

If Elephants Could Talk: Promoting Racial Literacy in Schools

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PROMOTING RACIAL LITERACY IN SCHOOLS

Differences
That Make a
Difference



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TAKE HOME POINTS

1. Feeling overwhelmed (racial fight, flight, or fright) about what to do during a racial face-to-face encounter in our work is **human**.
2. Avoiding that feeling and pretending it doesn't affect your work is also human, but is still **incompetence**, unprofessional and **unethical**.
3. Racial **stress impairs** your thoughts, behaviors, and emotions, and thus your relationships with clients and colleagues
4. Racial stress is more **observable, manageable** and **resolvable** than systemic racism, but only if you face it.
5. Asking for help, seeking knowledge, and **practicing** how to manage racial stress makes you more smart, competent, ethical, confident, and **COURAGEOUS**.
6. Racial literacy is not about blaming others or myself, but about how well I can read, recast and resolve a racial conflict (and **not run away**).

Seeing Diversity & Diversity of Stress- Elephant is Both-And

- We judge world from our unique perspective -“**My view, my study, my experience of Elephant**”
- *Understanding Elephant is **Both-And** re: sight*
 - unique blindness and special sight
- *Understanding Elephant Both-And re: stress*
 - My viewpoint is unique and differentially stressful
 - For some discovery is exciting, for others enormous stress
 - What do you see when you see the elephant in the room?
 - A reasonable definition of diversity- uniquely blind, uniquely visionary, and uniquely stressful

Racial Literacy- the ability to read, recast, & resolve racially stressful encounters (RSE)

- **Read- decoding racial subtexts, subcodes and scripts**
 - Accurately interpreting the meaning making (trauma, triumph, transcendence) of actors and actions in RSE
 - In written texts, social discourse and social interactions
- **Recast- reducing stress in RSE using racial mindfulness**
 - Racial socialization (Rsoc) reduces/**recasts**/reframes the negative meaning of racial stress in RSE (from 10 to 7)
 - Rsoc builds racial self-efficacy (confidence)
- **Resolve-negotiating RSE toward healthy conclusion**
 - Assertively communicating affection, protection, correction, and connection during RSE
- Requires preparation and **practice** for RSE (Stevenson, 2014)
 - **Relaxation, storytelling, journaling, debating, role-playing**

Racial Literacy Factors

-the ability to read, recast, and resolve racially stressful encounters, Stevenson, 2014

○ Racial stress

- “Race-related transactions between individuals or groups and their environment that emerge from the dynamics of racism, **and that are perceived to tax or exceed existing individual and collective resources** or threaten well-being” (Harrell, 2000)
 - intra- & interpersonal; anticipatory, in-the-moment & reflective;
 - **Vicarious** racial stress – witnessing others stress & need for protection
 - **Practicing** Appraisal/Reappraisal of racial stress (low, med, severe)

○ Racial encounters

- Past, in-the-moment or anticipated interactions that tax individual self-regulation of emotions, physiology, cognitions and voice
- **Encounters** occur between and within individuals

