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**Identity, Role Experience, and Relationships: An Exploration of Relational Health with
Faculty of Color in Social Work Education**

by

Shelita Lynn Jackson

A Banded Dissertation Proposal
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor in Social Work

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Abstract

This banded dissertation explores the relationship between identity and role experience for faculty of color in social work education. The purpose of this three-product dissertation is to investigate phenomena, which subjugates these faculty and impedes their relational connections. The study of relational health, that is, the condition of relationships and its psychosocial and professional impact for faculty of color exposes external factors which compromise relational confidence and impact role performance. Relational-Cultural theory (RCT) and intersectionality theory are combined as an integrated theoretical framework to understand interactions within the context of relationships.

The first product of this banded dissertation is a conceptual paper titled, “*When Your Faculty Member is a Person of Color: Relational Cultural Considerations for Social Work Programs.*”

Through a comprehensive literature review, this paper explores personal, historical, and professional experiences uniquely faced by people of color in the United States. Relational cultural considerations are presented for social work programs.

The second product is a qualitative research study titled, “*Exploring the relationship between racial and ethnic identity and role experience for faculty of color in social work education.*” The purpose of the study was to explore the relational cultural concepts of connection and disconnection for these faculty and the impact on role experience. Faculty of color at CSWE schools of social work recalled relational experiences with students, colleagues and within institutions. Data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. Findings suggest there are residual effects of disconnection that are historical, psychological, and relational. Bias, white supremacy, mistrust and communication are significant contributors to relational reality for faculty of color.

The third product of this banded dissertation is a workshop titled, *"Identity Matters: Exploring Relational Health with Faculty of Color."* The objectives of the workshop were to discuss relational health as a concept of well-being, identify growth fostering and oppressive relational factors, and explore the potential impact on self and perceived identity as contributors to well-being. This workshop was presented at the National Association of Social Workers PA chapter Annual conference on October 26, 2020.

Keywords: faculty of color, relational health, RCT, education, teaching, relationships

Dedication

I dedicate this banded dissertation to my husband, Kojo and our children, Kiana, Kiera and Kojo

Jr. My only goal in life is to live in a way that pleases God and makes each of you proud of me.

Nothing else matters.

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Ko, thank you for the continued encouragement. You witnessed the long nights, countless hours at my desk, wiped away the tears and celebrated each victory. I love you.

Mom and dad, you never hesitate to support me. Mom, you are one of my loudest cheerleaders.

Dad, you are always the first person to offer help. I love you both.

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Identity, Role Experience, and Relationships: An Exploration of Relational Health with Faculty of Color in Social Work Education

Like physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional health, the condition of the relationships we engage in are just as important. Relational health is conceptualized in this banded dissertation as the condition of a relationship. It is viewed as growth fostering and empowering (connected) or disempowering and stagnant (disconnected). The idea of relational health emerges conceptually from the core values of the Social work profession, specifically the importance of human relationships. The term relational health is reimagined and rooted in relational cultural theory (RCT), a product of Jean Baker-Miller's seminal work which explored the role of dominance and subordination in human relationships (Miller, 1976). The health of relationships is conceptualized as one which is growth fostering (Jordan, 2018) and produces positive outcomes while unhealthy relationships produce negative outcomes. Faculty of color are defined as a person of color who holds an academic ranking in a degree granting post-secondary institution and identifies racially and/or ethnically as a person of color. Jordan (2010) asserts disconnection and misunderstanding as problematic for relationships and has historically impacted people of color and other marginalized groups. Incorporating relational pedagogy into higher education requires a great deal of self and cultural awareness (Reeves & Le Mare, 2017). Fostering growth producing relationships is essential for educators, students, and universities. The importance of human relationships, a core value of the social work profession, is critical for effective engagement, teaching, and pedagogy.

Relational Health as a Concept

Growth fostering relationships can be defined as a fundamental and complex process of active participation in the development and growth of other people and the relationship that

results in mutual development and growth (Miller & Striver, 1997). The components of a growth fostering relationship have been identified through the RCT. Referred to as the “5 good things,” these components, when present, promote the development of good relational health. The five good things are zest, sense of worth, clarity, productivity, and a desire for more connection (Miller, 1976). As a framework, RCT has expanded for framing experiences across issues, contexts, and disciplines. Lange (2018) has studied RCT components in educational settings. Beyene et al (2002) and Spencer (2004) have studied RCT in the exploration of mentoring relationships. Each study concludes authenticity and mutuality as helpful constructs for relationship building. Relational pedagogy is being used to for curriculum development for social work (Gunderson-Duluth, 2018). This banded dissertation builds upon the utilization of RCT’s growth fostering relational concepts for faculty of color.

