. Failing to recognize the importance of culture in the counseling session, whether it is due to a lack of cultural understanding or adopting the “color blind” perspective, can lead to mistrust on behalf of the client and increase the chance of clients returning to counseling. Research shows that African Americans are less likely to participate in research for several reasons, which include a mistrust of the researcher, economic hardships, and the research programs’ cultural irrelevance for African Americans (Murry et al., 2004); however, culturally appropriate services are needed for elder African Americans to prevent them from becoming socially excluded (Bhattacharyya & Benbow, 2013).

Not only have elder African Americans been hesitant to enlist help from mental health professionals, through personal experiences and conversations with Black elders in the community, it has come to my attention that they have not been able to reconcile the injustices they were exposed to during the Jim Crow era. According to Leary (2005), the experiences of African Americans during the Jim Crow era were traumatic and comparable to the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. There are members of this generation who have experienced the peonage of sharecropping and convict leasing.

3 Disregarding racial characteristics
the fear of lynching, the Black codes, and Jim Crow. Whether through stories passed
down from ancestors or direct experiences, it still affects an individual’s psyche and if
left unresolved will continue to affect future generations of African Americans and the
communities from which they come.

Why the Story Needs to be Told

These stories need to be illuminated to give the experiences appropriate
recognition. By bringing these experiences to the mainstream society we may begin to
truly appreciate the history of African Americans and gain a stronger sense of what
shapes the Black community (Leary, 2005). This will also teach future generations what
it means to be resilient despite living conditions and treatment that are out of their
control. This will also allow the individuals who experienced this treatment directly to
have an outlet and an audience who will listen empathically.

Our society struggles with confronting pain and suffering, and our culture is still
deeply infused with anti-Black bias (Bobo, 2013). There are hints, suggestions, and
indications of racial bias that lead to feelings of inferiority all around us today, but it is
typically unspoken, if not altogether invisible, much of the time (Bobo, 2013). Franz
Fanon discussed this feeling of inferiority in his book Black Skin White Mask (1957).
Fanon suggested that Blacks being stripped of their native culture and adopting the
culture of the colonizer produces a sense of inferiority (Fanon, 1957). The fact that the
delegation from the United States walked out of the United Nations World Conference
Against Racism in August 2001, a conference that declared American chattel slavery as a
“crime against humanity,” showcases America’s refusal to acknowledge this period
(Leary, 2005). American historians have perpetually avoided the realities of these
sufferings as evidenced by the absence of these events from public school curricula and textbooks (Leary, 2005).

No progress will be made against this underlying illness by ignoring the deep-rooted character of racism in our culture and in so many everyday practices and habits (Bobo, 2013). Racism is a powerful word can cause people to avoid a conversation; however, such sensitivity cannot excuse silence of ongoing injustice (Bobo, 2013). Those who had direct experience with both Jim Crow laws have valuable insight. The concept of Sankofa was derived from the Akan people of West Africa. According to the W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center, Sankofa teaches that we cannot go forward until we go backward. That means we have to remember the past no matter how ugly, hurtful, and difficult and reclaim it and use it to move forward. Because the entire experience of African Americans during Jim Crow has been absent from most curricula and textbooks, retelling that period is critical. African Americans elders are resources who can be tapped as it pertains to racism and resiliency. Unfortunately, those elders are aging and dying, and if we do not capture their stories now, I fear there will be a gap in the retelling of the Black experience in the United States. They will not have the opportunity to totally heal from their experiences, and the Black community will continue to perpetuate the same maladaptive behaviors in responses to racism.

**Theoretical Foundation of the Study**

This study is a qualitative, exploratory study guided by phenomenological approach and will utilize van Manen’s (1990) lifeworld existentials. According to van Manen, research in the human sciences should not be completed matter-of-factly, but there should be sincere and honest interest in whatever phenomenon is being studied. As
an African American, I feel it is my responsibility to take on an inquiry of this magnitude to give a voice to the voiceless.

**Phenomenology: Van Manen’s Lifeworld Existentials**

Phenomenology is the study of the lifeworld (van Manen, 1990). According to van Manen, the aim of phenomenology is to gain a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of everyday experiences. Anything that is presented to consciousness is of interest, whether it is real, imagined, empirically measureable, or subjectively felt. van Manen suggests that “consciousness is the only access humans have to the world” (p. 9). He suggests that anything that falls outside of the bounds of consciousness also falls outside the bounds of reality. Phenomenology attempts to uncover and describe the structures of lived experience, the nature and essence of an experience.

In this study, the hermeneutic phenomenological constructs of van Manen’s (1990) lifeworld existentials, which were described in detail in Chapter 1, will be applied. van Manen describes the structure of human science research as the study of beings who have “consciousness” and who act purposefully in the world by creating “meaning” that are “expressions” of how humans exist in the world (p. 4). Phenomenological human science studies lived meanings and attempts to interpret the meanings to a certain depth. This differs from other human sciences that focus on statistical relationships among variables. Phenomenology also differs because it explicates meanings as they are lived in everyday existence (van Manen, 1990).

According to van Manen (1990), research methodology is the philosophical framework, the theory behind the method and why the method should be followed. He describes six methodological themes that can be helpful in hermeneutical
phenomenological research. The first is *turning the nature of the lived experience* by committing to a fullness of thinking. The second theme is *investigating an experience as it is lived*, which requires the researcher to stand in the fullness of life and explore the lived experience in its entirety. Third, *reflecting on essential themes*, requires reflection on that which makes a particular experience significant. Fourth is the art of writing and rewriting, which is also explained as the application of the *logos*—language and thoughtfulness. The fifth theme is *maintaining a strong and oriented relation*. This requires the researcher to be focused in their orientation so they are not side-tracked and fall victim to superficialities and falsities. Finally, the sixth theme is *balancing the research context by considering parts and whole* so that researchers do not get so preoccupied with the *ti estin*, that is, the “What is it?” that they lose sight of the end of phenomenological research. These six themes can serve as a guide for phenomenological research because there are no specific methods that must be used; rather, there are traditions, insight, and a body of knowledge that has served as a model when conducting human science research (van Manen, 1990).

This brief introduction of phenomenology and its origins serves as a foundation to the theoretical framework that will be used during the data collection process as well as the data analysis process. The six methodological themes will aid me as I collect data and continue to research this inquiry recognizing that this process will be recursive.

**Summary**

The impact of slavery was so dehumanizing that radicals began to refer to it as the African Holocaust. The Atlantic Slave Trade stands as a monumental example of inhumanity and the destruction of power and greed. Issues of race and diversity are so
critical because they remain at the root of the most pervasive problems facing the nation (Leary, 2005). Despite the progress made against racial injustice, slavery still has an impact on African Africans more than a century after its abolition (Horton & Horton, 2005). But with all of the abuse and indignities, slavery and Jim Crow were unable to crush the spirit of African Americans. Whether it was through quiet resistance or open rebellion, African Americans continued to fight and proclaim humanity. The legacy of Jim Crow still remains in the history and heritage of the South (which it helped shape) and in the memory of the North (in which it was long denied) (Horton & Horton, 2005). The effects of Jim Crow are still embedded in the fabric of America. We must truly understand the history of slavery to be fully emancipated from its consequences. A more valuable outcome would be continued public conversations about race, the acknowledgment of the history of African Americans, and the understanding that the past and present and will affect the future.

This study provides a qualitative examination of the lived experiences of African Americans who experienced Jim Crow, seeking to capture the stories of a generation of individuals. After slavery ended, activists and scholars recognized the importance of capturing the experiences and stories of those who survived slavery; however, the stories of those who experienced Jim Crow laws have not yet been captured. The outcome of this study will provide a deeper understanding of the effects of reoccurring exposure to racism, racist beliefs, and racist laws.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

My inquiry into how elder African Americans have been affected by the recurrent racist laws of the Jim Crow era is situated within a larger personal and professional commitment to bring the voice of this population to the forefront of mainstream society. I do this because I want to know the experiences of elder African Americans during Jim Crow. I am also interested in the effect this has had on their psychological well-being. This is an exploratory study, and I believe the methodology chosen to examine the meaning-making processes of elder African Americans through the retrospective recollection of their experiences during the Jim Crow era fits this exploratory study. In this chapter, I describe the elements of my research design.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to illuminate the lived experiences of elder African Americans who lived through and experienced the Jim Crow era and how these repeated exposures to traumatic events, such as racism and discrimination over one's lifetime, have affected these individuals. There is a capacious body of literature that examines the negative effects of exposure to racism; however, some professionals are hesitant to diagnosis reoccurring exposure to racist events as post-traumatic stress disorder. There is also voluminous research that has been conducted to examine the potential deleterious effects of racism on the community as well as on adolescents and young adults. The notions of low self-esteem, psychological stress, depression, hostility, and chronic violence are well delineated in the professional literature. A plethora of studies expound upon the negative effects of exposure to racism and discrimination. What has not been
well researched is how African Americans have responded to continuous racism, specifically Jim Crow.

**Description of Research Methodology**

Hermeneutic phenomenology was used to examine the data of this inquiry. Phenomenology is the study of the subjective experiences of others. It is also focuses on an individual’s interpretation of the world. It researches the world through the eyes of another person by discovering how they interpret their experiences. By using phenomenology, a researcher wants to understand how the world appears to others.

**Research Design**

Using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, the study sought to understand the experience of resiliency, coping mechanisms, and meaning-making of elder African Americans who lived through the Jim Crow era. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2006), research that uses the phenomenological approach investigates the reactions and perceptions of a particular phenomenon with the hope of gaining insight into the perceptions and worldview of the participants. Phenomenologists describe the essence as the essential characteristics of the experience (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). They believe that there are commonalities to how human beings interpret similar experiences, and by using this approach, researchers attempt to identify, understand, and describe these commonalities (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Through focus groups, the result of the inquiry is a description that is rich with experiential themes that enhance our understanding of elder African Americans' resiliency. Employing a phenomenologically-based case study design, the investigation relies upon methods, instruments, and data explication that are traditional to qualitative inquiry. What follows is a description of
 qualitative design, sampling, the criteria for subject participation, participant selection, and the sample size for the study.

**Qualitative Inquiry**

This is a qualitative inquiry because I am attempting to capture and discover meaning; I am not testing a hypothesis (Neuman, 2007). Glesne (2006) states that “qualitative studies are best at contributing to a greater understanding of perceptions, attitudes, and processes” (p. 29). The qualitative approach to social scientific research captures data in the form of impressions, words, and symbols that can convey the actual words or actions of people (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). According to Neuman (2007), “Qualitative research [relies] on interpretative or critical social science, follow a non-linear research path, and speak a language of ‘cases and contexts’” (p. 85). Qualitative research is nonlinear in that the research path sometimes moves backward and sideways before moving forward (Neuman, 2007). Qualitative research seeks to examine cases that arise in the natural flow of social life. Through examining the language of the cases and contexts, the researcher is able to interpret and create specific meaning in specific settings (Neuman, 2007). For this inquiry, I examined how elder African Americans have been able to make meaning of constant exposure to racism during the Jim Crow era.

According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2006), qualitative research involves “research studies that investigate the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or materials” (p. 430). Qualitative research attempts to bring to light a different understanding of human beings (Jovanovic, 2011). Qualitative research derives from three types of data collection methods: in-depth, open-ended interviews; direct observation; and written documents (Patton, 2002). This shows that the qualitative data comes from fieldwork (Patton, 2002).
For the purposes of this inquiry, I used in-depth, open-ended interviews. By using this method, I was able to make first-hand observations of interactions in the focus groups (Patton, 2002). Through an exploration of the perceived effects of exposure to reoccurring racism for elder African Americans and how they describe their experiences, the essence of coping and resiliency emerged.

Sample

The sample in a research study is the group from which the data were obtained (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Berg (2009) suggests that the underlying logic in using a sample of subjects is to be able to make inferences about a larger population; however, in this study since I am interested in the individuals’ perceptions and life decisions as it relates to racism, I did not use the sample to make a statement about the population of African Americans in general. The first task in selecting a sample is to define the population of interest (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

In qualitative studies the most appropriate sampling techniques are non-probability in nature (Berg, 2009). In non-probability sampling the sample selection is not based on probability theory, but efforts are made to create a quasi-random sample and to be clear about what larger groups the sample may reflect (Berg, 2009). To fulfill this inquiry about the lived experience of elder African Americans, I used purposive selection to compose my sample.

Purposive Selection

Purposive sampling is one of the most common sampling strategies by which participants who fit criteria relevant to a particular research question are invited (Berg, 2009). Sample sizes, which may or may not be fixed prior to data collection, depend on
the resources and time available as well as the study’s objectives. Purposive sample sizes are often determined on the basis of theoretical saturation. Purposive sampling is successful when reviewing the data and analyzing the data are done in conjunction with data collection.

Based on previous knowledge of the population and the purpose of the research, the sample was selected using personal judgment as to who will provide the data needed for the research questions (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Choosing a sample with purpose provides information-rich subjects specific to the study (Patton, 2002). A sample of willing participants was drawn from the population of African Americans in various communities in Western Pennsylvania. It was my aim to carefully select the study participants in order to maximize the probability that the desired phenomenon was experienced.

**Participant Selection**

I scheduled meetings and met with the gatekeepers and community leaders to develop a plan to identify and recruit potential participants. In these meetings, I gave fliers to the gatekeepers and leaders to give to prospective participants. Participants were also chosen through word-of-mouth, advertising, and snowball sampling. Interested individuals were provided with a clear explanation of the purpose of the study, how their confidentiality and information will be protected, the activities involved with the study, and approximately how much of a time commitment the activities would involve. Willing participants were asked about their availability, and based on their availability, they were put in one of the two focus groups. Prior to the scheduled time, each participant was given a consent form that explained the study, the study procedures, the voluntary nature
of participation, the potential risks, benefits, confidentiality of information, and information on the researcher. The consent form is further explained in the ethical consideration section of this chapter.

**Selection Criteria**

In a qualitative study, researchers invest time in attracting participants who possess the most relevant characteristics to the study (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007). Communities often are made up of disparate subgroups or individuals with similar perceptions of particular phenomena; therefore, researchers must make thoughtful decisions regarding sampling (Suzuki et al., 2007). Focus groups were used to document the lived experiences of elder African Americans and to give voice to a generation of individuals who were exposed to the Jim Crow laws. I also hoped to gain insight into their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes; therefore, this inquiry was a homogenous sampling of African Americans born in or before 1964.

**Sample Size**

There were two focus groups with nine participants total. The first focus group had 4 participants, and the second focus group had five participants. The focus groups were small because larger groups are difficult to manage and can erode into several fragmented groups, further complicating control and understanding of the information gathered in the group (Berg, 2009). Smaller groups also assist in reducing “group think” whereby because of sub-group pressure, several group members may agree with a particular idea (Berg, 2009). It was also best to keep the groups small to avoid one or two strongly motivated participants from monopolizing the conversation. Literature also suggests that smaller groups are also preferably because when analyzing the tapes, I was
able to differentiate participants’ comments (Berg, 2009). There were enough participants to generate and maintain a discussion but not so many that some participants could have a difficult time sharing their thoughts and opinions (Hatch, 2002).

**Data Collection**

For this inquiry, data were collected from focus groups. What follows is an explanation of this source and the process by which it was mined for data.

**Focus Groups**

Two focus groups lasting 1.5 to 2 hours were conducted. The focus groups allowed me to explore the nature and effect of ongoing discourse in ways that are not possible through interviews or observations (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). This format was also chosen as the best approach to elicit the greatest response from the participants. Focus groups rely on the interactions that take place among the participants to generate data (Hatch, 2002). Focus groups are efficient because they generate large quantities of information from a small number of people in a relatively short time (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). The focus groups allowed for interaction between the participants about the topic and were effective in generating broad overviews of issues and concern to the cultural groups represented. This method elicits spontaneous and affectively rich statements that would otherwise be unavailable to the researcher in individual interviews (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). Historically, focus groups have been used to give a voice to previously silenced individuals by creating a space for sharing one’s life experiences (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005).

Semi-structured protocol questions were used to keep track of the progress of the group and to steer the discussions in desirable directions (Hatch, 2002). Guiding
questions also gave me a sense of security and a direction to go if the group did not go as planned (Hatch, 2002). The sessions began with warm-up questions to introduce the group and to familiarize participants to the topic. As the session proceeded, I moved to focused questions and gave the participants a chance to summarize their perspectives at the end of the session (Hatch, 2002). The questions were open-ended and supported any differing opinions that emerged among group participants. The questions that lead this inquiry are below:

1. How have African Americans been able to exhibit positive psychological change despite being faced with adversity, such as transgenerational trauma and racism?

2. How have the participants been negatively affected by the ethos of Jim Crow?

3. How has being exposed to Jim Crow affected African Americans in their present lives?

4. What areas of African Americans’ lives have been impacted by Jim Crow laws, negatively or positively?

5. What coping mechanisms have African Americans developed as a result of exposure to Jim Crow laws?

I used my training as a group leader and supervisor to help effectively facilitate the focus groups, and I moderated the dialogue by encouraging participants to generate discussion around the topics of the focus groups (Hatch, 2002). I hoped that being in the group would make participants more willing to express opinions or feelings even if it was contrary to what they think they should say. At the beginning of each focus group,
ground rules for confidentiality, turn-taking, objectivity, and a non-judgmental environment were discussed, and all necessary consent forms were obtained prior to the start of discussion. Notes were taken during the focus groups and these notes were helpful in making accurate transcription (Hatch, 2002). It was important to know who the participants were, where the interviews took place, and what was discussed (Hatch, 2002).

**Researcher as Instrument**

My interest in this topic derives from my own experiences of engaging with elder African Americans in my family and community. I was in awe of their ability to possess a positive outlook on life despite living through racial turmoil. I also noticed that elder African Americans are often selfless and do not wallow in self-pity or blame others for the actions of some decades ago. In a society in which African Americans are seldom depicted in a positive light, the examination and growth of individuals after generations of racism and discrimination is inspiring. It is my hope that the research will come from a strength-based perspective that may assist younger African Americans in developing a greater sense of self-worth, hope, and appreciation of their lived experiences.

The researcher’s perspective is tied to his or her level of experience within the community under study (Suzuki et al., 2007). When researchers themselves are members of the community, then the nature of their insider perspective provides them with insight into the intimate workings of the group under study (Suzuki et al., 2007). Any researchers’ success is dependent in part on his or her understanding of the community where the data are gathered (Suzuki et al., 2007). Fortunately, this population is one I am very familiar with. Since 2006, I have been involved in community organizing with
various non-profit and grassroots agencies in this section of Western Pennsylvania. This benefitted me as the researcher when soliciting respondents for this inquiry.

While traditional, quantitative methods generate data through the use of instruments, such as questionnaires, checklists, scales, and other measuring devices, data for qualitative research is gathered directly by the researcher herself (Hatch, 2002). For this inquiry data were generated from transcriptions and notes from the transcriptions. Although mechanical devices, such as audio- and videorecorders, are used to support qualitative work, they have no significance until they are processed by the researcher (Hatch, 2002). Since I was the researcher and the moderator, it was my job to draw out information from the participants regarding the topic. For this inquiry, I was an observer as a participant. This role requires the researcher to move away from the role as a participant and embrace the role of the investigator (Berg, 2009). This replaces the more informal observations usually required of other roles.