○ Racial Coping and Racial Coping Self-Efficacy

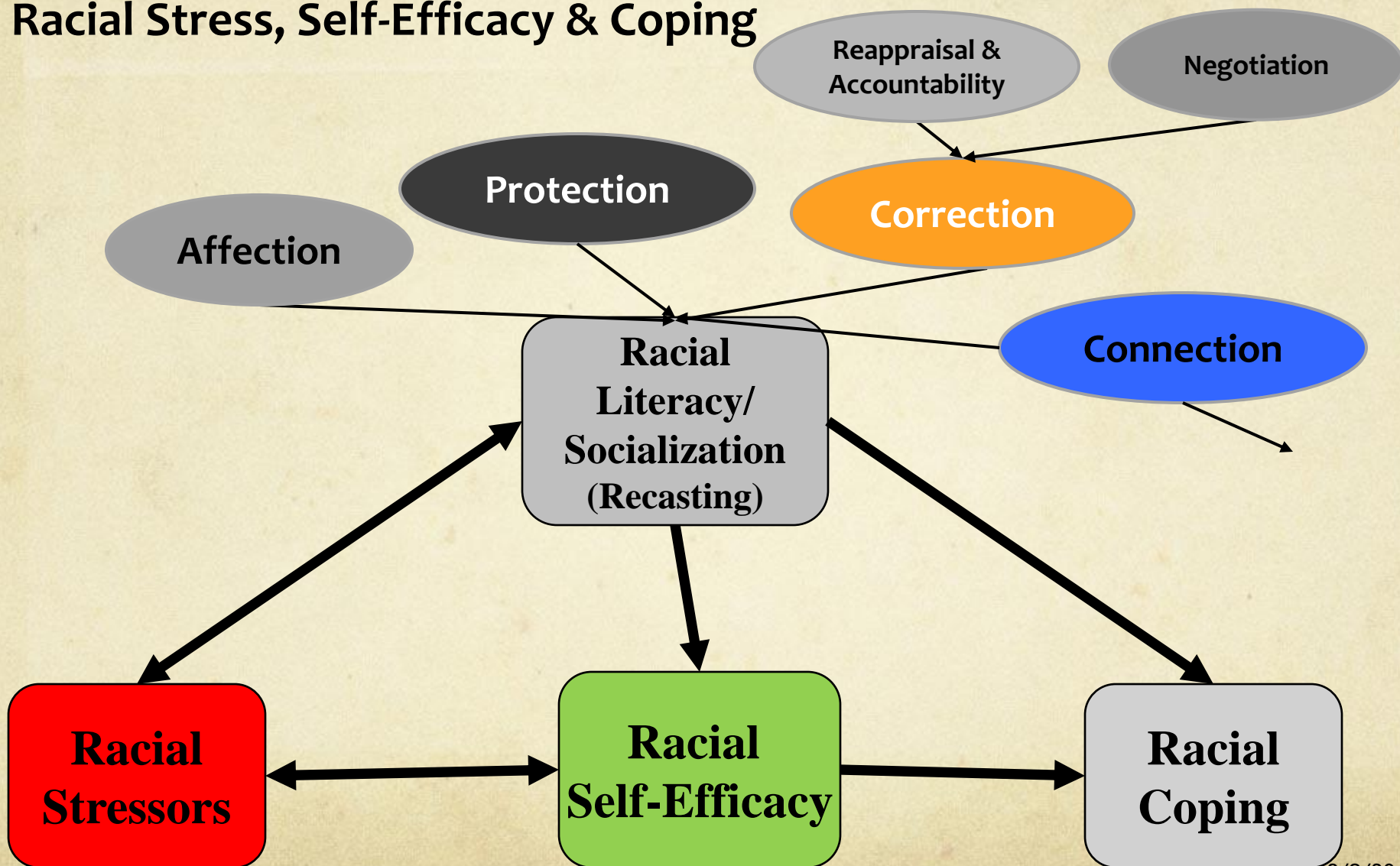
○ Racial Assertiveness

RECAST Theory

- Racial Encounter Coping Appraisal and Socialization Theory
- Racial socialization can reduce the stress of coping during racial conflicts by improving one's racial self-efficacy.
- But racial literacy takes practice.
- Practice?
- Practice? We're talking about practice?
- Yes