Measuring Relational Health

Three instruments have been developed to measure RCT constructs. Genero et al. (1992) created the Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire (MPDQ) which measures the degree of mutuality that an individual perceives within close adult relationships. The MPDQ conceptualized mutuality and the relation to mental stress. Mutuality may be a strong predictor of several outcomes related to mental health symptom severity (Lenz, 2016). The Relational Health Indices (RHI) is a 37 item self-report scale which measures the degree to which individuals perceive participation in growth-fostering relationships. The presence of authenticity, empowerment and engagement are three critical factors for measurement of participation (Liang, et al. (2002). The RHI conceptualized growth fostering relationships in three contexts, peer, mentor, and community. Lenz (2016) identifies eight authors who utilized the RHI instrument identify relational health as a protective factor positively associated with resilience. The third

instrument, the Connection Disconnection Scale (CDS), was designed to measure eight elements of relational connection-disconnection: empathy, authenticity, engagement, empowerment, zest, respect for diversity, increased self-worth, and desire for more connection (Tantillo & Sanftner, 2010). Each of the instruments measuring relational health is a self-report inventory design.

Implications for research include exploring a more diverse set of subjects, as the previously indicated measurements were tested with predominantly Caucasian women (Lenz, 2014). Within an increasingly diverse society and diversity of students and faculty, a more culturally informed perspective is identified as critical to measuring good relational health.

Relational Health with Students

Movement toward connection and the growth fostering relationship is the indication of good relational health. Social work educators are in a unique position to foster relational health with students because the importance of human relationships is one of the six core values of the profession (Birkenmaier & Berg-Werner, 2016). Establishing good relationships and a commitment to service are two primary goals of the social work educator. Haskins & Appling (2015) identify 3 stages for relational interactions and advising with students: establishing the relationship, increasing relational awareness and the final stage, reflection, evaluation, and application of relational knowledge. Intentionality and mutual empathy are critical components particularly when engaging minority students (Duffey et al., 2009). Authentic engagement strategies which promote good relational health with students include the establishment of clear boundaries (Duffey et al., 2009 Jordan, 2010). Students feel valued in the presence of authentic relationships where their values are prioritized (Protivnak & Foss, 2009). These basic tenets of RCT provide the framework for faculty engagement with students.

Relational Health with Faculty

Cultural knowledge and sensitivity (Alejano-Steele et al., 2001) is imperative to; establish safety, trust, and build bridges of connection (Comstock et al., 2018) with students and faculty. Faculty possess a dual task of balancing self (Duffy & Haberstroth, 2012) while educating, advising, correcting, and building relationships with students. Balancing university culture, personal identity and the diverse needs of students can be overwhelming, particularly for educators whose identity is not as diverse as their student body (Holland, 2012). RCT provides a framework for healthy engagement (mutual empathy, authenticity, empowerment, respect). Faculty perceptions about self-efficacy and confidence in relationship building (Fletcher, 2017) with students requires additional study. Levy (2017) explores fears of helping professionals. Shared vulnerability (Jordan, 2017) is a common attribute during the relationship building process. Institutions play a role in creating growth fostering environments and support for social work educators.

Relational Health within Universities

Establishing good relational health within universities depends on the condition of the environment or university culture. Person-in-environment perspective (Gitterman & Heller, 2011) outlines the critical nature of environmental fit and its relationship to stress. Essentially, positive environmental fit creates opportunity for personal growth and self-mastery, whereas negative environmental fit can be disabling and cause stress. The culture of universities directly impacts all organisms in the environment (students, faculty, staff, and constituents). RCT has yet to be explored in organizations to establish growth fostering connections; however, the incorporation of the “five good things” can provide a framework for engagement and establishing good relational health within university settings.

The purpose of this banded dissertation is to explore the relationship between identity and role experience for faculty of color and offer strategies for institutions to address the identified challenges. Social work core values and the established Code of Ethics provide guidelines for best practice; however, there is a gap in the literature in addressing the relational consequences as a result of historical, environmental, psychological and social factors for faculty of color in their role as educators. It is within this intersection that this dissertation explores the impact for these faculty.

For people of color, there are residual effects from relational disconnection which are historical, psychological, and relational in nature. White supremacy continues to permeate institutions and disproportionality impact faculty of color in the areas of role performance, promotion, tenure, and opportunity. Unchecked environmental and institutional structures of privilege continue to force these faculty to navigate invisible processes (Jackson, 2020). The constant navigation of these implicitly biased processes can cause psychological fatigue and hinder authentic social engagement and relational building. This banded dissertation presents three critical considerations for social work programs:

- 1) Faculty of color endure psychological pain associated with identity.
- 2) Faculty of color are vulnerable to biased exchanges, often implicit, in the classroom and institutional setting.
- 3) Faculty of color need institutional support grounded in anti-racist strategies.