**Note-taking and Reflective Journaling**

Note-taking occurred during the focus groups. Note-taking did not replace the audio- and video recording but was used in conjunction with the recordings (Patton, 2002). The purpose of note-taking is to assist the researcher in forming new questions, topics, or ideas as the groups or interviews progress (Patton, 2002). By taking notes, I was able to document any hunches, big ideas, and quotes that could be used in later analysis (Patton, 2002). Journaling occurred after the focus groups. By journaling, I was able to recall my feelings and thoughts as the focus groups took place. I explain in the data analysis section of this chapter the purpose of note-taking and reflective journals.
Ethical Considerations

Several ethical challenges can arise in collecting qualitative data, and the researcher should have an ethical framework to address these challenges (Patton, 2002). In order to prevent ethical challenges, informed consent, risk assessment, promises and reciprocity, and confidentiality will be discussed (Patton, 2002). Patton suggests answering the following questions in the informed consent:

- What is the purpose of collecting the information?
- Who is the information for? How will it be used?
- What will be asked in the interview?
- How will responses be handled, including confidentiality?
- And what risks and/or benefits are involved for person being interviewed? (p. 407)

The researcher should give the participants all information so they can make an informed decision to participate in the study or not. It was possible that retelling and reliving accounts associated with traumatic or offensive experiences that was discussed in this inquiry elicited strong emotions from the participants. Because of this, if necessary, there was a debriefing at the end of each focus group to assist participants in processing what they shared and heard (Patton, 2002).

Treatment of Participants

According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2006), there are three important issues that every researcher should address to ensure that the study is ethical. First, the protection of participant from harm ensures that participants in the research study are protected from physical and psychological harm, discomfort, or any danger that may arise from
participating in the study. This research will not cause lasting or serious harm or discomfort to the participants. Second, I ensured the confidentiality of research data. Once the data were collected, I ensured the participants that no one else has access to the data. The names of the participants were recoded and removed from all data collection forms. This was done by assigning each participant a code name. The participants were ensured that all data collected will be held in confidence, and they also had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Lastly is the question of deception of the subjects. This can be difficult because many studies cannot be carried out unless some deception takes place, but if the participants are deceived, the researcher must provide the participant with an explanation. When deception is used, it harms the reputation of the scientific community and fewer people will be willing to participate in research investigations. For purposes of this study, the methods used in this inquiry do not require deception.

**Confidentiality**

Berg (2009) states that confidentiality is “an active attempt to remove from the research records any elements that might indicate the subjects’ identities” (p. 90). As a way to ensure confidentiality, names and other identifiers were separated from the data. As stated earlier, all video- and audiotapings and notes were kept locked in a cabinet to which only the researcher has the key. The participants were made aware that the information they share will be kept confidential as long as it is within the bounds of child protective service laws and as long as there is nothing disclosed regarding harming one’s self or others. Though confidentiality in group settings cannot be guaranteed, I expressed
the importance of the group members keeping each other’s words, thoughts, and beliefs confidential and within the realm of the group.

**Data Storage and Retention**

Participants were made aware that the focus groups were audio- and videorecorded. They were also made aware of the note-taking process during data collection. I informed them that all data, audio/visual and written notes as it pertains to the study and their identities, will be stored in a locked file cabinet to which only I have access. All electronic data, including external memory devices, will be password protected. Video-and audiotapes will be destroyed after the study has been completed. Written materials, such as transcription and field notes, will be stored for a period of five years, after which time they will be destroyed.

**Report of Findings**

Subject participants were made aware that all findings reported in the study would be made without information that could serve to identify them. Subjects were also given an opportunity to obtain a summary of the findings of the study should they so choose.

**Data Analysis**

Interpretive analysis was used to analyze the data because not only is interpretation a defining element of all qualitative data (Hatch, 2002) but also because the aim of this inquiry is to give meaning to the data collected (Hatch, 2002). By using this model of analysis, I am attempting to “make sense of social situations by generating explanations for what’s going on within them (p. 180). According to Hatch, interpretation analysis makes the researcher an active part of the research process. I used the first six of Hatch’s eight steps in interpretative analysis model.
Read the Data for a Sense of the Whole

It is important for the researcher to be immersed in the data to the point that whatever impressions are formed throughout the data collection process is considered within the context of the overall data set. The only way to become immersed at that level is by reading the data over and over.

Review Impressions and Record in Memos

Review impressions previously recorded in research journals and/or bracketed in protocols and record these in memos. This is when it will be necessary to go back to the research journal recording as the research was unfolding and using this data to capture “fruitful explanations that can be systematically examined later “(Hatch, 2002, p. 182). The purpose of the review is to have an idea of which impressions might lead to more careful examinations. This was done with a highlighter or some type of handwritten marking. As the impressions were reviewed, it was possible that new impressions would be made and relationships between initial impressions were identified.

Next, memos were made from the impressions. This assisted me in articulating the interpretations being made when the impressions play out. Memos are essentially written notes to yourself about thoughts of the data and your understanding of them (Graue & Walsh, as cited in Hatch, 2002). The memos were in tentative, hypothetical language as well as possible explanations for the behavior recorded in the data.

Read the Data, Identify Impressions, and Record Impressions in Memos

This step requires a deliberate attempt to make sense of what is going on in the data. The data was examined carefully while making and recording interpretations of
what is happening within the social contexts of the data. Meaning was attached to behaviors and events, and it was shaped by the participants in the study.

**Study Memos for Salient Interpretations**

This step is a data reduction process in which the decision is made as to which memos express interpretations that are salient to the research at hand. During this process, I decided which memos are worthy of becoming a part of the final report.

**Reread Data, Coding Places in Which Interpretations are Supported or Challenged**

During this stage, I searched for places that directly relate to the interpretations in the memos, and they were then be coded. During this process, I was then able to decide if the tentative interpretations are supported by the data.

**Write a Draft Summary**

This is essentially summarizing the interpretations so that others who are unfamiliar with the context can understand. Writing the “story” of the findings assisted in providing a test of the logical consistency of my thinking and expose any gaps in my argument that may exist.

**Transcription**

The focus groups were video- and audiotaped. Patton (2002) implies that transcribing is a part of the data analysis process and allows the researcher to become immersed in the data. Hatch (2002) suggests that video recording can capture the data in a way that will improve the qualitative inquiry. He also suggests that video recording be used with, not instead of, other data collection methods. Through videotaping, detailed transcripts of what occurred in the group can be recounted and replayed to ensure accuracy (Hatch, 2002). With the transcriptions and the video, I was able to see the tiny
details that would be otherwise difficult to capture with field notes or just audio recordings (Hatch, 2002). I used my clinical skills when engaging the participants and collecting data. As a clinician, it was important to be cognizant of all non-verbal forms of communication that occurred in the group.

**Determining the Central Themes**

Chapter 5 will contain a discussion of the themes that emerged as a result of the explication of the data using the interpretive analysis model.

**Dependability of the Data**

The quality of the data measuring sources is very important in any research, including qualitative (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). I used focus groups, and to ensure dependability of the data I continued to review the data and consulted with my committee. Since I was a participant-observer in the focus groups, my observation notes served as one of the triangulating sources. The transcription of the focus groups also ensured the dependability of the data.

**Reliability and Validity**

In qualitative research, much of the reliability and validity depend on the perspective of the researcher (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006), and since all researchers have certain biases, there are a number of techniques that can be used to check the perceptions of the researchers to ensure they are not being misinformed (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Fraenkel and Wallen suggest using the following procedures for checking validity and reliability:
1. Use a variety of instruments to collect data. Validity is enhanced when the conclusion is drawn from a number of different techniques. In this study data will be gathered from focus groups and semi-structured interviews.

2. Learning to understand and, where appropriate, speak the vocabulary of the group being studied. If the researcher does not understand the terms used by the participants, the researcher will record invalid data.

3. Write down the questions asked and the answers received. This will assist in making sense of the data collect and reduce distortions because of forgetfulness.

4. Recording personal thoughts while conducting observations and interviews.

5. The researcher can record any unusual or inconsistent responses and can check them later against other responses.

5. Describing the context in which questions are asked and situations are observed. Using audiotapes and videotapes. (p. 462)

**Credibility**

To become aware of biases that may convolute the outcomes of this inquiry, I engaged in committee consultation, I immersed myself in the data and referred to my reflective journal. Having a support system in which I can solicit feedback assisted me in ensuring that I am answering the research questions at hand and have defined the participants’ essence correctly. I continued to review the literature pertinent to this topic because I recognize that a great deal of recursion is involved in this process. Lastly, I continued to keep and refer back to the reflective journal to become aware of any personal biases that may have affected my interpretation of the data.
Summary

The aim of the study was to examine the lived experience of elder African Americans who were exposed to Jim Crow laws. The effects of exposure to racism have been examined extensively; however, because there is lack of exploratory studies that address the concept of elder African Americans’ experiences of Jim Crow laws, a qualitative inquiry was appropriate. Designed as a qualitative inquiry, the study sought to elucidate the lived experience of African American elders by grounding the work in phenomenology. According to Patton (2002), phenomenological analysis seeks to illuminate the essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon. By capturing the essential characteristics of the experience, I was able to detect commonalities in the perceptions of the participants and how they interpret similar experiences (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

Participants for this study were purposefully selected by using the gatekeepers of the community, word-of-mouth, advertising, and snowball sampling to ensure that there would enough participants to capture adequate data. Once selected, the participants engaged in focus groups. The data were analyzed using the guidelines in Hatch’s (2002) interpretive analysis model.
CHAPTER 4: THE FINDINGS

Qualitative research often seeks answers to questions by examining the individuals who inhabit various social settings (Berg, 2009); more specifically, how do these individuals make sense of their surroundings through social roles, social structures, and rituals? Qualitative research questions usually seek to find out what is going on and how it happened. Thus qualitative research can empower people who typically are marginalized by society (Stein & Mankowski, 2004). Through the narratives derived from the focus group participants in this study, this chapter illuminates the experiences of African American elders who otherwise may not have the opportunity to share their stories and experiences from the Jim Crow era.

Following the narrative description of the focus group interviews, the categories are organized into tables that provide a concise view of the phrases of significance and their relationship to the theoretical frameworks and the themes. The chapter concludes with a cross-case analysis and summary, which provides a sound contextual understanding of the experiences of African Americans exposed to Jim Crow. All of this material acts as an introduction to an in-depth analysis of the central themes in Chapter 5.

Demographics

Nine individuals participated in the two focus groups; all of them identified as African Americans who were born before 1964 and who therefore had some exposure to the Jim Crow era. They ranged in age from 64 to 86 years old. Three of the participants were born in Pennsylvania, while the other six were from Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina. There were three males and six females. In order to
protect the confidentiality of the participants, each was assigned a pseudonym for purposes of discussing the findings.

Table 1.

*Informant Demographic Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant ID</th>
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<td>1928</td>
<td>86</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ruby</td>
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<td>Rose</td>
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<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>1938</td>
<td>77</td>
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*Focus Groups*

Discussion in the focus groups was semi-structured and was digitally recorded and videotaped to ensure an accurate, verbatim account for transcription. Videotaping was especially important during the focus groups to ensure that distinctions could be made between the voices of the subject participants. Throughout the interview process, I also took notes regarding the participants’ non-verbal behaviors. I used a reflective journal to assist in bracketing my suppositions and in documenting my own experience of the process. The first focus group lasted approximately 2 hours and the second one about 1.40 hours. Both focus groups were conducted in a private room in a public library to provide participants with a sense of privacy and confidentiality.

*Presuppositions*

The concept of reflexivity implies that researchers understand that they are part of the research (Berg, 2009). Thus, as the researcher, I am aware of the influence I had upon
this study. To mitigate this influence, I practiced reflexivity throughout the study to reduce the potential for bias. According to Berg (2009), “to be reflexive is to have an ongoing conversation with yourself” (p. 198). Keeping a reflexive journal allowed me to have that ongoing conversation and to identify biases so they did not surface in the interpretation of the data.

First, I believed the focus groups would be therapeutic for the participants. The existing literature notes that in the African American community, talking about one’s problems with an outsider, such as a therapist, is considered inappropriate and serves as a source of embarrassment (Williams, 2011). Based on the literature and on my own involvement with various groups that provide support for African American elders, I knew that the participants most likely had not talked to a professional counselor or therapist regarding their traumatic experiences during Jim Crow. I believed that the focus group setting would assist the participants in sharing experiences from that era. Further, I suspected that because of some of the heinous acts they had seen and possibly suppressed, hearing others share equally devastating events would push those suppressed memories into the conscious mind and that discussing those experiences would be somewhat cathartic. I believed as well that my interest in their stories and their sharing of these stories as tales of triumph would cause them to feel that they are contributing to the growth of future generations.

Second, based on my current work with elders in the community, I thought they would pass down life lessons to the generations after them, including me as the researcher. McCoy (2011) described African American elders as “keepers of the African American legacy” (para. 1). The period of Jim Crow attempted to break down the African
American psyche, destroy the family structure, and keep African Americans
disenfranchised, relegating them to second-class citizenship. However, as the momentum
for the Civil Rights Movement grew, yielding positive results and gaining support in
calling for an end to these unjust laws, African Americans were able to see a glimmer of
hope and an end to this era. The individuals who experienced that period are now the
elders and gatekeepers of that period. They have become “indispensable resources for
their wisdom and guidance” and are recognized and given strength, empowered, and
authenticated (McCoy, 2011, para. 4); thus I suspected that would use every chance to
pass down tidbits of knowledge.

Third, I believed they would describe personal growth. Growth on the part of the
oppressed is not usually discussed; usually, it is the oppressors who realize the error in
their ways and experience growth. I thought, however, that the participants probably had
directly experienced some growth from exposure to Jim Crow. Though the Jim Crow era
was devastating, degrading, and inhumane, I believe that overcoming and surviving such
a period would undoubtedly lead to growth. I expected that individuals who were
exposed to Jim Crow would rely heavily on spirituality, their communities, and their
family to get them through the heinous treatment, thus growing in these areas of their
lives.

Finally, I believed that the recent spotlight on racial profiling and killing of
Blacks at the hands of law enforcement would emotionally take the participants back to
Jim Crow and that a discussion would arise in the focus groups. Racially charged killings
are not a new phenomenon. In one way or another, such has been occurring since
Africans were brought to this country and especially during Jim Crow. According to
Wilkerson (2014), the unjust killing of black bodies out of “fear” or minimal offenses has been the reality of African Americans for centuries, and often there was “no trial, no jury, no judge, no appeal” (para. 1). Wilkerson asserts that in the early 20th century, when Blacks were lynched, their corpses remained in public view for over four days, but very seldom did the murder of African Americans make the headline news during the Jim Crow era. Often, the only people who knew of the murders were those related to the individual. With the development of television, Internet, and social media, the trials of African Americans are brought into all homes, whether watchers or readers know the individual or not. Today, the rate of police killings of Black Americans is almost the same as the rate of lynchings in the early 20th century (Wilkerson, 2014). There is no doubt that these staggering figures remind those exposed to Jim Crow of that shameful period of American history.

In my attempt to be aware of my biases and presuppositions, I used my reflective journal and dialogued with colleagues to allow the meaning of the data to emerge. I provided only the minimal prompts necessary to keep the content focused and on topic during the focus groups and allowed the participants to share experiences and discuss meaning for them. I also became aware of my own thoughts regarding the potential outcome of the focus groups. For example, in sharing their experiences with Jim Crow, some participants went too far off topic, and I was afraid the original questions would get lost in the stories. Though the sharing of the experiences and stories was important to the participants, because of time and the importance of touching on the focus group questions, it was crucial that the group remain on topic. Luckily, the other members realized it when another participant was losing focus, and they were able to bring the
group discussion back on topic without my intervention. It was also important for me to remain objective and not show my excitement during the times when the participants naturally brought up topics and ideas that I had hoped would come up.

**How Focus Groups Were Analyzed**

Once the focus group discussions were complete, they were transcribed to provide an accurate written account of the proceedings. I chose to transcribe the data because I knew that listening and watching the focus groups repeatedly would assist me in recognizing nuances and would allow me to take note of the non-verbal behaviors of myself and the participants. Since I was the facilitator and thus had to be aware of the entire group process, the focus group questions, and my own process as noted in my reflexive journal simultaneously, the repetitive viewing allowed me to examine the behaviors of the group members and myself in a more detailed and purposeful fashion.

After the completion of the transcription process, the data were further explicated through the lens of van Manen’s four lived existentials, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model, and the tenets of Black existentialism and critical race theory. I used interpretive analysis to analyze the data to determine the meaning (Hatch, 2002). By using this model of analysis, I was attempting to “make sense of social situations by generating explanations for what’s going on within them” (p. 180). As I immersed myself in the data, which included my listening and watching the tapes repeatedly, I was able to gather impressions, and from the impressions came the memos. Transcribing the data myself was also helpful because it forced me to a genuine understanding of what the participants were saying instead of merely being the group facilitator. Next, the data were examined carefully as I made and recorded interpretations of what was happening within the social
context of the data. Because the amount of data was overwhelming, I was able to reduce what would be included in the final report by assessing what memos expressed interpretations that were salient to the research.

I then searched for material, which I coded, that directly related to the interpretations in the memos, and I kept the codes as close to the language of the participant as possible. After identifying and giving names to the basic meaning units or codes, I put them into categories, grouping similar codes together. Data that did not relate directly to the research questions were not included in the final report. Finally, I summarized the interpretations so that others who are unfamiliar with the context can understand. Writing the “story” of the findings assisted me in organizing my thinking and exposing possible gaps in my argument. The quotations in the transcriptions are lengthy, but it is important to get an accurate and total picture of the participants’ feelings, attitudes, and thoughts regarding Jim Crow. The significant themes could be organized into eight general categories relating to the research questions, as follows:

You have to live.

They can go screw themselves.

Who could you tell?

You think they were sending a message?

Everyone who smiles in your face ain’t your friend.

I thought it’d be different.

Hey, boy!

Passing the torch.
Focus Group #1

The first focus group was conducted in a large room in a public library in the inner city of Pittsburgh. When selecting a place, I knew I wanted it to be a place to which African American elders would be comfortable traveling, and I also wanted it to be on the bus line for those who did not have cars or who were no longer able to drive and would be transported by an access van. Also, because of their likely mistrust of mental health treatment and all things “clinical,” I did not want to hold the focus groups in an atmosphere that might remind the participants of a mental health facility or research. The public library I chose was and still is very influential in the fight for civil rights of African Americans. I arrived ahead of the participants to set up the recording equipment and make the space conducive for the focus groups, and I brought refreshments for the participants. After I set the room up, I went to the main lobby of the library to make sure the participants knew where to go for the meeting. Because the focus group took place on the third floor of the library, I put only my first name and room number on the dry erase board located in the lobby of the library to maintain anonymity and to direct the participants where to go. I also asked the security guard to direct any participants asking for me to the room where the focus groups would take place. I was anxious because 15 minute after the group was to begin, no one had arrived for the meeting. Eventually, one of the participants arrived, and I walked her to the room. I informed her that we were waiting for other participants, and we began to discuss the church she attends. I felt this casual conversation would assist in building rapport between the participants and me, and eventually the rest of the participants trickled in.
When all of the participants had arrived, I provided them with a copy of the informed consent, and I reviewed this document with them. I was careful to emphasize the need for confidentiality and the difficulty of ensuring such in a focus group setting. I also emphasized the voluntary nature of the study and its separation from any work requirement. After the participants had indicated a clear understanding of the study parameters, had expressed no further questions or concerns, and had signed the consent documents, I began recording the session. Focus group #1 comprised four individuals whose demographic information is presented in Table 2. Two of the participants knew each other because they attended the same church. Though the rest of the participants did not know each other, they appeared to be comfortable, engaging in casual conversation prior to the start of the focus group.

Table 2.

_Focus Group #1 Demographics_

<table>
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<tr>
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I began the session by asking the participants their thoughts on the 50th anniversary of the march to Selma. Participant Lee said she did not watch the movie about it, but she had seen the events. I interjected and asked if the events that she saw on television had brought back any memories. She said, “They went through a lot as far [as] trying to get votes and their rights and stuff.” Lee then described the racism down South as “blatant—if they didn’t want you to do something, they would say it, act upon it.” She
then said, “I was pleased to see the President march with them, you know, because it was a struggle for all of us.” It was in this moment that I begin to feel once again how monumental it must be to see an African American President marching over the bridge upon which, 50 years ago, African Americans had been viciously attacked for attempting to express their right to vote.