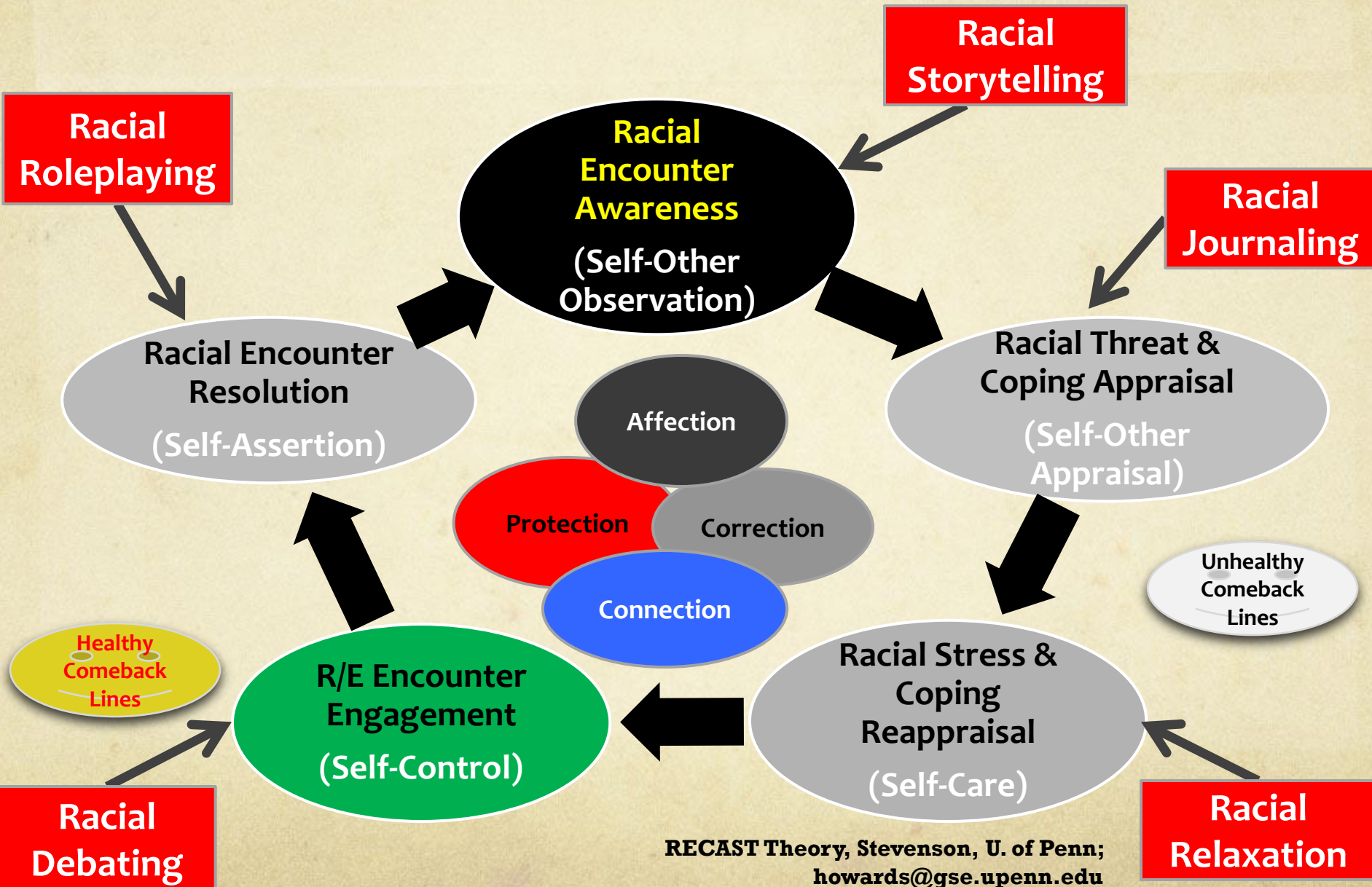
Figure 4. 1

**Mediating Role of
Racial Socialization (R/ES) between
Racial Stress, Self-Efficacy & Coping**



Racial Literacy Training Components

(Stevenson, 2014)



Calculate it, Locate it, Communicate it:

Racial Stress Mindfulness & Management

- Calculate it
 - On a scale of 1-10, how stressful was it? Did it shift, spike?
- Locate it
 - Find in your body where you feel the stress, be detailed
- Communicate it
 - Tell yourself, “I’m feeling stressed at the level of 9 and I feel it in my left leg that’s twitching uncontrollably.”
 - Tell a trusted friend
 - Disclose appropriately within the dynamics of your work
- Breathe and Exhale

Calculate, Locate, and Communicate:

Self/Other-Observation Skills

- Did you notice anything about YOURSELF as you were drawing, sharing, listening?
 - Feelings, thoughts, body reactions, memories you were having?
 - about how other people see you?
- Did you notice anything about your PARTNER as he/she was sharing?

Racial Socialization, Trauma & Literacy Interventions (Stevenson, 2003-2014)



○ **PLAAY project**

- Movement and cultural style in-the-moment
- Basketball, martial arts, parent coaching
- CPR group therapy, barbershop passion

○ **Shape-Up- Barbershop Project for Black Men**

- HIV/AIDS Safe Sex Skills Building (L. & J. Jemmott)
- Retaliation Violence Reduction Skills Building

○ **The ViRUS Initiative- Villages Raising US**

- So what if it takes a village to raise a child . . .?
- B-HURT- (Barbershops Healing Underlying Racial Trauma)
 - [Oldheads Schoolin' Youngboys Schoolin' Oldheads](#)

○ All use in-the-moment interventions and racial literacy curricula

Defining Racial Literacy

Theories, Assumptions, and Skills

Format:

Factual and Emotional

- What is Racial Socialization, RECAST, and Literacy?
 - Assumptions, Definitions, Theory and Skills
- Factual Knowledge about Racial Politics
 - Racial matters in schooling and living
 - Latest research in Racial Literacy and Socialization in Schools
- Emotional Engagement of Racial Politics
 - *In-the-moment racial stress management/mindfulness*
 - **Storytelling**, Journaling, Debating, Role-Playing
 - Childhood and School Stories
- Practical Strategies for Developing Racial Literacy

What is Racial/Ethnic Socialization?

-protection, affirmation, reappraisal, & negotiation of R/E self-efficacy, stress, & conflict (Stevenson, 2014)

-Seeing the Racial Jungle

- The **transmission** and **acquisition** of
 - intellectual, emotional, and behavioral skills to
- **protect and affirm**
 - individual & collective racial self-efficacy for
- **reappraising**
 - racially/ethnically stressful encounters and
- **negotiating**
 - racial/ethnic conflicts that occur in 5 socialization contexts
 - Information, relationships, identity, style, stereotype
- **Seeing the Racial Jungle -R/ES**
 - illuminates the tension between racial stress and coping
 - teaches how to be mindful of and responsive to racial encounters

Racial Literacy- Assumptions

1. Racial Stress MATTERS, not just General Stress
2. Racial Encounters (FTF) Matter, not Race Symbols
3. Racial Competence, not Racial Character.
4. Teaching Contexts are Socialization Jungles of Avoidant Racial Coping
5. We Can Resolve Racial Stress in Everyday Life

Affection (“Stickin’ To”-Affirmation)

- Physical nurturance (Touch to affirm)
- Emotional nurturance (Share/Teach to affirm)
- Cultural nurturance (Appreciate cultural legacy & supports)

Correction (“Gettin’ With”-Reconciliation and Reappraisal)

- Physical accountability (Touch to redirect and reconcile)
- Emotional accountability (Reconcile about surviving game)
- Cultural accountability (Teach reappraisal/negotiation of R/E stress /game)

Protection (“Watchin’ Over”)

- Physical monitoring (Touch to locate and defend)
- Emotional monitoring (Predict how youth might feel)
- Cultural monitoring (Track effects of R/E stereotyping/stress/game)

Connection (“Bonding and Bridging Across”)

- Physical networking (Physical presence in career & social mobility contexts)
- Emotional networking (Reframing social networking as emotionally meaningful)
- Cultural networking (Making social networking culturally congruent)

Why is it important to reduce racial stress?

Racial Microaggressions

(Pierce, 1970; Sue, 2007; May–June American Psychologist 271Vol. 62, No. 4, 271–286)

- *Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color (p. 271)*
- *Microassaults*
- *Microinsults*
- *Microinvalidations*

Interracial Anxiety and Unconscious Bias

Research- *Racial Fear Kills the Mind*

- Racial threat responses are exhausting (increased ventricular contractility & tunnel vision) (Richeson & Trawalter, 2005- *Why Do Interracial Interactions Impair Executive Function? A Resource Depletion Account; Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88, 6, 934-947)
- Trying to appear nonracist actually can increase fear
- Stereotype of threatening young black male --so ingrained in the “collective American unconscious that Black men now capture attention, much like evolved threats such as **spiders and snakes.**” Trawalter, S, Todd, A. R., Baird, A. A., & Richeson, J. A. (2008). Attending to threat: Race-based patterns of selective attention. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 44(5), 1322-1327.
- Unintentional racism is most debilitating

“A Racing Mind”

- Claude Steele in *Whistling Vivaldi* identifies research that shows when threatened by racial matters, our brains work overtime.
- A “racing mind” focused on some tasks is not prepared to focus on other mental tasks

“Okay, Class, 1st Test Question
for the day”

Which grade do you think
students of all racial groups are
expelled the most?