Lee then went on to say, “They went through a lot. Up in the North, we went through some things, but it wasn’t blatant.” I then asked her what some differences were that she saw between the North and the South. “Well, like I said, when they went through things—and they definitely didn’t want them to [go to] school and to vote or whatever—they came out and said it, and did things, up here, um, it was undercover; like even people you thought were your friends necessarily weren’t.” I asked her to clarify who “they” were and she said, “White people, I’m speaking about White people.” Lee then went on to discuss her experiences with discrimination on her job during the Jim Crow era:

I worked for a company for 37 years. And for the first time when they were gathering collecting companies to put together, they had many different people. Some were supervisors, Blacks, some were in their tutor company; they were in charge of stuff, and so as a result, when they collected these companies—um, I’m trying to say this without saying the company’s name—[company A] gathered all these—[company B] wasn’t a part of [company C]; [company D] wasn’t a part of [company E]; um, [company F] wasn’t apart of [company G]—but little by little they obtained these companies. There was Black supervisors within the companies; the different companies once they gathered, they fired all the
You were suppose to reapply for your job. As a result those supervisors that were there, they never got the job again. That was a way of saying they got rid of all, and you didn’t qualify, and they never had any supervisors after that, any Black supervisors. They did not rehire the same people that came into the company as a supervisor. They did not rehire them for a long time. I didn’t see any Black supervisors until maybe in the 2000s.

I then asked the group about Jim Crow and about the belief that Jim Crow was not in the North. Lee replied, “Jim Crow was, I want to say, blatant in the South. Like I said, if they didn’t like you, you knew they didn’t like you. This [in the North] was undercover.” I then asked, “What comes to mind when you hear the words Jim Crow?” Lee responded, “I didn’t have the knowledge of this until really I graduated from high school. Now my mother was a day-worker.” I asked her to explain what day-worker was in more detail. Lee explained:

She would go to these people’s houses and sometimes take care of their kids. And as a result, I mean we were poor as a result besides making—it wasn’t minimum wage. It was like $25 in carfare, if it was $25, and then if they had any clothing or something that could fit your family or whatever you could get hand-me-downs from them, and, um, if there was something wrong with transportation they would even come and get you.

I asked Lee if these were White families she worked for and she responded, “White families, right, and to a certain extent I think she was happy to work there because she was bringing in, you know....” Lee shared that she thought she could do day-work for extra money because she wanted more than her mother could provide:
I worked one day; they talked to me bad. Well, I remember at the end of the one day, she said to me, “Do I have to come home just to pay you?” I said, “Well, that’s what I am working for to help my mother so I could get things for myself.” She said, “Well, I didn’t think I had to come home to pay you,” and I said, “Well, you do.” I thought to myself, “How can my mother take this?”

I asked Lee how she thought her mother was able to withstand the treatment she endured as a day worker. She replied, “I don’t know. I really don’t know how she held what she wanted to say—when they talk to you that way, not only ‘do I have to come home?’ but I know there were other derogatory things said to her.” I then asked Lee, “What did your mother pass down to you about Jim Crow?” She replied, “I don’t remember exactly, but I know she was just happy she had a job to bring some money into the house, but she was always very tired because she was in that state where she scrubbed all the floors on her knees.”

As other participants joined the group, they remained quiet while the others talked. Lee and Marva finally began to discuss Jim Crow in Pittsburgh. Lee said referring to Marva, “See? She brought up a word that I called it ‘undercover.’ She called it ‘de facto.’” I was pleasantly surprised that this term came up at all in the group session, but I tried to remain objective and not show my excitement. Marva noted, “De facto segregation was in the North. We were segregated as to where we could live; we couldn’t live [just] anywhere. You had to live on the Hill, certain parts of Homewood, even all of Homewood was not open to us until after the civic arena was torn down.” (I believe she meant when the civic arena was built.) Lee responded, “I did not realize that because my mother and them had that house that we lived in. They owned that house through her
father, so we never moved anywhere, so I didn’t realize what the housing was like because we had a house.”

I asked the group about their feelings concerning the belief that Jim Crow did not affect people in Northern cities. Marva replied sternly, “That’s a lie! There was plenty that happened! You couldn’t walk through Wilkinsburg.” Lee interjected,

Or Mt. Lebanon after … and Wilkinsburg was even probably up until 1970. You couldn’t even walk through there when it was dark. And, you know, like a White guy said to me, he said, one time he asked me was I afraid of Homewood. I said, “I’m more afraid of Mt. Lebanon at night than I am in Homewood; I’m at home in Homewood. Okay, Mt. Lebanon I may get shot.”

Again, I engaged the group in a discussion regarding what feelings arise when they hear the term “Jim Crow.” Marva replied:

Well, you, I was telling her I lived in the South, South Carolina. I lived about 60 miles west of Charleston in a little town called Bamberg. And I went to school in, um, Denver, South Carolina, which was Voorhees College. And when I graduated from high school, here I was a honor student, okay? I was fifth in my class. We had at that time when I graduated in 1963, we had the largest graduating class all right. I was fifth in my class. I was not a dummy, okay? I had four years of French, and I spoke French fluently at that point. I went to school down in Voorhees College, and I became, I was the housemother down there. I was the housemother for one of the dorms. We had this one teacher who was a French teacher who had a drinking problem, and she could never make her 8 o’clock class, okay? After she heard me speak French, she asked me to take over her 8
o’clock class, so now I’m teaching her 8 o’clock class, I’m getting to something, okay? So now we had this Black Action Committee down there, and during this time—this was in the mid-60s, like ‘65, ’66—we, uh, we put up this petition and we were going to see the dean about our demands. I found out we had some teachers that shouldn’t even been teaching in college. They were only graduates of high school. They graduated from high school, so we go to the dean. Now, first of all, the school was either in Branchville or Denver, but the dean’s office was in Orangeburg, which was 30 miles away! Now, how you the dean and you 30 miles away from our school?

Okay, all right, so we go on up there, okay? That was the first thing, okay? We go on up there, and we present our demands. They make me the spokesperson because unfortunately a lot of those kids that were, that came from the South should not have graduated high school, okay? They were very poor in their academics, I mean extremely poor, so they made me the spokesperson, okay? I wrote all the papers and everything because their English was not together or whatever, so after we presented our demands, we had two teachers that was our support. One was a White English teacher, and one was a White math teacher. I excelled in both of those classes besides my French class, okay? And so we present our demands. Afterwards the dean dismisses everyone except me and the two teachers. He said to me, “Where are you from?” I said, “I’m from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.” He said, “Well, we do things differently down here. We do different things different down here.” [He] read me the Riot Act, okay? Fired the two teachers, flunked me in every class I had, even the French that I was
teaching! Flunked me in every class. I had no reason to stay there. I came back. I left.

The group fell silent after hearing Marva’s story and let out a collective, “Wow!” This appeared to affect Marva though it was over 40 years ago. I was relieved that the group sat with the silence and did not rush to respond to the story. They let Marva feel the disappointment in that moment. Marva continued:

I had other instances while I was down there. One of the things that you could do while you were down there, there’s a lot of streams and creeks and whatever. Usually you can go drop your rod in any creek stream and fish, okay? I was with my uncle and my aunt. We were going fishing on this road. I can’t remember the name of this road. Right outside of Branchville, and were out there. We’re fishing. And this car comes down, and it had six White men in the car. They pulled up about 200 yards in front of us, okay? They all got out of their car and started shooting over into the woods. You think they were giving us a message?

Marva let out a hearty laugh after sharing this experience with the group. The situation was undoubtedly traumatizing, but she is now able to share the experience with a light heart. The group became light-hearted as well, and the participants began to smile and laugh with Marva. I reiterated the question, “What comes to your mind when you hear the words Jim Crow?” I explained it could be an experience, a word, a thought, or an image. Henry responded:

Well, first thing I will say is that they think they’re better than you anyhow.

That’s number one, and then, again they don’t want you around. That’s why I’m going to tell you the truth when you start talking about down there. I’m from
down there. I was born and raised down there. I been here now 60 years, but anyhow they didn’t treat us right, you know. I was telling some of my church members the other day here, they all hollerin’, “Let’s go out to eat. Let’s go out to eat. Let’s go out to eat,” but you know what? There’s nothing wrong with going out to eat, but I remember when they wouldn’t serve us. They wouldn’t serve me. You had to go to the, had to go to the kitchen to get your food. They would pass you your food through a window, had to go back there and get it. You ride the bus, you had to get a bus or something going into little town, had to go in way in the back—ain’t had nothing but two seats, and then when the Whites get on and there wasn’t no room for them, and then you had to get up.

In unison, the group all began to agree with Henry reminiscing about not being able to get food from the kitchen. It sounded like a church service with the choruses of “Yes” and “Amens” coming from the group as Henry spoke. Henry said, “When I was working there was two water fountains, colored and White.” Marva joined in, “Right, when I was in the South in the 60s, they still had the Black and White signs up, and I remember too after he said that: it reminded me I went to the doctor one time, got sick, had the flu or whatever go to the doctor. Here I am stupid, right? I go in the White door.” Henry responded, “Well, you ain’t stupid.” Marva replied,

Well, because at that time when I first went down there, they still had the Black and White signs, okay? But by this time they had did all these marches; the signs were down, but they still had the separate entrances, okay? I go in the White side, and they told me, “Oh no, you have to go around the other way.” Now when you go in the White lobby, it’s clean, it’s bright, it’s cheery, went around to the Black
side... It’s dim, dark, and dirty, okay now? I sat there, now you had to wait until all the White people were waited on. It don’t matter when they came in. They could have came in two hours after you did. You still gotta wait until they’re all done. So now when they finally get to me and, uh, the nurse comes in, they take me into the exam room, and she says, uh, she wants to take my temperature, okay? Well, they had a beaker with alcohol in it, and the thermometers in it, right? Okay, but there’s about this much (uses hands to show amount) dust on top of the beaker. Now when she pulls that thermometer out, all that dirt goes onto the thermometer, and she told me to open my mouth, and I called her a few words and said, “You’re not putting that in my mouth.” Okay, all right. And so when the doctor comes in, of course, they ask me, “Where are you from?”

The group interjected and confirmed what she said. Marva continued. “And then he gave me, I don’t know what he gave me, but whatever he gave me, I can’t remember. It made me so sick I threw that stuff away. I poured that stuff down the toilet.” As the participants shared stories, it appeared as if these were stories they had not thought of in years. Marva, in particular, had experienced one thing after another with Jim Crow.

Marva continued,

My first year of college, I was going to Southern Illinois University. Okay, took the train; after you get so far over, you know, we was all sittin’ integrated. I can’t remember where the line was. I had to get up and move my seat. I had to go sit in the bathroom for the rest of the trip.

Focus group members seemed shock. Lee asked, “Wait a minute. You said, ‘bathroom?’” Marva replied, “Well, they told me I had to give up my seat to a White
person, and I could stand or go sit in the bathroom! I went and sat in the bathroom.”

Marva once again let out a hearty laugh.

I then asked the group, “How was it to hear each other’s experiences?” Lee replied,

Racism up here was undercover, you know; people even, I take it back to people I work with, I thought I was friendly with this…and they stab you in the back quicker than I don’t know what. I had bought a used car. It wasn’t new. It was used, and because I bought a car, this woman who smiled in my face had went and got the security and pointed out my car so that they could tow it away, and so I had asked her, “Why would you do something like that?” And she said, “You had no business parking where you did.” I said, “Are you jealous because I just bought? It’s new to me, but it’s not a new car.” But I thought she was my friend. Lee really appeared to be disappointed as she shared this story.

Marva asked if she was Black or White. Lee replied, “She was White. I was heartbroken, and from that point on, my family thought I was paranoid, but from that point on I didn’t trust.” I then asked the group if they had developed a mistrust for White people because of their experiences. Marva replied,

You have to take them one on one. Because I learned very quickly when I went out to Southern Illinois when I went to Southern Illinois University all my roommates were White, okay? I didn’t have any Black roommates. I couldn’t ‘cause I, the campus I lived on, ‘cause we were so poor. I lived on a secondary campus, and they transported us to the main campus, okay? And, um, so there were Blacks on the main campus, but there wasn’t any, you know, and so there
wasn’t a lot where I was at the vocational campus, and all my roommates were White so I learned you have to take them one on one because some of them I became very good friends with, and we wrote each other for years, okay? But one of my experiences, when I came back to Pittsburgh, there’s so many. I worked for Westinghouse, Westinghouse Electric out here in Monroeville, and we did the analysis of nuclear power plants, and I was a technician because at that point I only had an associate’s degree. I never, I never really got my bachelor’s, okay? Uh, I had an associate’s degree, and I was the first Black woman that was in the technical area, okay, in the energy system, okay, at Westinghouse, at that time nuclear energy system; and so it became very apparent to me that they were not used to dealing with Black people.

I asked Marva, “How so?” She responded,

Just in the courtesy, in trying to…the men were fresh. They think they thought that they could just do what they wanted with you, okay? You know, I had a guy dropped a paper clip, and this is why until this day I still don’t wear dresses anymore; I had on a dress, and at that time we were wearing minis, okay? I was programming. I’m working with this guy on this program, a paper clip happened to fall on my leg he had the nerve to touch my leg. I reported him.

Marva then went into detail regarding the conversation she had with her supervisor regarding the incident. She stated that her supervisor did not understand why she no longer wanted to work with him. She said,

I’ll never forget his name was [name removed], and, uh, I know one time he said to me, he says, “You know, I understand racism,” and I said, “Really?” He says,
“Yeah, ‘cause, you know, umm, I’m Catholic and something, something, and I’m like Catholic?” You don’t know nothing ‘bout racism. Shut up? That’s what I wanted to say, but I’m thinking, Really?

The group began to discuss being the only Black in their work experience. It became very evident that Marva had many stories to share about her experiences with Jim Crow. Marva continued,

I was the only Black in the technical field, well the only Black female. There was one Black guy there [Name removed], but [Name removed] used to make me so angry because he was the Black person that wanted to get over [i.e., not work his hardest but still expect positive results] to instead of doing the work. He wanted to get over, so they would tell me. I went in and I talked to my boss [removed name]; um, but I went in and talked to [name removed], and I said, “Why don’t we have more Blacks working here?” And he says, “Well, we can’t find any,” and I’m like, “Really?” I put the call out, okay? And so we got lot of Blacks that came in and applied, okay? And so we did get some Blacks hired there. But their idea was, “There’s none out there that’s qualified.” No, they’re afraid to, um, apply because they know that they’re gonna get … rejected.

Henry added, “Or get fired!”

Henry began to discuss his experiences working in Pittsburgh. He had moved from Jacksonville, Florida, and he discussed the discrimination he faced on his job. He shared that he came to Pittsburgh in hopes of making more money.

When I was down South, the Blacks use to work on production, but when I got here, there wasn’t no Blacks on production. They was just mopping the floor and
washing the walls, which I did when I came here. When your hand is in the lion’s mouth, you got to ease it out, but you’ll learn a lot if you just keep your mouth shut. When I got here, the Blacks was just mopping the floor. The only time Blacks were allowed to work on production was when White people had their 8, 10, 12 hours in, and the Black guys had to come in and finish it off. We was good enough then, but wasn’t good enough to start it. It was 1967 before they start hiring Black womens. They had White womens. They could work but not our Black womens.

The group then began to talk about their work experiences in their career and the minimal wages. In an attempt to focus the group back on the discussion questions, I asked how they were able to survive that period. Marva responded, “The thing of it is, at that point your family all lived almost on the same street as you did.” Henry replied, “Everyone, cousins.” Marva went on to say,

My aunt, my mother, now there were three families in my house. There was my mother and two of her sisters lived in the house. My aunt lived across the street. My other aunt lived on the next block. You go through the ally [and] you’re at her house, okay? So your structure, your family structure was all close. And we put in together to do what we had to do.

The group agreed, saying, “That’s right” and “Yeah.” Marva continued, And then you had rent parties. There was always the rent parties. The rent parties was like, okay, you might have a poker game going on; whose ever house it was at, they’d cut the pot. And then they might have a social, so you’d pay to get in,
and then you bought the food. You had to pay for your food, and you had to pay for your drinks. These were the rent parties that we had in order to get your rent. Henry responded with, “Amen.”

I asked the group if they talked about the experiences they endured with anyone. Lee replied, “No, you had to keep it.” Henry added, “You just keep it to yourself.” I asked the group why did they not discuss their experiences concerning Jim Crow with anyone. Henry replied, “Cuz you ain’t have no one.” Lee said, “I talked to some of my family, but I wouldn’t talk to someone on the job.” Henry interjected, “Because that’s your job, and they would have got rid of you.” Lee said, “You don’t know who’s talking to who, so you would keep it, and either talk to your family or keep it to yourself.” Marva said,

Now I did talk to my supervisor about them not having other Blacks, not about my particular situation. We had all these formulas we had to do or whatever, and the one engineer gave me some work because I was the technician. He supposedly count the formulas that I was to use, and I was to make the calculations. Well, when I looked at the formula he put the formula down wrong, okay? I took it to my supervisor because when I took it to him, he told me I didn’t know what I was talking about. Okay, so I took it to the supervisor, okay? So now when I go to the supervisor and I show him the mistake, he corrected it; and he said he called in the engineer and told him, and so what they did from that is made a whole new structure of how work was to be checked. That another engineer was supposed to check the other engineers’ work and the technician was to check all the calculations.
Henry said to Marva, “They wouldn’t take your word for it, you know what I mean?”

The group then began to discuss their families and work experience in more detail. The members of the group were very proud of their children, listing their accomplishments. I transitioned the conversation to discuss what the participants passed down to their children about Jim Crow. Henry shouted out, “Go to school!” and in unison, the rest of the group responded, “Education!” Henry again shouted out, “Education, you can’t beat it!” Marva said, “I sent my kids to private school, and my son used to tell me—not my son, my brother—he used to tell me, ‘You’re making them prejudiced!’ I says, ‘No, I’m preparing them.’”

Lee began to discuss her children, saying that she also put her children in private schools. Lee explained that her daughter went to a school in Pennsylvania and would call her often to talk about the racism she faced there. Lee said, “For some reason her talking to me was different than me talking to my mother. ‘Cause my mother was sort of closed-mouthed. She never talked a lot that I could talk to her.” Lee said she told her daughter if she could handle the experiences she faced at her school, she would be able to handle other experiences because that is what “the outside world looks like.” Lee finished by saying, “Education is the way out.”

I asked the group what messages they got from their parents about Jim Crow. Once again in unison they responded, “They didn’t talk about it!” Henry said, “If the White man say something, you know what I mean.” Marva replied, “You had to do it!” and Henry supported her statement, saying, “You had to do it.” Marva shared, “When I went to the South, what my mother said to me—because I got a smart mouth, my mother
said to me, “Keep your mouth shut. Don’t talk.” Marva said that she received the same messages when she would visit her aunt and uncle down South. She said,

They used to tell me, “[Name removed], don’t talk. When you go into town, don’t talk, don’t say anything.” They use to tell me all the time, “just keep your mouth shut,” but I was never that one. I’m not the one to keep my mouth shut. If I see you messing over me, I’m gonna tell ya.

I asked the group if they had ever seen others stand up for themselves to a White person. It was quiet for a moment, then Henry replied first saying, “I didn’t see it; I was young, I was small, and like mama and daddy say, ‘You obey them.’” Marva responded to Henry’s statement saying, “See, and they weren’t educated either.” Henry replied, “Yeah, see my dad didn’t go to school. I don’t think he went to the third grade.” They discussed their parents’ education, with some sharing indicating that their parents did not finish middle school. Henry said,

And after I got married I told them, I said, “I know what I went through with them, what my sisters went through. I ain’t had but one sister, and I’m not ashamed to tell it, I tell the kids all the time, I ain’t have but one sister who finished high school.” But I promised the Lord I know when I was working at A & P, I didn’t want to mop no floors. Ain’t nothing wrong with mopping floors, but I didn’t want to mop floors; if the Whites can make it, then why can’t I? I’m just as smart as they are.