Black PreK Left Behind by Stereotype Fears (Gilliam,

2005, Yale Child Study Center)

- First nationwide study of expulsion rates in state-supported preschools found
 - ▣ African American preschoolers are twice as likely to be expelled as white or Latino children and five times as likely as Asian Americans (Dobbs, 2005; Gilliam, 2005)
- Pattern of risk for expulsion with African-American students K-12 (Holzman, 2004).
- Pattern is suggestive of disproportionate control and punitive actions taken by authority figures that consciously and/or unconsciously may be **egregious overreactions driven by their biased expectations and fears** of these youth
- Behavioral consultant in room reduces the disparity
- http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/02/20/empathy-not-expulsion-for-preschoolers-at-risk/?_r=0

“Black Boys Are Viewed As Older And Less Innocent Than Whites”

- Goff, Jackson, Di Leone, Culotta & DiTomasso (2014). The Essence of Innocence: Consequences of Dehumanizing Black Children. *J. of Pers & Soc Psy*, 106, 4, 526-545.
- They found support for the following hypotheses
 - a) **Black boys are seen as less “childlike” than White peers,**
 - b) characteristics of childhood are applied less when thinking about Black boys relative to White boys, and
 - c) these trends would be exacerbated in contexts where Black males are dehumanized by associating them (implicitly) with apes (Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008)

Teachers evaluate Black preschoolers more negatively than other engaged in pretend play

- Yates & Marcelo (2014) observed 171 preschool-aged children in pretend play and found all children were **“similarly imaginative and similarly expressive,”** but there was a discriminatory effect.
- **“teachers . . . more likely to evaluate black children negatively than nonblack ones who were engaged in pretend play. “**
- **“For white children, imaginative and expressive players were rated very positively [by teachers] but the reverse was true for black children. “**
- **Imaginative and expressive black children were perceived as less ready for school, as less accepted by their peers, and as greater sources of conflict and tension.”**
- Both magnification of negative behaviors and systematic devaluing of positive attributes among black children were present
- **“some kids are being educated towards innovation and leadership and others may be educated towards more menial or concrete social positions.”**
- <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2013.09.003>
- [doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2013.09.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2013.09.003)

Perceived racial discrimination affects health and stress biology

- “young adults from racial/ethnic minority groups who perceive more discrimination have higher levels of cortisol in the evening, and less decline in cortisol levels (registration) across the day than those with lower discrimination.
- <http://qz.com/334366/why-black-americans-cant-sleep-at-night-racism/>

Greater Prolonged Perceived Racial Discrimination predicts Chronic Stress

- Perceived racial/ethnic discrimination (PRD) has been found to predict alterations in cortisol diurnal rhythms in past research,
- 120 ($N=57$ black, $N=63$ white) adults ($M_{age} = 32.36$ years; $SD = .43$) from the Maryland Adolescent Development in Context Study (MADICS) provided saliva samples at waking, 30 minutes after waking, and at bedtime each day for 7 days. Adult diurnal cortisol measures were predicted from measures of PRD obtained over a 20-year period beginning when youth were in 7th grade (approximately age 12).
- **Specifically, greater average PRD across the 20-year period predicted flatter diurnal cortisol slopes for both black and white participants.** For blacks only, greater average PRD predicted lower waking cortisol and lower total cortisol across the day, a profile considered **indicative of chronic stress.**
- The effects of PRD on lower average cortisol across the day for blacks were driven by PRD experiences in adolescence. Young adult PRD, however, for blacks only, was associated with a larger cortisol awakening response. Although PRD impacts cortisol for blacks and whites, effects are stronger for black participants. Adolescence is a sensitive period for chronic impacts of PRD on adult stress biology.

Racism tied to **Breast** Cancer in Black Women

- 59,000 African-American women studied over 6 years, with more racial discrimination had higher risk of breast cancer
- Stronger among women <50, common for young black women
- Facing "everyday" discrimination, (poor service at stores, or people "afraid" of or superior to them (32% higher risk).
- Facing "major" discrimination (in housing, on job, from police were 48% more likely to develop the disease than other BW.
- Perceived racial discrimination undermines health as source of chronic stress, linked to poorer physical health
- Taylor, T. R., Williams, C. D., Makambi, K. H., Mouton, C., Harrell, J. P., Cozier, Y., Palmer, J. R., Rosenberg, L., Adams-Campbell, L. L. (2007). Racial discrimination and breast cancer Incidence in US Black women: The Black Women's Health Study. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 166(1), 46-54.

Why do we need a racial literacy?

- We avoid or over-react to face-to-face racial conflicts
- Legal dismantling of racism won't heal trauma
- Skills to see and resolve racial conflicts are lacking
- Racial literacy demands *competence* not character
- Unaddressed racial conflicts hurt health and learning
- Resolving stress is easier than curing systemic racism

Courage is Seeing Yourself as the Racial Elephant

- What did I notice about myself in the moment?
- How stressed was I & where did it affect my body?
- What did I hold back out of fear?
- If I had a do-over, what would I say or do differently to read, recast, and resolve the encounter?
- Do I have healthy racial comeback lines?
- Am I prepared for the next face-to-face racial encounter?

Racial Incompetence, not “Racist”

- Don't have to think of people in personality groups with regard to being racist or not-
 - Engenders **Blame**
- “Racist” is imprecise and doesn't accurately reflect feelings of racial rejection- **“F-U” doesn't explain “feeling dismissed”**
 - Let's offenders off the hook-
 - instead of building competence, fear turns to self-protection and away from reducing ill effects of racial rejection
- More helpful to think **of racial coping skillsets** or incompetence
 - Or being **woefully unprepared** for upcoming racial encounters
 - Ways to know if you are unprepared for upcoming racial encounters

Strategic Plan for an Applied Diversity Mission

- With diversity mission statements, situate your definition of diversity competence in addressing conflicts in relationships and academic outcomes, not just ideas
 - Use situations from your school's present and past where different school personnel handled those situations well and poorly; avoided and engaged
 - Include competencies that are behavioral, measurable, and replicable
 - Assess knowledge level of staff whose job it is to train and evaluate competencies
 - Provide readings and materials that support these behaviors, activities, and outcomes as racially literate. Not opinion.
 - Not finished unless core questions are addressed,
 - What racial/diversity conflicts have we most experienced in our past?
 - What strategies have we consistently used to cope with those conflicts?
 - Have we practiced the competencies to resolve encounters enough?
 - Use case study approach to re-examine past diversity challenges/triumphs from parent, educator, administrator, student, trustee levels

Strategic Plan for an Applied Diversity Mission

- If leaders don't define racial literacy as core to canon, it will remain the rejected orphan of pedagogical interest
 - Subject to abuse, ridicule, hazing, avoidance, & inferiority
- Key Contexts of Racial Threat
 - Hiring, Athletic Team Play and Coaching, Mentoring, Professional Development, Classroom, Parent-Teacher Conversations; Others?
 - Practice/Roleplay challenging & stressful diversity situations until you
 - define core coping competencies and tie them to mission statement
 - create evaluation form of personnel using core diversity competencies
 - give feedback to personnel based on those core competencies
- Why can't we include a case example of a common racial struggle going on in your school in the hiring interview?
 - Expect candidate to describe how s/he will handle the situation
 - Judge their competency or potential for competence

Elephant Attention

Howard C. Stevenson

Its not about the blame.

Not trying to make you feel guilty.

It's not just about you. It's the filthy way we both ignore
the elephant in the room.

I deplore the card games, the slurred names, and fanning
the politically correct flames.

It's not even about the shames that we can't mention,
'cause the silencer on the racial tension is the doom,
that we presume.

I'm not trying to build fences or get too intense, or bait
your defensiveness; but my sixth sense says that it's
senseless that we can't even mention or make
reference to **that** boil waitin' to bloom,

or **that** cloud of "racist" that looms large over the elephant
standing like a dusty heirloom in the corner of the
dusty room.

Were we crazy thinking that we could polish away the rusty
with a broom, or sweep away this mess, like it was
the wind, tsunami or monsoon that blew in this
unrest of the racial?

No. It was our musty elephant that exhumed up & dragged
in the fume.

No broom can clean this spew up, that we all threw up.

We need a bigger tomb to bury the sorrow and the worry
that years of fears have brewed up, pretending that
the skin color didn't bother you or father me; didn't
other me or mother you.

We both know that the dark will make you holler and bring
out that other you.

We both know that you're afraid that the darker brother is
gonna smother you 'til you're blue.

No need to sweat it, I get it.

Everybody in the lighter hue **and** the darker hue has got the
same fear of the darker smother brother too.

So don't hate the player or the shame that the racial blame
keeps wrecking. Hate the racial game.

Cause it's way too insane if you keep sneaking and freaking
about every time the elephant wants a shout out.

Just say hello and ask if he wants to stay or go and then
we'll all know whether it's okay to mention the
tension or find the right intervention for our negative
emotions.

Because ignoring the snoring in the corner is boring and
elephants won't leave without attention.