Marva replied,

It’s funny you say that because when I was in school I had the one aunt, and she worked at the cleaners and then they did day work. All the women did day work.
They went in the White peoples’ houses, and they was cleaning their house, and so that impressed me, and so the impression it gave me was that I ain’t cleaning no White people’s houses. They can go screw themselves. I ain’t cleaning no White people’s houses, and when I wanted to go to college my aunt, God rest her soul, she didn’t understand it. She said, “Why do you want to do that? You can go with me, and I’ll teach you to,” and I’m like, “I don’t want to go nowhere with you.”

They all discussed those in their lives who were day workers and shared the sentiment that they did not understand how they were able to do that type of work because of the way they were often treated. Lee stated she did not understand how her mother did it saying, “I wasn’t vocal with mine, but it was bubbling up on the inside.” Marva interjected,

I used to even fight with the teachers. My homeroom teacher and my English teacher at [name removed], but, um, me and him use to fight like cats and dogs, and one day I said to him, “You can’t be treating me like no black dog!” You know, so he put me out of his class for a few weeks. I had to sit out in the hall. I asked the group how what they went through during Jim Crow affected them today. Marva replied,

Very much so. It has made my personality even more because even now till this day I will not accept that crap from White people. I won’t accept it. I will not accept it, but it has also given me the thing to know that no matter what I do, I have to do my best to show them. But what I have really found is that the reason White people are so afraid of us is because they know more of our history than we
They know what the Egyptians did, right now they tryna make them seem like they [the Egyptians] White. They wasn’t White back then, okay? They were Black. They discovered algebra and calculus and all that stuff so what they are is afraid that we will eventually take over the world, and they will be subjugated to us. That’s what they’re afraid of, okay? That’s what I have found in this life.

I turned to Lee and asked her how it affected her. She replied,

At first, even as a young kid, I was kind of quiet. I was a good listener before I really said anything, and as it went along, I become more vocal. My mother didn’t encourage me a lot as far as school. I encourage my daughter. I refuse to be like my mother and not say anything because I knew education was the way. I told her, “I would help you. This is your main job. You don’t have to work because I want you to come out of school.” I think if I would have had more encouragement when I first started out in school, I would have stayed in there, but I didn’t have that.

Lee went on to say that she did not have the encouragement from her mother because her mother was soft spoken and from a different era. The group collectively responded, saying, “They didn’t talk much.” I turned to Henry and asked him how it affected him. He said,

I see so much of that. See, my sisters worked hard, and daddy worked hard. I promised the Lord when I came up here just like down home, these Black womens was going out to Squirrel Hill, going way out there to Mt. Lebanon. You had street cars, then they would ride from let’s say Homewood, East Liberty, to Mt. Lebanon. They’d go out to Craig Street and get another bus and go all the
way down. I promised the Lord if the Lord bless me to have a family and we have a family, I say those kids going to school, I told them that you know what I mean. I see that the Black womens and the Black men, the Black womens they was going out there to help their husbands, had handbags [they] use to bring some of the clothes home to iron them at night, you know what I mean? And I said I don’t want my wife, I don’t want my wife going up there and scrubbing no floors, you know what I mean? And she can go to school to get an education, although I didn’t have it, you know what I mean, but the Lord bless me. I have experience, and I used to tell her “you not doing that.”

He went on to share what wisdom he imparted in his children by getting an education and being honest. Henry then said,

I didn’t want my wife out there working for those White people. Then, they had to bring the clothes home, iron them. My sister, she’s deceased now, worked for the [name removed] down in Charleston, South Carolina. She put 40 years. I don’t think she get a pension.

This observation seemed to arouse the group, and Marva shouted, “No pension, no social security, no nothing!” Henry interjected, “That’s why I told these kids, ‘You go to school. You get an education.’” The group continued to discuss the treatment of Blacks. Henry then said, “And the black kids today, I don’t know what’s wrong with them.” The group seemed to be eager to discuss the state of younger Blacks today. Marva shared,

What I have seen now, unfortunately, because it’s in my own family, the young people think that they’re free, okay? They’re not free. They don’t understand
racism. They don’t understand what we went through to make them feel like that they free, okay? So now they don’t think that they need to get educated. I have a granddaughter—unfortunately, she’s 30 years [old] and can barely read. She has four children. What can she teach her children? Nothing! She can’t teach them anything; praise the Lord her son—the boys are always the hardest, okay. They drop out of school faster than any others. The boys always drop out. The girls seem to stay, but the boys always drop out—praise God her son calls me every day, great grandson, and we talk, and I told him, “Whatever you do,” ‘cause he said he wants to be a rapper and I said, “Okay, it’s not my choice, but if that’s what you want to do, you need to start reading poetry so that you know how to construct a rap.” I said, “You need to learn English so you know the words you are using. You just don’t need to use cuss words all the time. You need to be able to tell a story. If you don’t read, you can’t tell a story, okay?” So I encourage him to do the work. Okay, I said, “You want to be a rapper, okay. This is the things you need to find out about the record industry, okay, how does it work?” I’m like, “Okay, you’re 12 years old, but you need to find this out now,” I said, “cause then when you get 17 or 18 years old, what you gonna do?” I said, “Then you’ll be ready to start doing what you want to do, okay?” But if I didn’t encourage him that then he would still be doing whatever, and unfortunately his dad is a drug dealer, okay? And I told him, I says, “You know, I don’t want to see you go that way. Your dad is either gonna get killed or end up in jail.” I said, “Is that what you want for your life?” So we have to take our young people, and I try to take those kids and encourage them, and I always took the worst kids, give me the bad
ones. I want the bad ones, you know, give me the worst kids, you know; those are the ones I want.

Since the group vocalized their concerns with “young people” today, I asked them what they thought the differences were and why they were so disappointed in the younger generations. Marva replied,

Because they knew they weren’t free, those young people in the 40s and 50s. They were the ones being lynched—strange fruit, that’s a man or a woman hanging out of a tree—okay, you saw that our kids don’t know nothing about that. My grandson and them didn’t even know that you couldn’t even go, when you go to a White person’s house, you had to go to the back door!

Henry added, “Tell them about.” She added, “And they was like, ‘You had to go to the back?’ I’m like, ‘Yeah! You had to go to the back door. You couldn’t go to the front!’ You know they didn’t know that!” Henry then added, “You couldn’t go in their house at all.” Marva responded, “Exactly! Unless you were doing some work.”

Marva began to discuss her experiences in a segregated school in Pittsburgh. She said,

When I went to elementary school in the 60s, there was no Whites. When I went to junior high school, there was two White kids in the class. Now, when we went to Schenley in high school, that’s when I got into an integrated class because they were coming from Oakland and the Hill, okay, but until then I didn’t have any contact with White people.
Continuing to discuss the current generation, Lee stated, “We didn’t feel like we were entitled to stuff. This generation they feel like they’re entitled. We had to work [for] everything we got.” The group all agreed with her statement.

By this time, Marva had to leave the group, and Jean entered the group but sat quietly and listened to the others share their experiences. When she entered, I quietly explained the informed consent, so I would not interrupt the group discussion and gave her an opportunity to read over it before she signed it. I also told her what we had discussed up until that point. Jean finally began to share her experiences:

I went to Taylor Allderdice when no Blacks were there. There were like four Blacks in the whole school, and they didn’t have us in the same school. I had to get up in the morning—you did your chores before you went—then when you came home from school, you had to help fix dinner and all that; I did all that just to go to school, and I did just like you did [pointing to Henry], and I told my kids, “Why use your back when you can use your head,” and all mine graduated from high school, and then I have grandchildren who graduated from college.

The group supported Jean as she discussed the success of her descendants. Henry replied, “That’s a blessing! I said that I had three kids; well, I just got one daughter living oldest daughter passed away; then my son passed away, but I stayed on them you know what I mean, I know what I went through; many days I could cry.”

Jean continued,

Well then, you know Beltzhoover, that use to be a really nice place to live. My husband, when we were married, he always took us to an area where there were no Blacks. We lived in Beechview on [name removed] where we were the only
Blacks. I took my kids to the playground, and the Whites asked me, “Are you lost?” And I said, “No, I live here.” They took all their kids and left the playground. And I lived in a little, uh (inaudible) during the riots. They had come down from Mt. Oliver, Beechview and all that, to go past my house, and those grown White men would be coming down with bats and chains and stuff just to go down into Beltzhoover to fight, and here I am up in this White…. I told my neighbors, I said, “I’m telling you now, if I see anybody that looks like they’re gonna come to my house to hurt me or my children, I’m going to shoot first and ask questions later.”

The group began to share memories of the riots after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated. She continued, “When we moved, the man in the front, he would come and empty his garbage in my yard.” The group began to process what Jean shared and agreed that because she lived in a White neighborhood and was the only Black family there, the Whites would deliberately do things to try to force her to move. Jean then went on to say,

Then we had a nurse. When she would back her car out into the ally to get out, and she would always bump into my fence, and it kept on going for…. See, White people are dirty. They don’t come out. They do it dirty underhanded, so I’ve had enough.

At that point the group once again brought up de facto racism. Jean continued to share:

I was a nurse then, and I would always take my uniform off when I came in the door and put it in a bucket of bleach water because I didn’t want to bring the
germs home to my family, and I was upstairs in the bed in my slip. Someone knocked on the door, and my husband went down and answered the door, and it was a White neighbor from down the street, and she said, “I don’t want my sons playing with no niggers.” I came down those steps so fast and said, “First of all, don’t no niggers live here.” I said, “When I read the dictionary, it said a nigger is a low character ignorant person,” and I said, “That fits you better than it does me.” I said, “You’re gonna come to my house…?” and I grabbed a hold of her and wouldn’t let go.

At this point, the group supported Jean’s shared experiences by making statements like, “That sounds like them” and “Mm hmm.” Jean added, “But they put you through all kinds of stuff.”

The group then began to discuss unfair treatment they and their children had experienced during the Jim Crow era. They specifically discussed the treatment they received from police. Jean added, “I had six sons that I had to protect,” and Lee said, “You had a battle on your hands.” Jean replied,

Yes. I did. You have no idea, right here in Pittsburgh [name removed] in East Liberty. You could go and buy an ice cream, but you couldn’t eat it there. But we could not eat in there, and me and my husband went to Maryland, and my husband had never been nowhere, and we went into this restaurant in the morning to have breakfast, and they kept going all around us, and nobody would wait on us, and I called the waitress, and I said, “We been sitting, and nobody waited on us,” and she said, “Did you read the bottom of the menu?” And I said, “No, I
didn’t,” and I read it, and it said, “We do not serve colored people,” and I said, “That’s all right ‘cause I don’t eat them either!”

The group began to laugh. “But I knew that we didn’t need to eat there because they could have put something in our food, anything.” The group began to discuss other experiences; therefore, in an attempt to bring the group back to the group questions, I asked the group how it feels to hear the words “Jim Crow”? Jean answered first:

It was always, you were always aware of it especially in Pittsburgh. They called Pittsburgh “the little South.” It was little subtle things, you know, like you’ll go in the store and you’re standing next to be waited on, and they’ll go past you and wait on some White person that just came in and leave you standing there, and you either take it or you don’t, and I never could take it. I was born in Tennessee, and we would go home at night because you couldn’t eat in any of the restaurants. Henry added, “Sure couldn’t.” Jean continued, “Couldn’t use the restrooms. We had to go out into the bushes and relieve ourselves, and all this kind of stuff, so our kids don’t know nothing about that.” Henry chimed in,

They don’t know nothing ‘bout that. See, I’m from South Carolina, you know what I mean. We used to go down South…. We would go down the Pennsylvania Turnpike, and you know what, we use to pull in the gas station. See, they got more big gas stations than they ever had. We would go to a little gas station, small mom and pop store, and they was serving gas or whatever. You go in there, and you have to go to the bathroom. The kids have to go to the bathroom; mom or I had to go to the bathroom. Anyhow, they say, “Can I help you?” and I say, “Yes, we want some gas, and do you have a bathroom?” “Yes, we have a bathroom, but
we don’t have one for Blacks,” and I said, “Well, I don’t want no gas,” and get back in my car.

Based on his experience, Henry offered words of wisdom to me, encouraging me always to keep gas in my car when I traveled.

By this point, the group was continuing to share stories, so I asked them to share what they were taught about Jim Crow. Henry replied, “They didn’t talk about it too much. They was scared, I would say now. They ain’t gonna talk about the White man, but the White man talk about you. They get together Friday and Saturday night and they talk….” Jean replied, “That was their conversation,” and Henry agreed. Jean added,

We went home to Tennessee because it was homecoming and reunion, and here come these White people to the house [name removed]. “I hear we got folks from up North down here” because they were our relatives, and my little boy, he was really cute, and they’re laughing and talking said, “Aww [name removed], that’s a mighty cute little nigger you got there.” My aunt said, “Sit down. Be quiet. He don’t mean no harm.” That’s what they call it. I didn’t like that.

Jean told the group her family was used to being called “nigger,” but she was not. I then asked the group members if they had ever been called “nigger.” Jean replied, “Oh yeah, all the time.” Henry added, “They want to do it now, but they know we don’t take it.” Henry continued to share words of wisdom with the group. He told an old fable, “An old owl, he sat in an old oak tree. The more he hear, the less he spoke. The less he spoke, the more he heard. So keep you mouth shut.”

Jean then began to describe how Jim Crow affects her today.
I live in a senior citizen building, and some of those Whites have never lived with Blacks before, and it comes out. Uh, we had an incident a couple weeks ago over a can of soup. Someone left their groceries down in the shopping cart, and someone took it, and they accused this White woman of doing it. Of course, you ain’t supposed to tell her nothing. She’s White, and, uh, her and the lady that accused her, they got into it, and she called her a nigger. Then she came one day just crying, “These Blacks are tryna get us White people out of here.” I said, “Does she know who she’s talking…? I’m Black.”

Jean began to discuss her work experience before she retired. She discussed her interactions with her White co-workers, saying they would tell her, “You’re not like the rest of them. You’re different.” I always said, “Look, I’m no different than anybody else. You put me in the White House, I’d eat my chittlins and play my music.” They always tried to separate you. You’re the good nigger, and those are the bad niggers. Then I lived in Squirrel Hill for a while, and my daughter came to see me, and this old, well you know, Black women have a lot of problems with White men. They think you’re there for their enjoyment, so I had turned him down, tried to come to my house and stuff, politely, but me and my daughter standing there, I’m waiting for the bus for her to go home. He looked at my daughter, “How many children you got? About 13?” I mean, you know, just, he’s just degrading her, and I said, “Wait,” I said, “First of all, when you were down on Logan Street selling that stuff that you were selling to my folks, and you were putting away a penny,” I said, “Well, I saved a few. That’s why I can live next door to you.” They automatically assume that we have a gang of children, we
don’t have no husbands, we’re dirty and nasty and stuff, and see some of them
same people I’m living with in the senior citizen place came with that
preconceived idea, and most of the Blacks in there can buy and sell them over,
and they can’t take that. A Black person is not supposed to have more than they
have.

I once again brought up the 50th anniversary of Selma and how that was for them.
Jean replied,

I marched. I went to Washington, and marched in the 60s. I went with Kathy
Milton and Christian Jenachet, and it was scary. You’re walking around there
protesting, and here are these big cops on these big horses, riding through the
crowd, and you don’t know whether they’re gonna hit you in the head with their
with their billy stick or let the horse trample you. You don’t know you’re putting
you life on the line. And right here in Pittsburgh, I protested [name removed]
because of their hiring practices. So all of us in our own way, we might not have
been able to do what Martin Luther King and them did, but in our own small way,
we did something.

The group began to discuss current events and their feelings about race relations
today. They described their disgust with the way President Barack Obama has been
treated as well as the incident at Oklahoma University. Jean stated,

It’s in them. They want to see us down. They don’t want to see you have nothing,
and most of them still wish they had plantations that they could own your butt and
all that. So, what you have to do is know who you are, and don’t let anyone take
that away from you. They look for us to get out there and [simulated cussing and
arguing]. Don’t do that cause that’s what they want you to do because that justifies what they’re doing to you. But in their quiet way, you tell them, “I’m not any of that, and you’re not gonna talk to me that way,” or whatever. Stand up for yourself.

In referring to racism, discrimination, and the ethos of Jim Crow, Jean stated, “It’s still going on.” I asked the group if they thought it was worse now than during Jim Crow. Jean replied, “Yes, it’s worse. They don’t want you to know what they have done to you, and they don’t want you to know what it cost for you to get where you’re at.” Going back to the question of survival, the group once again agreed that the way to survive Jim Crow was education. But Jean said, “They’ve made that hard for you to do. You go to the White schools, [and] they have computers and good books and stuff. You go to our schools, and we have second hand.” She then went on to discuss how she fought to get Sambo taken out of the public schools because it was degrading to Black children. She added,

See, you can’t do a lot, but do something. See, Black men now are a target. They’re the most endangered species in the world. They just killed another boy, unarmed, no reason, but they killed him. But this other White boy came out with a rifle, shooting at them, but they shot him in the hand. So it’s not okay, and as far as I’m concerned, in my lifetime, it never is gonna be.

I then wanted to hear more about what was passed down to their children, so I asked if they feared for their children’s lives during Jim Crow. Jean replied, “Of course.” She shared another experience with her sons when they were younger while Henry agreed. She continued, “You’re always afraid for your sons, even the grown ones. Now,
I’m afraid for my grandsons.” She later added, “You have to fear on two sides: Blacks who have nothing want to destroy someone who does, and the White man who doesn’t want you to come up to where he’s at. So it goes on and on and on.”

Henry brought the conversation back to the current generation, discussing the violence, “Just like all these guns and stuff; we don’t have no guns, [so] who gives [them]? Where they get the guns? The White man, and they sell it to them for little to nothing!” The group began to wrap up, and I once again shared why this research is so important. It was clear that the group did not want to leave because they continued to share experiences. Jean added, “We went through all kind of stuff, but we had children who depended on us to feed them, to keep a roof over their heads, so we had to take blows.” I asked if that was what helped them to get through, knowing they had a family and children depending on them. Jean replied, “Yes, and you had to swallow your pride.” Henry also agreed, adding, “That’s why I tell kids [to] stay in school. See, once you get it up here (pointing to head), no one can take it from you.” Jean said, “See, knowledge is power!”

The group began to discuss the current state of the Black community and how disappointed they are. I asked the group what they thought had changed. Jean immediately replied, “Family values changed, when the old heads started dying off.” She also added, “Neighbors took care of neighbors. Now that’s gone.”

I posed the question of the part integration has played in the changing dynamics of the community. Jean was the first to reply saying, “It became both better on one hand, worse on the other, because White people never wanted you to know the poverty they went through, but when we started integrating....” Henry added, “It’s in me because I
know what I went through, then I ain’t want you calling me no nigger. A dog’s a nigger, you know what I mean, we would fight over that I know how they feel about me as a Black man.”

Jean began to discuss complexion issues within the Black community:

My mother-in-law told me “[Name removed], you’re a nice girl. I don’t have anything against you, but you’re just too dark,” so, you know, we got it from both ends. And I don’t care, we might like a light-skinned boy, but he could not take us home because they ain’t want no dark kids. They wanted to lighten the race, but I told my kids we can’t be prejudice against anybody.

There was further brief conversation before the group ended. I thanked the participants for coming out and reminded them that I might need to call them for an interview. As I was about to put away my belongings, Jean began to share another experience:

I lived in Florida, and I worked at a hotel, and, you know, you’re not suppose to, you’re suppose to knock on the door and make sure nobody’s in there. So I saw this couple go out, didn’t see the man come back. I knocked on the door. Nobody answered. I went in there. He was in there, waiting for me, and he raped me. Who could you tell? You know, then I’m on this (inaudible) bus and they’re all rubbing on me, and I said, “Stop that!” and then I thought about it. They could throw me out here in these woods, and no one would never know. But you went through all kinds of degrading incidents. It wasn’t just down there; it was here. I was a nurse. I worked on Fifth Ave. This man’s wife was really, really sick, and he wanted me to go with him, and he said, “[Name removed], they do this all the time. I’ll take
good care of you” and all that stuff, and we got into a wrestling match, and I’m standing in the door waiting for my replacement to come, and I never went back, and he kept calling. “I want [Name removed] to come back.” He’d call my house and say, “[Name removed], they do this all the time,” but I don’t do it, but they had their sons, you work in the house. Their sons be tryna follow you around and grope you and stuff it … was awful. And you had to work, you had to have money to live, but you had to protect yourself. But half the time the White women knew it. They didn’t care what their husbands did as long as they keep bringing that money home. So you had no protection, so we were [in] peril at home.

I did not ask any questions at this point and allowed silence in the group so the members could process what had just been shared. I thanked the participants for being a part of the group session, and I reiterated that I would be in touch for individual interviews. The group members said it was nice to meet each other, and I also said that I would share the results with them if they wished. After the participants exited the room I allowed myself to sit with the experience of the focus group. The richness of the stories left me speechless many times during the group. I took notes in my reflexive journal so I could remember my feelings while I transcribed the data. I felt the discussion questions had been answered and addressed extensively, and I was confident that my research questions had been answered as well.

The phrases of significance from Focus Group 1 are contained in Table 3.

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Table 3 (continues on following pages).

*Theories that Frame the Study Paired with Focus Group #1 Quotations*

### van Manen’s Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenets of Theory</th>
<th>Quotation of Significance</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lived Space</td>
<td>We were segregated as to where we could live; we couldn’t live [just] anywhere. You had to live on the Hill, certain parts of Homewood; all of Homewood was not open to us.</td>
<td>Hey boy!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>…you couldn’t walk through Wilkinsburg, or Mt Lebanon when it was dark up until 1970.</td>
<td>Hey boy!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>…well, we do things differently down here.</td>
<td>You think they were sending a message?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Racism up here was undercover.</td>
<td>Hey boy!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>De facto segregation was in the North.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived Time</td>
<td>At first even as a young kid I was kind of quiet; I was a good listener before I even said anything, and as it went along I become more vocal.</td>
<td>You have to live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived Body</td>
<td>No, you had to keep it.</td>
<td>You have to live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You just keep it to yourself.</td>
<td>You have to live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I wasn’t vocal with mine, but it was bubbling up on the inside.</td>
<td>You have to live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived Others</td>
<td>I talked to some of my family but I wouldn’t talk to</td>
<td>You think they were sending a message?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Critical Race Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenets of Theory</th>
<th>Quotation of Significance</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White Supremacy</td>
<td>Well, one thing I will say is that they think they’re better than you anyhow….</td>
<td>Hey boy!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If they didn’t want you to do something, they would say it, act upon it.</td>
<td>You think they were sending a message?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes we have a bathroom but we don’t have one for blacks.</td>
<td>Hey boy!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Privilege</td>
<td>…that was a way of saying they got rid of all and you didn’t qualify, and they never had any supervisors after that, any Black supervisors.</td>
<td>You think they were sending a message?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nigrescence Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenets of Theory</th>
<th>Quotation of Significance</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre Encounter</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encounter</td>
<td>People you thought were you friends weren’t</td>
<td>Everyone who smile in your face ain’t your friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersion/Emersion</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalization</td>
<td>You have to take them one on one.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>…so I learned you have to take them one on one because some of them I became very good friends with and we wrote each other for years.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Everyone who smile in your face ain’t your friend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Everyone who smile in your face ain’t your friend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalization/Commitment</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bronfenbrenner**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenets of Theory</th>
<th>Quotation of Significance</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Microsystem</td>
<td>...when the doctor comes in of course they ask me “where are you from?” Ok, and then he gave me—I don’t know what he gave me but whatever he gave me made me so sick.</td>
<td>Everyone who smile in your face ain’t your friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...my aunt my mother, now there were three families in my house; there was my mother and two of her sisters lived in the house.</td>
<td>You have to live.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mesosystem</td>
<td>Go to school</td>
<td>You have to live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education is the way out.</td>
<td>You have to live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exosystem</td>
<td>My mother didn’t encourage me as far as school; I encourage my daughter. I refuse to be like my mother and not say anything because I knew education was the way.</td>
<td>You have to live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macrosystem</td>
<td>She would go to these</td>
<td>They can go screw</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
people’s houses and sometimes take care of their kids. And as a result, I mean we were poor as a result besides making—it wasn’t minimum wage, it was like $25 in carfare if it was $25, and then if they had any clothing or something that could fit your family or whatever you could get hand-me-downs from them and, um, if there was something wrong with transportation they would even come and get you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chronosystem</th>
<th>At first, even as a young kid, I was kind of quiet. I was a good listener before I even said anything, and as it went along, I become more vocal.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Risk Factors</td>
<td>And when I graduated from high school here, I was a honor student; okay, I was fifth in my class. We had at that time, when I graduated in 1963, we had the largest graduating class. All right, I was fifth in my class. I was not a dummy—okay, I had four years of French and I spoke French fluently at that point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective Factors</td>
<td>When I went to the South what my mother said to me, because I got a smart mouth, my mother said to me, “Keep your mouth shut; don’t talk.” I didn’t see it; I was young, I was small, and like mama</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You have to live themselves!
and daddy say, you obey them.

**Black Existentialism**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenets of Theory</th>
<th>Quotation of Significance</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abasement</td>
<td>They talk to you any kind of way</td>
<td>Hey boy!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>…after you get so far over—you know, we was all sitting integrated [and] I can’t remember were the line was—I had to get up and move my seat; I had to go sit in the bathroom for the rest of the trip.</td>
<td>Hey boy!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The men were fresh they think, they thought, that they could just do what they wanted with you</td>
<td>Who could you tell?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I don’t want my sons playing with no niggers.</td>
<td>Hey boy!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existence</td>
<td>…the young people think that they’re free; okay, they’re not free; they don’t understand racism, they don’t understand what we went through to make them feel like that they free ….</td>
<td>They can go screw themselves!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Because they knew they weren’t free those young people in the 40’s and 50’s they were the ones being lynched</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trepidation/Anghuish</td>
<td>“You’re always afraid for your sons, even the grown ones. Now, I’m afraid for my grandsons.”</td>
<td>You think they were sending a message?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaninglessness</td>
<td>…he put the formula down wrong ok I took it to my supervisor because when I took it to him he told me I didn’t know what I was talking about. They wouldn’t take your word for it.</td>
<td>Hey boy!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopelessness/Despair</td>
<td>If the white man say something you had to do it ...so I saw this couple go out didn’t see the man come back I knocked on the door nobody answered I went in there he was in there waiting for me and he raped me, who could you tell? You know then I’m on this (inaudible) bus and their all rubbing on me and I said “stop that!” and then I thought about it, they could throw me out here in these woods and no one would never know.</td>
<td>You think they were sending a message? Who could you tell?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>…they pulled up about 600 yards in front of us ok they all got out of their car and started shooting into the woods, you think they were giving us a message? They didn’t talk about it too much; they was scared, I would say now; they ain’t gonna talk about the White man but the White man talk about you.</td>
<td>You think they were sending a message?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Focus Group #2

The second focus group was held in the same library as the first but in a different room. The room was smaller, and it was warm in the room, but to ensure confidentiality the door was kept closed. Once again, my name was on an easel in the library so the participants would know where to go. I asked the security guard to direct the participants to the elevator, since it was on the third floor of the library.

All of the participants arrived within 10 minutes of the group’s start time. Two participants who arrived before the start of the group sat on the first floor looking at books. At the intended start time of the group, two people were still not present, so I explained that we would give them a few more minutes, and then the group would begin. Everyone agreed. While we waited, a few of the participants who knew each other began to talk casually about church, line dancing, and work. Though none of the participants knew each other, they appeared to be comfortable with each other and engaged in casual conversation prior to the start of the focus group.

When all of the participants had arrived, I provided them with a copy of the informed consent, and I reviewed this document with them. I was careful to emphasize the need for confidentiality and the difficulty of ensuring such in a focus group setting. I also emphasized the voluntary nature of the study and its separation from any work requirement. When the participants had voiced a clear understanding of the study parameters, had no further questions or concerns, and had signed the consent documents, I began recording the session. Focus Group #2 was composed of five individuals whose demographic information is presented in Table 4.
Table 4.

Focus Group #2 Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant ID</th>
<th>Year of Birth</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>City of Birth</th>
<th>Current City of Residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ruby</td>
<td>1950</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Birmingham, AL</td>
<td>Pittsburgh, PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>Orangeburg, SC</td>
<td>Pittsburgh, PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Gulf Port, MS</td>
<td>Pittsburgh, PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Jackson, AL</td>
<td>Pittsburgh, PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>1938</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>Pittsburgh, PA</td>
<td>Pittsburgh, PA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I began the group session by thanking the participants for attending and being part of the research. I reiterated that the group would be audio- and videotaped so I could transcribe it, and I also informed them that they could help themselves to refreshments I had brought. Since none of the participants knew each other, I asked them to introduce themselves and share where they were originally from and activities they are involved in. When they did this, some of them realized they had mutual friends and even attended the same church.

Paul introduced himself by saying he is a Korean War veteran. He talked briefly about his experience, discussing his disappointment in the treatment he received, especially when he came back: “The Blacks in the Korean war, they did nothing for the Korean War veterans when they came back from overseas. They just dumped us on the waste side.” Dave agreed with Paul regarding Blacks in the military, saying that his father was in WWII and sharing experiences he saw his father endure. Paul continued,

I remember I took my training in Ft. Jackson, South Carolina. I was in the military, so on weekends we had a weekend pass from Columbia, South Carolina. Jackson’s up in Columbia, so I had to travel 41 miles to get to Orangeburg. So I gets on this Greyhound Bus going to Orangeburg. The bus was
full, a lot of Mexicans and all these others. There were no seats [available]. The bus was full, so there was one seat in the front. I sit next to this Mexican, and we talking. So the bus driver gets on [the intercom]. He gets up and says, “Uh, this bus is (inaudible) Clark and Orangeburg, Charleston South Carolina.” He said, “Hey, boy” to me. I’m in uniform. “Boy, why are you sitting here? You got to go to the back of the bus. You can’t sit up here,” and there was no seats in the back of the bus, but that I will never forget.

The rest of the group members continued to introduce themselves and share where they originated from. Martha was the only participant from Pittsburgh, but she shared that her maternal side of her family was from Virginia. After the introductions, I asked the group their thoughts and feelings on the 50th Anniversary of Selma. Ruby shared:

I didn’t participate in Selma 50 years ago because I was a little too young to go, but living in Birmingham, I remember the march, all of the marches. Uh, I remember the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church. As a matter of fact, I knew all four of the girls. Two of them were from my neighborhood. One was, uh, my elementary school teacher’s daughter, so, um, I was all up in the mix of that, but just at the time of all that, I was really too young to quite understand the meaning of it, and I learned more about it as I got into high school and into college, and, um, it was quite an experience. I have told both of my daughters about it. That’s what I have let Jim Crow give me the opportunity to instill those type of values in them, and I taught them that you cannot trust everyone that you have to, and I don’t teach them to hate the White people, but I teach them that you have to assess the people and be very careful about definitely trust. Selma to me
was more like, I went to see the movie, and it was like something that made me
very proud, and it’s also, it makes you sad because I start to reminisce about the
people that I knew from those times and things that they have done. It was a good
experience, but if I had to do it over, I would grow up in the South, just like I did.
Yes, I would not change anything about it because I think when I met people here
from Pittsburgh—I have a girlfriend that goes to church with me, and she acts like
segregation in the South was so far removed from her, and I can’t understand that.
I really can’t. She’s like, “Oh yeah, I hear about how they used to” know she’s
probably 70 years old, and she tells me, “Oh yeah, I heard about that,” and I’m
like, “What do you mean you heard about that?” “My mother told me how they
use to treat people in the South,” and I’m like, “Wait a minute, I saw them treat
people the same way here in Pittsburgh, so why do you think it was so different?
You’re not removed from this at all.”

The group began to laugh as Ruby continued to discuss her surprise at the
attitudes of Blacks in the North regarding Jim Crow and segregation. She added, “I’m
surprised sometimes at the African Americans about what they say and how they act
about racism, and I’m like, don’t they know they Black too? You might not be from the
South.” At this point Rose began to speak:

Well, I’m from the South, and I’m proud of it, and I have something to share with
ya’ ll. I have Martin Luther King’s obituary. I graduated in ’68, and some of the
students, um, they went to the funeral, and [Name removed], she sent me an
obituary, and I’m the only one that got one. Some of my classmates went to the
funeral, and they didn’t get anything, but she sent me that [pointing at the obituary], and I will cherish that for the rest of my life.

At this point, the group appeared to be in shock, and you could hear exclamations of “Wow” and “Oh my!” In that moment I felt so grateful to be part of the group experience not only as the facilitator and researcher, but as a member as well. The group encouraged Rose to laminate the obituary, so it will remain in good condition. Rose continued to talk as group was consumed with looking at the obituary of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.:

And then I met him. He came to Jackson, Alabama, when a Black guy was shot, and, uh, I was young. We ran down there to shake his hand, and I shook his hand, and it felt like it was just cotton, and I never will forget that.

The group, still fascinated with the obituary and the fact that Rose had met Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., began to talk to each other.

In an attempt to refocus the group, I asked, “So when you all hear the term ‘Jim Crow,’ what immediately pops into your mind?” Dave immediately responded with, “‘Separate but equal,’ but it wasn’t never equal.” And in unison the group said, “Segregation.” The group began to discuss the origins of Jim Crow. Dave was very knowledgeable on the subject, and the group was receptive to him. Martha added, “Prejudice. I just thought Jim Crow was prejudice.” Paul added, “The new word is prejudiced. The old word is Jim Crow!” Martha continued,

I understand her saying her friend about Pittsburgh because actually in Pittsburgh, Blacks lived in one area, you know on the Hill, and we had our own store. Well,
there was Jewish people there, too, but, um, I felt safe and sound, and I didn’t even think of being prejudiced or anything like that.

To explore Martha’s statement further, I asked about her experience of Jim Crow in Pittsburgh. She responded,

Not in Pittsburgh, but when I went to visit my sister in-law in Lyons, Ohio, uh, we went to a store, me and my sister-in-law, and they told, I guess I was about 11 or 12, and they said, “We don’t sell,” I don’t know if they said, “[to] niggers” or “Negroes.” I can’t remember now, but they said, “We don’t serve Negroes in here,” and we just looked at each other and bust out laughing like we were simple. I mean, I thought it was something to really say. As far as experiencing racism in Pittsburgh, I didn’t know it because it was so covert or what do you call it, underhanded, that when you’re young, you really don’t pay it any attention. It wasn’t until I got grown that I started realizing.

Dave immediately said,

Well, my first day in Pittsburgh I experienced it, 1978; when I was first drove in coming in from Virginia, a police man stopped me on the Ft. Pitt bridge, and he said, “Boy, where you going?” I looked at him like, “Whoa, where am I at?”

I asked Dave if he had been shocked because he thought things would be different in Pittsburgh than in Mississippi. He began to explain that it was not the regional expectations but more of the progression of society and that by that time “boy” and “nigger” were no longer said, publicly anyway, or tolerated the way they had been a decade before. He continued:
It just reminded me so much of being home because I heard that word. I was called “nigger” every day. I mean, there wasn’t a day that went by in the South that I wasn’t called a nigger because we had to go 6 miles to get to school, and if we missed the school bus we had to walk, so, uh, it was different times. It was something that we, you knew about and you lived with it, but it was something that always nagged at me because of how they treated my father and mother. I mean here my father was a grown man, smarter than most of them, by the way. My dad only went to 12th grade, but smart guy, and here these White guys coming by him calling him, “boy,” you know, “boy” and “nigga,” and, you know, you gotta do what they say because, you know, unfortunately, which is like it is today all the weaponry they had, okay, I don’t know if you guys remember, but there was a time in the South where there were more Blacks than Whites. Many more Blacks than Whites, but we didn’t have any guns. We only had machetes and knives, but they had the guns and could shoot you and take you away quickly, okay, so that was the big differential factor down there. They had all the guns. But it was not, it was not a good situation. I mean I had friends who disappeared regularly down there.

I asked Dave if his friends were murdered. He responded, “Yup, Mississippi was terrible. It was the worst. We had more hangings in Mississippi than any other place in the South.” Rose agreed and added, “I’m from Jackson. They still got the plantations down there.” Rose continued, “My mother taught us always say, ‘Yes, ma’am’ and ‘yes, sir,’ to them, and we were taught that. My mother was a strong Black woman.” Dave added, “Oh yeah! My dad was strong. So was my grandmother.” Rose continued, “When
I first came to Pittsburgh, (inaudible) cause I knew down South was prejudice but up here, I didn’t. I had no idea it was prejudiced, but it’s still prejudiced here. You just don’t see it, but it’s here.” Dave added, “Yeah, it’s everywhere.” I asked Rose if she was surprised by the way Blacks were treated in Pittsburgh. She replied, “Oh yes. I was surprised, I guess I was surprised cause down South I know it’s down there, but you come up here and [scoffs], I tell my grandchildren, ‘You don’t trust everybody.’” Dave shared,

Well, it was more than sad for me. It was an experience that I talk to my kids about it, but I would never want. I had to save one of my friends from being hanged. Yeah, I was about 16 at the time. They had him. They had the noose around ‘is neck.

In this moment I felt sad because of what he witnessed. I had never had someone tell me a personal story about lynching. Images of lynch mobs began to go through my mind, but I had to refocus myself consciously so I did not miss the significance of Dave’s experience. I asked if Dave knew the reason, if there was a reason at all. He responded,

The reason was very simple. We were all in the woods, all playing, and we use to play with them all the time, but he said something to piss them off, made him mad, one of the White kids. You could always play with them, but when it came time to get down to brass tacks, you were down here, and they were up here, and no matter how, and by the way, these kids were as poor as we were. They were as poor as we were, but that’s just the difference in terms of how things were, and when they had him up by the neck, and I’m sitting there saying, “No, guys. This is not … We play with you guys every….” I really had to plead with those guys to
not kill him, and finally they backed off, but, yeah, I had a lot of friends who disappeared, and the kid who came down from Chicago, Emmitt Till, he was right down there near my hometown. Yeah, he whistled at a White woman, and they did him in really bad. But then again, you look back at that, and I just regret that my father and my mother had to endure so much, but you know what? They were as strong as anybody. They raised four kids. We all went to college, and, uh, you know, and I think that’s because they were just so strong, and that was the community you had. We had a church that was solid behind each other, and that was really where everybody... That was the rally cry, was church. Everything happened at church.

Ruby began to discuss the role of the church in the lives of people during the Jim Crow era. She said,

Your social life revolved around the church, and now you can’t get young people to come to church, and I think it’s because it’s too many other things out there that take the attention away from church, but we would go to church, and I tell my girls now, we would go to church, Sunday school, 11 o’clock service, then we would go home and eat dinner, and we would come back at 5 o’clock. It was no big deal.

Paul added,

I think we all, back in the day, we all grew up in the church, what he saying, what she’s saying, it’s right. We all came up in the church, Sunday school. It was mandatory, that thing we enjoyed doing, and the community was organized, and we was like family, neighbors, all that was family. Like I know in South Carolina,
I didn’t have no peach tree, but my buddy did. Peach tree, fig tree, and pecan tree all in the yard, so we had all that in the South, and I went to a segregated school, but we didn’t know anything about segregation at that time because in the community, it was a Black school, everything was Black. You didn’t understand what segregation was until you became of age, and you venture out of your neighborhood, or out your city, and I didn’t experience no segregation until I went into the military, and I’m telling you, it was rapid. It was terrible. They had separate, uh, platoons and all that, and that’s when Truman integrated all the military because World War II they had Blacks shining shoes, driving trucks, and they put them on that front line, but what happened was some of them White boys getting killed over in Germany, so they said, “Uh, uh, put them Blacks up there in the front line.” That’s exactly what they did. So I’m not sitting up here making up no story cause when I went into the military in 1951, I was station in Ft. Jackson, South Carolina, but I grew up here, and my God, it was terrible in Ft. Jackson, South Carolina. It was more from Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee, and when we graduated from basic training, this is no lie, the war was going on in Korea. They sent all the Black guys to Korea and the Whites boys to Germany.

Paul continued to discuss the racism he faced in the military, talking about Whites from Oklahoma. He said that the Blacks could not get promoted in the military, but the Whites were promoted. He said, “I never got promoted. The only thing they put in my hand was a machine gun.” Paul then went on to share his experiences when he returned home from war.
Once again, to keep the group on track regarding the discussion questions, I asked them to tell about a time when Jim Crow really affected them. Martha spoke first:

I remember my aunt was the first Black woman to work for Bell Telephone at that time, but she was very fair, so I do know that much, and speaking of Korea, both my brothers went to Korea. One was killed at 27 here in Pittsburgh at a gas station. They didn’t investigate Blacks’ deaths, like they do now.”

Ruby corrected her saying, “Like they don’t now.” Martha continued, My brother was shot with a shot gun, and they said he put it in his shirt pocket and shot him, and they put “Suicide” on his death certificate, and we never found out until this day what happened to my brother. … But we had our own Jim Crow, cause I remember to this day my mom went to a Presbyterian church, and it never dawned on me until this day that there were all light-skinned people, and there’s was only like one or two dark-skinned people, and one was a police man… realized as an adult we segregated ourselves.

Ruby added, “That’s what Jim Crow did. It made us segregate within ourselves.”

Rose added, “Well, my cousin when she come to visit us, and she was real light, they treated her better, so that is so true. It’s true today. It’s true today.” The group began to discuss colorism and the light-skinned/dark-skinned complex among Blacks, and Dave added,

But again those are all learned experiences, okay, because we grew and had the mulattos. The White guys, you know, you saw The Butler, you watched The Butler. I mean, that was typical down South. The White guys were raping our Black women all the time.
While the group talked, I heard one of the members bring up the names Bull Conner and George Wallace, so I asked Rose to share her memories of them. She said,

I remember George Wallace. He was a nasty bit of man, and my mother told me, “You pray for him. You pray for him.” He died a terrible death. He was mean to everybody. George Wallace, he was a prejudiced to the Earth.

The group began to discuss their memories of Bull Conner and his treatment of Blacks. Ruby then added,

I think what has happened with Jim Crow, and I don’t know how everybody defines Jim Crow, but what has happened now is that we are, so, there are so many things in the media that they show that the White people are the more beautiful people, and I thought this had stopped until I went into a situation with my 6-year-old granddaughter. My son-in-law is White, so she’s—you can imagine what she looks like. [Name removed] wants her hair to be straight. She wants White dolls. Now, my daughter is Black but because she goes to school with White kids, and she sees everything White on television, and because her skin is very fair, so she figures, “Why should I have everything that’s Black?” And see this is the problem. We’re still having this same problem. She’s only six-and-[a]-half years old.

The group began to discuss the differences between the South and Pittsburgh.

Ruby said,

I had all Black teachers. We went to all Black doctors. My aunt was a principal. My other aunt was a nurse. We had the professionals in the family, and when you got sick, that’s where you went to. You went to professionals. But when I came
up here, and I worked at a public accounting firm downtown—it was a Jewish firm, so it was a little bit different. I was surprised. And I was trying to find us a doctor. We need a dentist. We need all these different things. Everybody they recommended was White. I said, “Okay, wait. There has to be some Black doctors and people in this town that I can give my money to.” And it was very few, and I have a Black doctor now, finally, but it has taken a while, and I was really surprised. And even I was really disappointed because my Black friends that I went to couldn’t even recommend Black doctors. My daughter went to [Name removed], and she had one Black teacher her four years in school, and it was a gym teacher, and [Name removed] never had a Black teacher. So, and see, that’s a problem, although we did live in Monroeville that might have been it, too; but still, why is it that we have come so far, but yet we haven’t come that far at all?

Because the group was discussing the state of the Black community when they grew up in the South and how different it was in Pittsburgh, I asked their opinion on what happened to the Black community. Dave responded,

We had no choice. We grew up. We clinged together because we were segregated, so you had to develop those resources within your community; it wasn’t bad at all. When you look back at it you say to yourself, “We should have stayed. …” People who are in control, their whole goal is to always stay in control, so even though we got some of those things we had asked for, they were making sure that they still controlled everything. As a result, we got the crumbs of what was left over, and that’s still like that. That’s what you see the remnants of today. When I grew up in Mississippi in Gulfport, we had our own theater. We had four
restaurants in our little community. We had a barbershop. We had church. We had everything. We had a community, and I go home now, [and] we have none of that, and this is 2015. We don’t have a theater. Nobody owns. No Blacks own a theater. We have maybe one or two restaurants.

Ruby added, “I noticed when I moved here, and I was disappointed because there were no upper-middle-class, Black neighborhoods, and see there are middle-class, Black neighborhoods in Alabama where I came from.” Dave added that there was a Black, middle-class neighborhood called Sugartop, but Ruby said she was not familiar with that area when she relocated to Pittsburgh. The group talked about the Hill district and how it was thriving when they moved to Pittsburgh. The group then began to discuss their work experience in Pittsburgh. Martha stated, “I found out I was the token.” Ruby added,

What I found surprising was whatever job I’ve had in Pittsburgh I’ve either been the first Black or the only Black, and I still can’t understand. It is just so—when I first came to Pittsburgh, I worked for a public accounting firm [Name removed], and I was the second Black they had ever hired. It was another man there, and he eventually became a partner, and then I went to another organization and another organization, and I was always either the first or the only. I mean I’m in accounting, so they may have something to do with it too, and my husband’s an accountant, but we always found that there were not that many Blacks.

Ruby added, “To me, that’s Jim Crow today.” I asked the group what was passed down to them about Jim Crow. Dave responded,

The main thing for us was that you had to remain in your place, okay, growing up in that type of environment, and that’s what kept you safe as long as you
remembered what your place was. Your community was always your refuge, okay.

I asked Dave to explain what “remain in your place” meant. He replied,

No eye contact. Make sure you drink the Black water, not the White water.... I got my first job at [Name removed]. I come out of engineering school I was in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1970. Now 1970! I walk in the plant: “Black bathroom” “White bathroom.” Isn’t that something in 1970? As soon as we walked in the building, there were three or four of us brothas, and we said, “Whoa! I thought I left this in Mississippi.”

The group members were shocked and responded with “Whoa!” and “What?!?” Rose added that her family told her, “Don’t get out of place. If you get out of place, they can put you in jail, anything, say, ‘Yes, ma’am,’ ‘No, ma’am,’ and ‘No, sir.’” Dave added, “There was nothing good about Jim Crow. It forced us to do certain things.” Ruby added, “I wonder about kids these days.” The group once again talked about the communities that they grew up in and how Blacks supported each other. Dave continued,

That was the most embarrassing thing to me. I worked at a place called the Doghouse, and I worked for 33 cents an hour. That was big money back then down there at that time. 33 cents an hour. I’ll never forget, I washed dishes. I worked one week 60 hours, 60 hours in one week. I was in school in one week and my take home, I had my envelope. I left it at my mom’s house, and the house got caught up in Katrina, and we had to tear it down, but my take home pay was $33. 60 hours. I tell ya, I thought I was in heaven to have $33 in one week. But again those are the kind of the things you go caught up in, but I’ll never forget the
treatment is what sticks with me involved with this Jim Crow, you know. We were just not respected at all, and it bounces back on me now when I look at how they’re treating Obama. I just hope he writes his memoirs because I’m sitting back thinking, “There’s no difference between what’s happening today and what happened 50 years ago.” The way they treating this man, and this man is smarter than all of them put together, but they don’t give him no respect.

I asked the group how they were able to survive the Jim Crow era. Dave replied first, “Just what I told you. You stayed in your place.” Paul added,

We had our own communities. We didn’t have to deal, like we was saying, with the White man or the White people. We had our own Black community, our own store, own school, and had Black leaders and Black people that we could look up to as leaders in our neighborhood. So like I say, went to school and did what you was suppose to do back there then, so like today all these Whites in all these schools, they ain’t trying to teach no Blacks nothing. That’s why they building more jails for us. “You don’t want to go to school so I got a place for you!” If you are one of the chosen few Blacks today that’s really gonna go to school, that’s Jim Crow.

The group continued to reminisce about their upbringing. Paul said, “Neighbors looked out for neighbors. You could knock on your neighbor’s door and get a cup of sugar. Could I borrow this and that?” Dave added, “Matter of fact, we didn’t knock on doors because we didn’t lock the door.” The group then asked me how I survived. They shared that they think my upbringing with the gangs, drugs, and violence was as hard as
theirs. They told me my children would ask me the same questions I am asking them. I then asked the group what they passed down about Jim Crow. Dave said,

What I passed down to my children was that you got to get yourself educated as much as you can. That’s really going to be your only salvation. Get as much education as you can because it’s gonna give you a flexibility to move into any direction cause you know we don’t have that lifeline at all. We don’t have that person sitting up there in the ivory tower that’s gonna bring you through…It’s a shame. It’s really a shame because now things are kind of reversing on us. That’s not good because there’s 42 million African Americans in this country, and that is not a good situation for this country, and I’m going to tell you that now, and I think some smart White folks recognize it, but a lot of the White folks don’t even know. They have no idea. When you start, you know, getting to the point where you’re definitely taking Black folks back 50, 60, 70, 80 years, this country can’t afford that. We won’t survive, not 42 million people. They can’t afford to do that. And I don’t know why they’re not thinking, you know, education. They should be working to get most of us educated as they can. That’s in their best interest.

That’s in everybody’s best interest.

Ruby shared,

One thing I taught my kids is if you can’t start a business, you need to support Black business. I really have a problem with that. Everybody can’t start a business. Everybody cannot, but you can find a business to support, and I really have a problem with people who put their money in all these places.

In response to what they passed down about Jim Crow, Rose said,
Respect everybody, I taught my grandchildren to say, “Yes, ma’am” and “No, ma’am.” To me, people think I’m not supposed to tell them to do that, but that’s respect. My mother taught me, “You got to give respect in order to earn respect.” That’s the way I feel.

The group began to share experiences and the conversation became lively as they talked about what they have learned from living through the Jim Crow era. They all appeared eager to share a story with the group. I then asked the group what about their experiences with Jim Crow still affects them today. Dave replied,

What I still remember is, again, when I was working at the Doghouse making 33 cents an hour, there was a White woman who ran the Doghouse, which was a restaurant, but they called it the Doghouse, and she made a dollar an hour. I made 33 cents an hour, and she used to always come back to me and say, “[Name removed], now you getting ready to graduate next year,” she said, “What you gonna do? Where you gonna work?” I looked her and said, “What you mean, ‘Where am I gonna work?’ I’m going to school. I’m going to college.” She said, “Why?” and that stuck with me from that time on. And when I finished engineering school, I went back to that place, and she wasn’t working there then, but she was at her home, and I knew where she lived, went by her house, I said, “I just graduated as an engineer, by the way. I make five times more money than you make.” But you know, I look back and say, “That’s what this thing is about.” They want to keep us in a particular place, if we don’t exert ourselves. That’s what I tell the kids now. That’s one reason I love, what’s the Black guy that graduated from Syracuse, they kicked out of the country? Uh, Paul Roberson—
he’s my hero. Paul Roberson had it, he had it figured out from the very beginning and his whole point was, you know—I’ll never forget his words—“We know that our future lies chiefly in our own hands.” And that’s what I start the kids off with today. You got to take that responsibility, and you got to get out there and make sure you get prepared because you got to go out there and compete. You got to go out there and make sure you could make a way for yourself. So, uh, that’s what I got from Jim Crow. I said, I’m not going to go through the crap I seen my parents go through and my grandparents go through, and they said they told me the same thing what they were doing was making sure I didn’t have to go through what they went through. I passed that on to my kids too. I mean, that was a time that I would never want to look at again. That was, uh, that was pretty bad. I think that if any race has to endure that kind of thing that is unbelievably what takes us down to where we are right now, and it’s hard for us to come back. Right now, we are reliving a lot of that, and we don’t even know it. The kids don’t even know it, and it’s a shame, but, uh, that’s what I got.

In response to what still affects her from Jim Crow, Ruby replied,

I think I learned one thing is that you can’t trust White people to be good or bad just by looking at them. I had learned coming to Pittsburgh, I thought it was going to be a totally different experience. I got out of college to come here and work and I just thought, “Oh, okay, this is going to be fantastic!” because I’m coming out of the South, and I just couldn’t wait to see what the experience was gonna be like, but I didn’t see many Black people. And the group that I saw was a very small group, and just about everyone was from somewhere else. The Blacks, the
professional Blacks, and we all had these stories to tell about how we were looking for Pittsburgh to be something else, and it really wasn’t. It was a let down. And I really haven’t seen that much change since I’ve been here. But like [Name removed] said, “We have a small percentage of African Americans,” so maybe that’s why. But my experience was I never really had one-on-one with White people. I had White professors. I went to Alabama A & M. I had White professors, but it’s totally different, totally different, I mean, because they were teaching at a Black university. They had a different, um, their agenda was totally different. It was to help you, and that’s what they did, but then I came here and I’m working in an organization where they have not seen that many Black people working there, and a Black woman who thinks she know something. I was in their tax department, and so I had to start assessing people one by one. This White person you can trust or this White person you cannot trust, and I think Jim Crow taught me that, but it was really amazing to me that I would come here and not really see that many Black people or have an experience that, to tell you the truth, I think I’m still looking for that, that experience of the closeness with Black people that I had in the South because as long as I’ve been here and all the friends that I have, I don’t think that we ever developed that closeness. I don’t see the Black people here having that closeness.

The group ended by discussing the mentality of Whites, and they shared that they felt that “no matter how much a Black person achieves or obtains, a White person will always think they are better.” The group collectively discussed their own experiences with White people in Pittsburgh and the treatment they endured. I began to bring the
session to a close before the participants began to share more experiences. I thanked them for being part of the focus group, and I reiterated that I might call them to discuss their specific experiences with Jim Crow in more detail. I also explained that after the meeting, I would transcribe and analyze the data, and I would share the results with them. The group agreed and engaged in casual conversation as they exited the room.

As the participants left the room, I once again sat with the experience and made notes in my reflective journal. I felt honored that the participants were comfortable enough to share their experiences. I felt that I had successfully created a safe space in which the participants could be transparent. I also wondered, as I did in Group 1, if the participants had ever had the opportunity to speak this candidly about their experiences.

The quotations of significance from Focus Group 2 are presented in Table 5.

Table 5 (continued on the following pages).

*Theories that Frame the Study Paired with Focus Group #2 Quotations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenets of Theory</th>
<th>Quotation of Significance</th>
<th>Theme</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lived Space</td>
<td>…I was all up in the mix of that, but just at the time of all of that I was really too young to quite understand the meaning of it…</td>
<td>You have to live</td>
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<td></td>
<td>…blacks lived in one area you know on the Hill…</td>
<td>Hey boy!</td>
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<td></td>
<td>When I first came to Pittsburgh, (inaudible) cause I knew down South was prejudice, but up here I didn’t I had no idea it was prejudiced</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lived Time</td>
<td>I didn’t participate in Selma 50 years ago because I was a little too young to go…</td>
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<td></td>
<td>…I’m sitting back thinking there’s no difference between what’s happening today and what happened 50 years ago…</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lived Body</td>
<td>…to tell you the truth I think I’m still looking for that, that experience of the closeness with Black people that I had in the South because as long as I’ve been here and all the friends that I have, I don’t think that we ever developed that closeness…</td>
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<td>Lived Others</td>
<td>I really had to plead with those guys to not kill him</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Everyone who smile in your face ain’t your friend</td>
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<td></td>
<td>You think they were sending a message?</td>
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**Critical Race Theory**

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<tr>
<th>Tenets of Theory</th>
<th>Quotation of Significance</th>
<th>Theme</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White Supremacy</td>
<td>Separate but equal, but it wasn’t never equal</td>
<td>Hey boy!</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>…you could always play with them, but when it came time to get down to brass tacks, you were down here, and they were up here…</td>
<td>Hey boy!</td>
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<td></td>
<td>…I didn’t experience no segregation until I went into the military, and I’m telling you it was rapid; it was terrible—they had separate, uh, platoons and all that…</td>
<td>Hey boy!</td>
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<td></td>
<td>There was nothing good</td>
<td>They can go screw</td>
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about Jim Crow; it forced us to do certain things themselves!

White Privilege
NA

**Nigressence Model**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenets of Theory</th>
<th>Quotation of Significance</th>
<th>Theme</th>
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</table>
| Pre Encounter    | I went to a segregated school, but we didn’t know anything about segregation at that time because in the community it was a black school—black, everything was black…  
…(name removed) wants her hair to be straight; she wants white dolls… | You have to live |
| Encounter        | Well, my first day in Pittsburgh I experienced it; 1978, when I was first drove in coming in from Virginia, a police man stopped me on the Ft. Pitt bridge and he said, “Boy, where you going?” | Hey, boy! |
| Immersion/Emersion | …okay, wait, there has to be some black doctors and people in this town that I can give my money to… | I thought it’d be different |
| Internalization  | I taught them that you cannot trust everyone that you have to, and I don’t teach them to hate the white people, but I teach them that you have to assess the people and be very careful about definitely trust. | Passing the torch |
| Internalization/Commitment | One thing I taught my kids | Passing the torch |
is if you can’t start a business you need to support black business…

**Bronfenbrenner**

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<th>Tenets of Theory</th>
<th>Quotation of Significance</th>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Microsystem</strong></td>
<td>I remember the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist church; as a matter of fact I knew all four of the girls. Two of them were from my neighborhood; one was, uh, my elementary school teacher’s daughter.</td>
<td>You think they were sending a message?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>…you know, and I think they were just so strong and that was the community you had; we had a church that was solid behind each other and that was really where everybody… that was the rally cry was church; everything happened at church.</td>
<td>You have to live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mesosystem</strong></td>
<td>I just regret that my father and my mother had to endure so much, but you know what, they were as strong as anybody; they raised four kids we all went to college …</td>
<td>You have to live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exosystem</strong></td>
<td>…she said “What you gonna do where you gonna work?” I looked at her and said “What you mean, where am I gonna work? I’m going to school I’m going to college” She said “why?”…</td>
<td>Hey, boy!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macrosystem</td>
<td>I never got promoted the only thing they put in my hand was a machine gun</td>
<td>They can go screw themselves!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chronosystem</td>
<td>…I had learned—coming to Pittsburgh, I thought it was going to be a totally different experience. I got out of college to come here and work, and I just thought “oh, okay, this is going to be fantastic” because I’m coming out of the South, and I just couldn’t wait to see what the experience was gonna be like, but I didn’t see many black people.</td>
<td>I thought it’d be different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Factors</td>
<td>Don’t get out of place; if you get out of place they can put you in jail, anything….</td>
<td>You think they were sending a message?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective Factors</td>
<td>My mother taught us always say “Yes, ma’am” and “Yes, sir” to them.</td>
<td>You have to live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The main thing for us was that you had to remain in your place, ok, growing up in that type of environment and that’s what kept you safe as long as you remembered what your place was…</td>
<td>You have to live</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Black Existentialism**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenets of Theory</th>
<th>Quotation of Significance</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abasement</td>
<td>…he said “Hey, boy,” to me (I’m in uniform); “Boy why are you sitting here? you got to go to the back of the bus you can’t sit up</td>
<td>Hey, Boy!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
here,” and there was no seats in the back of the bus, but that I will never forget.

...we don’t serve Negroes in here,” and we just looked at each other and bust out laughing like we were simple. I mean, I thought it was something to really say.

It just reminded me so much of being home because I heard that word. I was called “nigger” every day; I mean there wasn’t a day that went by in the South that I wasn’t called a nigger.

Existence ...they had the guns and could shoot you and take you away quickly...

...I mean, I had friends who disappeared regularly down there...

Trepidation/Anguish ...but it was something that always nagged at me because of how they treated my father and mother. I mean, here my father was a grown man smarter than most of them (by the way my dad only went to 12th grade but smart guy), and here these white guys coming by him calling him “boy” you know “boy” and “nigga”

Meaninglessness I had a lot of friends who disappeared, and the kid who came down from Chicago, Emmitt Till, he

Hey, boy!
Hey, boy!
Hey, boy!
You think they were sending a message?
You think they were sending a message?
They can go screw themselves!
You think they were sending a message?
was right down there near my home town; yeah, he whistled at a white woman, and they did him in really bad.

**Hopelessness/Despair**

The Blacks in the Korean war they did nothing for the Korean war veterans when they came back from overseas, they just dumped us on the waste side.

I mean that was typical down South; the white guys were raping our black women all the time

**Fear**

…and you know you gotta do what they say because you know unfortunately, which is like it is today, all the weaponry they had…. Mississippi was terrible; it was the worst. We had more hangings in Mississippi than any place in the South.

I had to save one of my friends from being hanged; yeah, I was about 16 at the time. They had him, they had the noose around his neck.

**Cross-group Analysis**

The participants in the focus groups expressed many similar thoughts regarding their experiences with Jim Crow, but not all of the main tenets of the theoretical frameworks were represented in both focus groups. Table 6 provides a cross-case analysis that shows which tenets were expressed in both focus groups.
Table 6.

*Theoretical Framework Cross-group Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical Framework</th>
<th>Focus Group 1</th>
<th>Focus Group 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Van Manen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived Space</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived Time</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived Body</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived Other</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Race Theory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Supremacy</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Privilege</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigrescence Model</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre Encounter</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encounter</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersion/Emersion</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalization</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalization/Commitment</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronfenbrenner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microsystem</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mesosystem</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exosystem</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macrosystem</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronosystem</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Existentialism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abasement</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existence</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trepidation/Anguish</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaninglessness</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopelessness/Despair</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I was not always surprised by the themes that emerged in the focus groups. As stated in previous chapters, because of my work in the community, specifically with African American elders, I thought I knew some of their thoughts and feelings about Jim Crow and the ethos of Jim Crow. What did surprise me was the urgency with which they wanted to share their stories and experiences. It was obvious that they had had so many
experiences with Jim Crow and the ethos of Jim Crow, and it appeared as if they were going through a mental Rolodex to decide which story to tell.

A common emergent aspect of the participants’ experiences was risk and protective factors. Based on the literature, I expected participants to discuss these factors, and whether they were aware of it or not, they did describe risk and protective factors throughout the focus group discussions. When the participants described what they were taught about Jim Crow or how they were expected to behave toward Whites from their parents, they mentioned that they were told to keep their feelings to themselves. Participant Lee even described it as “bubbling over.” While I was coding the data, I called this “stuffing the stuff.” This phenomenon was a risk factor because if they did “mouth off” toward a White person, there would most likely be irreparable consequences. Some of the participants did say it was difficult for them to keep their thoughts, feelings, and words to themselves when they were being degraded and disrespected; however, the majority of the participants reported keeping their feelings to themselves. As I transcribed the data and reflected on this silence that the participants discussed, I wondered if the silence made them feel invisible. The concept of Dubois’s gift of the second sight applies here: that is, they were a part of the society physically but not acknowledged as a part of that society because they were Black.

As the participants reminisced about their experiences, it was evident that they missed the sense of community. During the group discussions, they stressed the disappointment they felt and still feel in northern cities. That strong sense of community, which included family, neighbors, church, and Black leaders, is what kept them safe. It
gave them solace in the midst of a harsh reality and was the protective factor that kept them alive and able to participate in this focus group.

The main risk factor that participants described was not staying “in their place.” They also discussed the importance of addressing Whites with respect by saying, “Yes, ma’am” and “No, ma’am.” Failing to abide by the laws of Jim Crow, such as using the “Black entrance” and drinking from only the “Black water fountain” could cause individuals to be jailed or worse. Another risk factor, which was also a protective factor, was education. One of the participants in Focus Group #1 discussed in great detail that her intelligence caused her to endure hurtful and demeaning experiences during Jim Crow. Nonetheless, the participants in both groups agreed that education was important, and they passed down the importance of it to their children. Other protective factors included the church, their families, and the Black community. There appeared to be an unspoken bond that existed among Blacks and the Black community during Jim Crow, in part because, being segregated to their own facilities, they had no choice but to support each other.

Table 7.

Risk and Protective Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Factors</th>
<th>Protective Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talking back</td>
<td>Keeping feelings inside/silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making eye contact</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not staying in their place</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to follow the law/customs</td>
<td>Respecting Whites (yes, ma’am, no, ma’am)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(using Black entrances, Black water fountains, etc.)</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While conducting the interviews, I was reminded of what is occurring in today’s society with the rallies and “Black Lives Matter” campaigns. When participants discussed the unsolved murders of their loved ones and friends during the 1960s, I immediately began to think about the countless Blacks murdered today. Regardless of my passion on the subject, I had to remain objective, reminding myself that I had a duty to perform: facilitate the group process, lead the group in answering the discussion questions, and allow the group participants to have a platform for discussing their experiences.

Even though there was almost a 20-year age range among the participants, the stories and the effects of living through this period were similar. First, the participants are still angry about the treatment they endured or saw their parents endure. Second, no matter how difficult it was, they had to stay in their respective “places” in order to survive. Third, there was a sense of helplessness because of abuse: sexual, emotional, and physical. Fourth, they emphasized the importance of passing down a legacy to their children and wanting them to do better than they did. Fifth, they shared disappointment over the current state of the Black community; and finally, they shared the sentiment, which I found to be the most disturbing, that not much has changed in the 50 years since Jim Crow was eradicated.

Another similarity between both focus groups was resiliency. According to the American Psychological Association (APA) (2015), resiliency is the ability to “bounce back” when faced with adversity or traumatic experiences. Though not one of the participants used the word “resilience,” in discussing how they were able to overcome Jim Crow and the ethos of Jim Crow, what they actually described was resiliency. The APA suggests that many factors contribute to an individual’s being resilient, one example
being a support system. In both focus groups, the participants discussed the closeness of the family and the strength of their community of origin. The participants shared that their parents did not discuss Jim Crow with them, but they gave them tips for surviving Jim Crow. Even though they may not have had a platform to discuss the injustices and trauma of Jim Crow with their families, they witnessed the example of people overcoming adversity.

No extreme differences emerged in the content of the discussions from the focus groups. The order in which the discussion questions were asked was slightly different, and because the experiences of the participants varied, some topics were discussed in one group and not in the other, such as segregation in the military. The central themes will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

**Summary**

This chapter explicates the data collected from the two focus groups that met for the study. Narrative descriptions of the focus group interview process provide illustrations of the quotations of significance that relate to the theoretical frameworks and the themes. Tables are used to organize the quotations of significance in order to present a clearer picture of the data obtained. The chapter concludes with a cross-case analysis of the tenets of the theoretical frameworks used to analyze data. These data points are used to construct the main themes discussed in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

An ole’ owl he sat in an ole’ oak tree. The more he heard, the less he spoke. The less he spoke, the more he heard. (Focus Group #1 participant Henry)

Despite the strides this country has made regarding race relations, society tends to be dismissive of accounts of lynchings, signs in public places dividing the “white” and the “colored,” and the laws mandating that Blacks sit in the back of the bus. According to the literature, experiences of racism and discriminatory attitudes are often thought to be merely the perceptions of the individuals who experienced them. Adding to this suppressed trauma for Blacks is the mistrust of mental health professionals because 1) they are typically part of the dominant culture and 2) the mental health community and the African American community have historically been on opposite ends of the spectrum. When an individual experiences a traumatic event, he or she may go to a mental health professional, but when that mental health professional looks like those who afflicted the trauma, that creates a conundrum; and the individual is left to her or his own devices to heal and grieve.

Research surrounding race relations and racism shows that exposure to racism yields certain results: Kwate (2014) suggested that racism compromises the aging process for African American elders because it depletes and jeopardizes their resources; Utsey, Glesbrecht, Hook, and Standard (2008) acknowledged that poor mental health, lower self-esteem, and a diminished quality of life result from race-related stress; and Harrell (as cited in Utsey et al., 2008) implied that African Americans would potentially experience deleterious health consequences and a decreased quality of life as a result of race-related stress. Utsey et al. stated that without adequate coping mechanisms, daily
stressors can potentially cause psychological and physiological distress. Kwate (2014) discussed this distress more in depth by examining the effects of racism on African American elders’ health. He argued that recurrent exposure to discrimination in day-to-day activities and major events result in poor health and is associated with a number of psychiatric symptoms and medical issues, such as arterial calcification.

When an individual’s resources are threatened or removed, or the individual does not gain sufficient resources, psychological stress arises (Hobfoll, 2001). Many of the participants spoke of this fear in the focus groups, and Kwate (2014) supported the notion of this fear when he stated that “African American workers are less likely to be hired and more likely to be fired” (p. 13). In discussing their experiences, they characterized their ability to survive as resting on their ability to keep quiet and to internalize the racism and discrimination faced at the hands of Jim Crow.

Clearly, there is a burgeoning interest in the effects that racism has on an individual and the community. Researchers continue to discover the effect that exposure—or more precisely, constant exposure—to racism and discrimination has on an individual. The literature regarding racism, race-related stress, and discrimination is copious, but few studies have been undertaken that specifically explore the attitudes and experiences of those who lived through the period in history known as Jim Crow.

The focus of this study was not to determine if participants were affected by Jim Crow because any living adult over the age of 54 was most likely affected in some way by Jim Crow. Rather, the focus of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African Americans exposed to Jim Crow. The participants in this study all reported having first-hand experiences with segregation and discrimination as a result of the Jim
Crow laws. Though several of the participants expressed anger regarding the treatment they received during that time, all of the participants were able to discuss how they were able to survive that period.

The findings of this study revealed that the participants experienced trauma as a result of the segregation laws known as Jim Crow. From saving childhood friends from being lynched, being denied service at restaurants and gas stations, and even the degradation of being raped and sexually assaulted, the participants relived some of the most challenges aspects of living through Jim Crow. They were able to speak candidly about their feelings and discuss their anger and resentment toward those who treated them badly. As the facilitator who heard these incredible stories, I found myself full of anger and resentment because of what they described, but somehow they were able to find humor in describing their stories. I wondered if the humorous approach made it easier to recall and share—not with regard to what they experienced, but as part of the audacity with which they faced their experiences.

The participants also discussed how they were able to survive, crediting family, community, and spirituality as mitigating factors in surviving Jim Crow. They shared what they have passed down to their children and to the younger generation in general—education as the one thing that cannot be taken. It was clear that the discussion took them back to a place that they would never forget but to which they hoped never to return.

From the experiences of the nine participants the individual perspectives that emerged, when examined for commonalities, clearly demonstrated eight dominant themes, which are discussed in this chapter. As each research question is explored, the implications of this research for the counseling field are also examined. Finally, the
chapter discusses the limitations of the study, questions that the study has generated, and suggestions for further research on the topic.

**Research Question #1**

Aspects of five different theoretical frameworks were used to ground this study. The first research question will be deconstructed using Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model, van Manen’s concept of lived others, and the nigrescence theory. The theoretical foundations were used to form the question, “How have African Americans been able to exhibit positive psychological change despite being faced with adversity, such as transgenerational trauma and racism?” The essence of this question grew from my many years of working with elder African Americans in a community setting. They would never share the specifics of what they had experienced but would instill tidbits of wisdom that they had learned in life.

**Theme #1: “You have to live”**

This theme is derived from Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model because of the emphasis on protective factors and the support of their microsystems. In both groups, the participants discussed their involvement in the church and their emphasis on the support of the community and how close they all were:

They raised four kids. We all went to college, and, uh, you know, and I think that’s because they were just so strong, and that was the community you had. We had a church that was solid behind each other, and that was really where everybody…. That was the rally cry, [the] church. Everything happened at church. (Dave)
Your social life revolved around the church, and now you can’t get young people to come to church, and I think it’s because it’s too many other things out there that take the attention away from church, but we would go to church, and I tell my girls now, we would go to church, Sunday school, 11 o’clock service, then we would go home and eat dinner, and we would come back at 5 o’clock. It was no big deal. (Ruby)

I think we all, back in the day, we all grew up in the church. What he saying, what she’s saying. It’s right. We all came up in the church, Sunday school. It was mandatory that thing we enjoyed doing, and the community was organized, and we was like family, neighbors, all that was family. (Paul)

Here, the participants are describing their microsystem, which comprises those things and people with whom people have direct contact in their lives. Because of the strength of the participants’ microsystems—that is, church, community, and family, which also served as protective factors—they were able to exhibit positive psychological change. Van Manen’s lifeworlds describe lived others, which refers to the relationships we make with others in this world. These can be either a positive or a negative for the participants in their experiences with Jim Crow, but for purposes of this research question, the positive will be discussed. Practically speaking, this concept can involve the same individuals or systems that make up the microsystem, consisting of the relationship with the pastor, the next-door neighbor, and even the participants’ mothers and fathers. Having positive and supportive interactions with these individuals can result in positive psychological change despite the laws and customs of that era.
Finally, the participants described the internalization stage in Cross’s nigrescence model. In the internalization stage, individuals are able to remain connected to their blackness while having meaningful relationships with Whites who understand how important their racial identity is to them. It is important to let some of the hate and anger go in order to have meaningful relationships with Whites, even though ill treatment has occurred in the form of injustices and demeaning. Otherwise, it would be difficult to experience psychological growth, and this concept is also evident in the focus groups:

You have to take them one on one. Because I learned very quickly when I went out to Southern Illinois, when I went to Southern Illinois University. All my roommates were White, okay. I didn’t have any Black roommates. I couldn’t ‘cause the campus I lived on, ‘cause we were so poor, I lived on a secondary campus, and they transported us to the main campus, okay and, um, so there were Blacks on the main campus, but there wasn’t any, you know, and so there wasn’t a lot where I was at the vocational campus, and all my roommates were White, so I learned you have to take them one on one because some of them I became very good friends with, and we wrote each other for years. (Marva)

Implications. A copious amount of literature in the counseling field addresses posttraumatic growth. Typically, studies have been conducted to examine growth after experiencing such life challenges as cancer, and disasters, such as an airplane crash (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Tedeschi and Calhoun have done voluminous work on the subject, but still missing from the counseling literature are the effects of experiencing Jim Crow first-hand on African Americans who are now considered elders in the community. An examination of the resiliency of these individuals who have faced such adversity is
also missing from the literature. The interactions with overt racism and staunch segregationists are unpleasant events in their lives. This study suggests that although the participants went through unimaginable trauma during the Jim Crow era, they have not let it completely control their lives and their existence. The wounds still seem to be very raw and fresh, as if it happened yesterday, but through reliance on their spirituality, family, and communities, they have been able to experience a measure of growth from it.

**Research Question #2**

Black existentialism is used as an approach to the second research question. This theoretical foundation formed the question, “How have the participants been negatively affected by Jim Crow?” Black existentialism explores the meaning of Black existence and the liberation of Black people from oppression (Bassey, 2007). Since the Jim Crow laws were created to keep African Americans oppressed, several tenets belonging to Black existentialism—abasement, existence, trepidation/anguish, meaninglessness, hopelessness/despair, and fear—were used to analyze the data. Four different themes emerged from this question:

**Theme #2: “They can go screw themselves!”**

This theme showed up immediately in the first group. The code for the theme was anger, which is the logical end of despair. The participants in Focus Group #1 began to express their anger at seeing the women in their family do day work, which consisted of working for White families cooking, cleaning, and sometimes raising their children. In response to seeing her mother do day work and attempting to do it for extra money, Lee shared,
I worked one day. They talked to me bad. Well, I remember at the end of the one
day, she said to me, “Do I have to come home just to pay you?” I said, “Well,
that’s what I am working for, to help my mother so I could get things for myself.”
She said, “Well, I didn’t think I had to come home to pay you,” and I said, “Well,
you do.” I thought to myself, “How can my mother this?”…I don’t know, I
really don’t know how she held what she wanted to say when they talk to you that
way. Not only “do I have to come home?” but I know there were other derogatory
things said to her. (Lee)

When I was in school, I had the one aunt, and she worked at the cleaner’s
and then they did day work. All the women did day work. They went in the White
people’s houses, and they was cleaning their house, and so that impressed me, and
so the impression it gave me was that I ain’t cleaning no White people’s houses.
They can go screw themselves. I ain’t cleaning no White people’s houses, and
when I wanted to go to college, my aunt, God rest her soul, she didn’t understand
it. She said, “Why do you want to do that? You can go with me, and I’ll teach you
to” and I’m like, “I don’t want to go nowhere with you.” (Marva)

I was upstairs in the bed in my slip, and someone knocked on the door,
and my husband went down and answered the door, and it was a White neighbor
from down the street, and she said, “I don’t want my sons playing with no
niggers.” I came down those steps so fast and said, “First of all, don’t no niggers
live here.” I said, “When I read the dictionary, it said a nigger is a low character,
ignorant person,” and I said, “That fits you better than it does me.” I said, “You’re
gonna come to my house?” and I grabbed a hold of her and wouldn’t let go. (Jean)
Theme #3: “Who could you tell?”

This theme also derives from the tenets of Black existentialism relating to hopelessness/despair. This may have been the most difficult theme to uncover in transcribing and processing the data. In a lot of the participants’ stories, as strong as they appeared sitting in front of me, as they took me back to the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, I saw hopelessness and despair, which is reflected in the title of this theme: “Who could you tell?” As they described the brushes with death and the sexual assault they could not report to authorities, they indicated that they had to deal with it the best way they knew how:

I lived in Florida, and I worked at a hotel, and you know you’re not supposed to, you’re suppose to knock on the door and make sure nobody’s in there, so I saw this couple go out, didn’t see the man come back. I knocked on the door. Nobody answered. I went in. There he was in there, waiting for me, and he raped me. Who could you tell? You know, then I’m on this (inaudible) bus and they’re all rubbing on me, and I said, “Stop that!” and then I thought about it. They could throw me out here in these woods, and no one would never know. (Jean)

See, Black men now are a target. They’re the most endangered species in the world. They just killed another boy, unarmed, no reason, but they killed him. But this other White boy came out with a rifle, shooting at them, but they shot him in the hand. So it’s not okay, and as far as I’m concerned, in my lifetime, it never is gonna be. (Jean)

I mean that was typical down South. The White guys were raping our Black women all the time. (Dave)
Theme #4: “You think they were sending a message?”

This theme, also taken from Black existentialism, came from the participants’ descriptions of moments of pure fear. All of the participants described an experience in which they were afraid of what would happen, or they described an experience in which a White person or group wanted them to be afraid of them.

I had other instances while I was down there. One of the things that you could do while you were down there… There’s a lot of streams and creeks and whatever. Usually, you can go drop your rod in any creek stream and fish, okay? I was with my uncle and my aunt. [We] were going fishing on this road. I can’t remember the name of this rode, right outside of Branchville and were out there fishing. And this car comes down, and it had six White men in the car. They pulled up about 600 yards in front of us, okay. They all got out of their car and started shooting into the woods. You think they were giving us a message? (Marva)

I marched. I went to Washington and marched in the 60s. I went with Kathy Milton and Christian Jenachet, and it was scary. You’re walking around there, protesting, and here are these big cops on these big horses, riding through the crowd, and you don’t know whether they’re gonna hit you in the head with their with their billy stick or let the horse trample you. You don’t know. You’re putting you life on the line. (Jean)

Implications. This was a loaded research question, as I knew it would be. I was not surprised at the responses concerning exposure to decades of legal segregation. There is no easy way to “fix” the participants and others who were exposed to Jim Crow. However, allowing them to talk about how they were affected may have provided some
type of relief and help by way of discussing their frustrations about what they went through during Jim Crow with no expectation that they should simply “get over it.” It is important to understand that some of what they see happening in society now might trigger thoughts of their own experiences during Jim Crow and that reliving Jim Crow could re-traumatize them. Understanding this generation and their views on counseling will also be helpful for working with this population. One of the major themes that emerged in this study was mistrust of Whites. Clinicians wanting to work with this population and who are part of the dominant group must understand that and must rest assured that such feelings arise from hurt rather than hate. Not only had the participants been through repeated trauma, but also the experiences have spanned their lives; and for the first few decades of their lives, this trauma that was legal and accepted by society.

**Research Question #3**

This research question was addressed using van Manen’s four lived existentials, especially lived others and lived space, and critical race theory. Critical race theory is overarching in this study because it recognizes how interwoven and ingrained racism is in society. As a result, differential power structures have emerged, and White privilege and White supremacy have moved to the forefront. “How has being exposed to Jim Crow affected African Americans in their present lives?” Three themes emerged from this question.

**Theme #5: “Everyone who smile in your face ain’t your friend”**

Trust was a major theme throughout both of the group discussions. This theme came up as soon as I asked the first question. Despite the participants’ experience with
White people during Jim Crow, they did not appear to have hate or disdain, but they expressed feelings of mistrust.

Racism up here was undercover, you know; people even, I take it back to people I work with, I thought I was friendly with this, and they stab you in the back quicker than I don’t know what. I had bought a used car. It wasn’t new. It was used, and because I bought a car, this woman who smiled in my face had went and got the security and pointed out my car so that they could tow it away, and so I had asked her, “Why would you do something like that?” And she said, “You had no business parking where you did.” I said, “Are you jealous because I just bought? It’s new to me, but it’s not a new car.” But I thought she was my friend. …She was White. I was heartbroken and from that point on, my family thought I was paranoid, but from that point on I didn’t trust. (Lee)

I have told both of my daughters about it. That’s what I have let Jim Crow give me: the opportunity to instill those type of values in them, and I taught them that you cannot trust everyone that you have to, and I don’t teach them to hate the White people, but I teach them that you have to assess the people and be very careful about definitely trust. (Ruby)

**Theme #6: “I thought it’d be different”**

Out of the nine participants, only two were from Pittsburgh, and one of them had lived in the South for several years. This theme spoke to the disappointment participants felt in living in Pittsburgh. In both focus groups, members spoke about how they looked for Pittsburgh to be different from what they had been experiencing in the South. Pittsburgh was hope, and that hope was dimmed when they arrived and were
experiencing the same treatment, attitudes, and behavior as they did in the South. The participants who were Pittsburgh natives seemed upset at the Southerners’ former belief that the North was different because the North that may have been portrayed to the South during the Jim Crow era was not the North the participants remembered.

Jim Crow was, I want to say “blatant” in the South. Like I said, “If they didn’t like you, you knew they didn’t like you.” This was undercover. (Lee)

That’s a lie! There was plenty that happened! You couldn’t walk through Wilkinsburg and Wilkinsburg was … probably up until 1970, you couldn’t even walk through there when it was dark. (Marva)

Well, my first day in Pittsburgh I experienced it; 1978, when I was first drove in coming in from Virginia, a police man stopped me on the Ft. Pitt Bridge, and he said, “Boy, where you going?” I looked at him like, “Whoa, where am I at?” (Dave)

When I first came to Pittsburgh, (inaudible) ‘cause I knew down South was prejudice, but up here, I didn’t. I had no idea it was prejudiced, but it’s still prejudiced here. You just don’t see it, but it’s here. (Rose)

I had learned, coming to Pittsburgh I thought it was going to be a totally different experience. I got out of college to come here and work, and I just thought, “Oh, okay, this is going to be fantastic!” because I’m coming out of the South, and I just couldn’t wait to see what the experience was gonna be like, but I didn’t see many Black people. (Ruby)
Theme #7: “Hey, boy!”

The essence of this theme derived from the disrespect that the participants experienced during Jim Crow. Participants often started or ended their stories with a phrase indicating that they will never forget what they went through.

I remember I took my training in Ft. Jackson, South Carolina. I was in the military, so [on] weekends we had a weekend pass from Columbia, South Carolina. Jackson’s up in Columbia, so I had to travel 41 miles to get to Orangeburg. So I gets on this Greyhound Bus going to Orangeburg. The bus was full [of] a lot of Mexicans and all these others. There were no seats [on] the bus. [It] was full, so there was one seat in the front. I sit next to this Mexican, and we talking. So the bus driver gets on [the loud speaker], he gets up and says, “Uh, this bus is (inaudible) Clark and Orangeburg, Charleston, South Carolina.” He said, “Hey, boy,” to me. I’m in uniform. “Boy, why are you sitting here? You got to go to the back of the bus. You can’t sit up here,” and there was no seats in the back of the bus, but that I will never forget. (Paul)

But I’ll never forget. The treatment is what sticks with me involved with this Jim Crow, you know. We were just not respected at all, and it bounces back on me now when I look at how they’re treating Obama. I just hope he writes his memoirs because I’m sitting back thinking, “There’s no difference between what’s happening today and what happened 50 years ago,” the way they treating this man, and this man is smarter than all of them put together but they don’t give him no respect. (Dave)
**Implications.** This question is critical because when the debate on racism occurs, there is usually a shared sentiment of “get over it,” which is easier said than done, given the lived experiences of the participants. Research shows that failing to acknowledge a trauma further traumatizes the individual, so if these participants are not able to express and share their anger, fear, and any other feelings associated with exposure to the Jim Crow era, the trauma will continue to plague them.

**Research Question #4**

Research Question #4 was explored using van Manen’s lived existentials, specifically lived others: “What areas of African Americans’ lives have been affected by Jim Crow, negatively or positively?”

**Theme # 8: “Passing the torch”**

It was eerie that this theme arose around the same point in the sessions with both focus groups. All of the participants discussed what they had passed down to their children and what they hoped the younger generation will learn from their experiences. Some of them also shared frustration at the actions of the younger generation in the way they conceptualize life and freedom. Because participants met this conversation with such passion, I asked a few probing questions that I would like to explore in future research.

The Black kids today… I don’t know what’s wrong with them. (Henry)

What I have seen now, unfortunately, because it’s in my own family, the young people think that they’re free, okay. They’re not free. They don’t understand racism. They don’t understand what we went through to make them feel like that they free, okay, so now they don’t think that they need to get educated. (Marva)
I tell kids, “Stay in school, see. Once you get it up here (pointing to head), no one can take it from you.” (Jean)

**Implications.** Not discounting the wisdom elders have will be important for individuals working with this population. Although the session may have been therapeutic in that they were able to discuss and perhaps resolve experiences from Jim Crow, I also felt that they were happy to impart nuggets of wisdom to me as both the research and a member of the younger generation they spoke of. Though individuals continue to climb the ladder of academia and obtain more licenses and certificates to counsel a desired population effectively, certain things still cannot be taught in school, things that wisdom teaches. Some of the participants did not go further in school than the 6th grade, but that does not mean that, as a researcher and clinician, I (or anyone else in my position) cannot learn from them. Learning to humble themselves will be important for clinicians working with this population, which has something to teach us, no matter how old or outdated their ideologies appear to be. As in the fable at the beginning of the chapter about the old owl, sometimes we can learn more by listening.

**Research Question #5**

Bronfenbrenner and the discussion of protective factors are used to explore this research question. A review of the data reveals that this question (though yielding different responses) is very similar to Research Question #1 because of the focus on protective factors and the importance of the microsystem and healthy interactions between the mesosystems. The question derived from this framework is, “What coping mechanisms have African Americans developed as a result of exposure to Jim Crow?”
Theme #1: “You have to live”

As I analyzed the data, this theme and its many subthemes had a common basis: survival. After the participants described a horrific encounter with Jim Crow, I would ask, “How did you get through this? And who did you talk to about this?” It was hard for me, in my naiveté, to understand how these participants could withstand trauma and face death the way they did without having a complete psychotic break. Some of the coping skills they discussed may not be considered healthy by today’s standards. One mechanism I labeled *stuffed the stuff*. I derived this idea from the fact that, when I asked participants who they talked to, they would say “no one.” Part of this response was learned because the participants shared that they did not see their parents discussing how Jim Crow affected them, and another aspect of it was trust. If they decided to talk about it, which appeared to be rare, it would be with someone in their microsystems because they had developed a lack of trust in Whites. As stated previously, individuals in their microsystem did not discuss this topic, so the participants made the following statements about discussing their experiences during that time:

- No, you had to keep it. (Lee)
- You just keep it to yourself. (Henry)
- You don’t know who’s talking to who, so you would keep it and either talk to your family or keep it to yourself. (Lee)

They also strongly emphasized family and community, which gave them the resources to cope because they knew they were not alone in experiencing the effects of Jim Crow. Although they may not have talked about it with each other, they knew that was a shared experience. Their whole segregated community experienced it, and their
family members experienced it. Thus, they were able to cope in the same ways that they were able to experience psychological growth. Another coping skill the participants discussed was to “stay in their place.” Once again, this is not a healthy coping skill, but the goal of it was to keep them out of harm’s way and alive. According to the participants, it kept them from being berated and taunted, and it certainly kept them from being killed. Dave from Focus Group 2 said, when I asked how they survived, “Just what I told you, you stayed in your place.” This sentiment was echoed several times throughout both focus groups.

**Implications.** Talking to individuals from this population and allowing them to share stories will give clinicians the skills they need to work effectively with them. Carefully deconstructing the mechanisms that were used for survival during Jim Crow, though still relevant and helpful in today’s society, nonetheless may be causing some distress. It would behoove a counselor to tread lightly with regard to replacing the coping skills African American elders have used for more than 50 years, just as when discussing behavior for children, you want to replace a less desirable skill with one more desirable. *So if staying in their place* was something elder African Americans did to survive during Jim Crow, the clinician can introduce another skill to use for coping.

**Resiliency**

For such strategies, the counselor should have a good understanding of resiliency, which, as noted earlier, is the ability to adapt in adversity (APA, 2015). Research shows that resiliency may be attributed to several factors including a positive attitude and optimism (www.psychologytoday.com). Research also shows that resiliency is essential for human development (Price-Mitchell, 2015). Resilient people are able to use their
skills and strengths to cope and recover from challenges. Resilience does not eliminate stress or erase life's difficulties; individuals’ resiliency does not exempt them, either, from experiencing emotional pain, grief, and loss. It is their outlook that allows them to work through such adversities and recover.

Resiliency is not a genetic trait (Price-Mitchell, 2015); therefore, research suggests it is learned from those involved in an individual’s support system as they grow and mature. According to the American Psychological Association (2015, section 3, para. 2), many factors contribute to individuals’ resiliency: “the capacity to make realistic plans and take steps to carry them out, a positive view of yourself and confidence in your strengths and abilities, skills in communication and problem solving, and the capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses.” The ability to develop resilience depends on the individual. Not everyone responds the same when faced with life’s challenges, and different people use varying strategies.

Though nine participants in this study were from different parts of the country, they had all developed resiliency to survive the Jim Crow era. In both focus groups, participants discussed what they had learned from their parents and other members of their families as those adults in their lives faced the adversities of Jim Crow. They reported getting strength from their families and others in their segregated communities. Living through Jim Crow forced the participants to rely on their families, communities, and faith. These are examples of how the participants developed resiliency.

The results of this research seem to indicate that the resiliency of the participants was learned, and that it had developed precisely because of the support system that surrounded them as they developed and because of era in which they lived. The
participants learned to conquer inequity because that is what they saw their families and communities do. In essence, they had to survive; there was very little alternative. Resiliency is the reason the participants were able to laugh and reminisce about how their communities were closer because of Jim Crow even as they manifested anger from their memories. Resiliency alone emerged as the essential answer to several of the research questions regarding how Jim Crow affected the participants and how they were able to exhibit positive psychological change.

Table 8.

*Themes Delineated from the Research*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme # 1</th>
<th>You have to live.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme # 2</td>
<td>They can go screw themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme # 3</td>
<td>Who could you tell?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme # 4</td>
<td>You think they were sending a message?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme # 5</td>
<td>Everyone who smiles in your face ain’t your friend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme # 6</td>
<td>I thought it’d be different.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme # 7</td>
<td>Hey, boy!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme # 8</td>
<td>Passing the torch.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Limitations of the Study**

Because the focus groups were conducted using elders, it is possible that they may not be able to recall all past events or feelings pertaining to their experiences of Jim Crow. Though the participants may not have been diagnosed with a disorder or illness that negatively affects memory, it is still possible that they might have a difficult time retelling and recounting experiences from over 50 years ago. As a result, this may affect the data that is gathered during the groups and subsequent interviews.

My work in the community and familiarity with the population could have caused some bias on my part or may even have affected the participants’ willingness to
participate in the study. Even though I knew only two of the participants from the community, the participants did seem to view me as a daughter or granddaughter and not the moderator of the focus groups, which might have added more bias to their shared stories. It is also possible that participants did not share certain stories because of the closeness among them, as well as the fact that they had mutual friends and acquaintances.

Another limitation is that participants may have left out parts of a particular experience that could have provided further understanding of their story or experience, either because of advanced age or because people simply forget. I also could have used a different data collection method to ensure that the stories were consistent, which would have contributed to the validity of my study. Having too few participants may have been a limitation as well. Though the focus groups were smaller than I expected, the smaller number of participants allowed for each person to have the opportunity to share his or her thought process thoroughly without being interrupted because of time constraints. The integrity and richness of their stories would have been sacrificed if there had been any more participants in the groups; however, the participation of more individuals, even if the data had yielded the same themes and results, would have strengthened the validity. Finally, my inability to assure confidentiality in the group sessions could have kept participants from disclosing specific stories or events that might have been helpful in answering the research questions but that would have been used to identify specific people or companies they interacted with.

**Implications for Future Research**

In both focus groups, much attention was given to current and future generations of Blacks. A comparative study could be done to assess the differences in attitudes
toward Blacks during the Jim Crow era and those in the post-Jim Crow era. In discussing her disappointment in the younger generations, Marva said that they are not “free.” An examination of what is meant by freedom in that context could be another area of interest. In the theme, “Whom could you tell?” rape and sexual assault were discussed; thus, a profitable research topic might be the sexual assaults and rape of Black women during Jim Crow. As participant Jean asked, “Who did they have to talk to?” How could they report an assault when the individuals who were supposed to protect them were either the ones perpetrating the act or looking the other way? I would like to speak with a group of African American women who were sexually assaulted by a White man during Jim Crow and could not do anything about it. I would be interested in knowing how they made sense of it, whether they have forgiven the person, and whether they ever saw the person again.

Questions Generated by Research

A number of questions have emerged directly from this study:

- Do elder African Americans still use the same coping mechanisms in their current lives?
- How did they cope with the sexual harassment and abuse suffered during Jim Crow?
- Even though Jim Crow laws are no longer in force, what remnants of the era still exist in society today?
- How do Blacks interact with White people today?
- Were Blacks able to develop and nurture genuine relationships with people from the dominant culture?
• What are their thoughts on the current state of the Black community?
• What are their thoughts on integration?

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to illuminate the lived experiences of African Americans who were exposed to the Jim Crow era. These participants all reported that they have had some exposure to Jim Crow laws, even those who were born in states in which Jim Crow was illegal. The findings of this study highlight the resiliency and strength of this sample. Through the stories, it is evident that the participants are still affected by that period and the treatment, but instead of letting it define them, they grew from it.

Nine individuals participated in the study through two focus groups. They provided a rich description of their lives and allowed me into intimate parts of their past. From their discussion around the five research questions, eight distinct themes emerged. These themes revealed that survival was important, and whether that meant “staying in your place,” saying “Yes, ma’am” or “No, ma’am,” or looking the other way when called “boy” or “nigger,” those were the ways in which they survived that period. Much anger was expressed as the participants recalled each experience. There was also a sense of hopelessness and despair. Whether being raped or witnessing the attempted murder of a friend, there was very little that they could do. As a result of that, the participants were afraid. During Jim Crow, it was clear when Blacks were not welcomed, and if they were deemed to have forgotten their place, they were quickly reminded. As a result of what they went through, they have very little trust for Whites. They do not hate, but because of experiencing Jim Crow, they lack trust. The participants were able to recall vividly the
disrespect they endured; the treatment they experienced will most likely stay with them forever. The six participants who were originally from the South appeared to have shared the feeling that moving to the North would be different. Thus, the disappointment at finding that Pittsburgh was no different from the Jim Crow South they knew was also shared. Finally, all of the participants expressed a desire not only to pass on the legacy of African Americans but also to encourage the younger generations to do better than they had done. They all reported a belief that the way to overcome racism and discrimination is to get an education because being educated cannot be taken away.

This study provides insight into the previously unexamined experience of elder African Americans. Though the participants will always remember what they went through, they have used it to propel themselves forward and move on. All of the participants have been able to contribute to a society that not too long ago considered them three-fifths of a person. It is hoped that inspired by this study, more researchers will explore this specific population, capturing their stories and giving them a platform from which to speak their truths.
REFERENCES


Wilkerson, I. (2014, August 25). Mike Brown’s shooting and Jim Crow lynchings have too much in common. It’s time for America to own up. Retrieved from: 


http://nlyingst.iweb.bsu.edu/edpsy251/courseconcepts/251/bronfenbrenner.html

APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Protocol for Participants
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE: The Lived Experience of African Americans Exposed to Jim Crow Era

INVESTIGATOR: Janelle Carter (PhD Candidate)
              (412) 983-3234

ADVISOR: Dr. Lisa Lopez Levers, Ph.D
          School of Education
          412-396-1871

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the
                    requirements for the doctoral degree in Counselor Education and
                    Supervision at Duquesne University.

PURPOSE: You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to
         investigate African Americans’ thoughts, feelings, and perceptions
         of the racial caste system known as Jim Crow. Participants are asked
         to participate in one focus group. The focus group will last
         approximately 1 to 1.5 hours. The focus group will be video and
         audio taped for analysis. In addition, you may be asked to allow me
         to interview you individually. The individual interviews will be
         audio taped and transcribed and will last for approximately 1 to 1.5
         hours in the same location as the focus groups. By providing your
         phone number below you will agree to me calling you after the
         focus groups have ended to schedule a time and date to conduct the
         individual interviews. All materials used during the focus group and
         individual interviews will be collected by the researcher and used
         for the analysis. These are the only requests that will be made of
         you.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: There are no risks greater than those encountered in everyday life.

Although there may be no direct benefits to you personally, the
information that you provide can assist in developing a better
understanding of the lived experience of African Americans who
were exposed to Jim Crow era.

COMPENSATION: There will be no compensation for participation in this study.
               However, participation in the project will require no monetary cost
to you.
APPENDIX B

Advertising Flyer for the Study
LOOK FAMILIAR?

Participate in a focus group that is seeking to illuminate experiences of African Americans exposed to Jim Crow.

Requirements:
- African American
- Born in or before 1964
- Exposed to Jim Crow

Let YOUR voice be heard!

Refreshments will be served!
APPENDIX C

Focus Group Protocol
Focus Group Protocol

Pre-Focus Group Protocol

Before the group begins the researcher will review the consent-to-participate which consist of the purpose of the study, risks and benefits, compensation, confidentiality, right to withdrawn from the study, access to summary of the results, and voluntary consent. Researcher will be reminded focus group participates that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed due to the nature of the group. Participants will be asked some demographic questions, such as age, gender, where and when they were born, and so forth.

Protocol Questions

The following semi-structured questions represent the types of questions that will be asked of the focus group participants for this study. These questions are designed to be open ended in order to allow for additional probes and effective facilitation of the focus group.

1. When you hear the words Jim Crow what comes to mind?
2. Describe an experience in which Jim Crow laws had an impact on you?
3. What stories have been passed down to you as it pertains to the Jim Crow era?
4. How has being exposed to Jim Crow laws affected you?
   In the past?
   In your present daily life?
5. How where you able to survive the Jim Crow era?
   Can you identify specific ways that you coped?