These considerations call social work programs to reevaluate these relational positions from a just and culturally informed perspective.

As identified in social work education and practice, the relationship is conceptualized in this banded dissertation as the medium through which connection, reconciliation and change

takes place. The relational lens of this dissertation is that the relationship between faculty of color and social work as an institution directly impacts the relationship between these faculty and students, colleagues, and their respective programs. Relationship building is not seen as individual ability or skill, as relationship requires mutuality. The primary assumption of this dissertation is that faculty of color desire growth fostering relationships and equitable treatment in their role as educators. Intersectionality and relational cultural theory are combined to present my findings through this integrated lens. The relational cultural concepts of connection vs. disconnection combined with the intersectionality's concepts of identity politics and jeopardy grounds this dissertation. Race as a critical construct (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), an element of critical race theory, provides additional insight into the way identity shapes experiences (Kendi, 2020; Sue et al., 2008; Wong et al., 2013). Each theory identifies a power-oppression based paradigm as the culprit for relational disconnection (Jordan, 2010). It is in this intersection, that this banded dissertation situates itself to explore the voices from faculty in product #2, a qualitative study where faculty of color in social work education recall their experiences with relational connection and disconnection. The impact on role performance is highlighted in this qualitative study.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this banded dissertation is relational cultural theory combined with intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) as an applied concept. Intersectionality as an applied concept was developed by Kimberlee Crenshaw to expose identity politics and present the notion of “jeopardy”, a result of having multiple subordinate identities (Crenshaw, 1989). The combination of these identities impact life experiences, by way of advantage or disadvantage. RCT offers a way of understanding interactions within the context of relationships.

RCT provides a critical lens for identifying good relational health and recognizes the impact of multiple identities across the lifespan, and across contexts. Five key relational concepts of RCT are connection across the lifespan, mature functioning, relationship differentiation, mutual empathy and empowerment and authenticity (Haskins & Appling, 2017). To explore relational health for students, educators and universities, the assumptions, concepts, and propositions of RCT provide insight into the elements of healthy interactions within relationships. Mutual empathy and mutual empowerment are core processes that foster relational growth (Miller & Stiver, 1978). Disconnection, a result of misunderstanding, invalidation, humiliation, impedes the relationship building process (Jordan, 2010). A culturally grounded mindset and environment can promote relational connection and is a good starting place for empathic relationships.

RCT makes one assumption: the capacity to build connection is an essential human skill (Jordan, 2010). This assumption is based on a natural human desire for connection. Dr. Brene Brown, social worker and researcher, speaks often about human beings as hard-wired for connection (Brown et al., 2011). Connection, for students, educators and universities is vital to establish relational health. Challenges with relationship building are inevitable as each party in the relationship possesses varied abilities, motivations, experiences, identities, and levels of power and, engagement strategies. Engagement is particularly critical for historically disadvantaged populations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Jordan, 2010).

Nine empirically reviewed research articles have been published in peer reviewed professional journals between 2000-2012 exploring RCT as a theoretical framework. Beyene et al. (2002) and Duffey et al. (2009) provide support of RCT as a theoretical framework in mentoring relationships. Using mixed methodology, Beyene (2002) explored mentoring relationships through a relational lens and found relational mutuality as the helpful construct.

Duffey (2009) conducted a qualitative study with grounded theory to identify perceptions of relational competencies in diverse counseling settings. Through a single-case design, Lenz (2012), assessed RCT as an intervention for developing relational health while incarcerated. The study concludes RCT is helpful for promoting empowerment and engagement. Gibson & Meyers (2002), Frey et al. (2004), Frey et al. (2005), Liang (2012) and Sanftner & Tantillo (2010) published studies which support RCT instruments to measure connection-disconnection and mutuality (Lenz, 2016). There is enough empirical evidence to support RCT as a conceptual framework.

The Council for Social Work Education requires social work educators to be competent in practice. Educational Policy and Accreditation Standard C2 mandates an orientation to social justice (CSWE, 2016). Diverse learning environments, staffing and curricular ideas are essential for the profession that seeks to affect the environment that impacts how social work students form their assumptions, ideas, and engagement strategies. How can the applied concepts of RCT inform social work education? The aim of this banded dissertation is to identify and explore phenomena which impacts relational health for faculty of color in social work education.

Summary of Scholarly Products

The first product of this banded dissertation is a conceptual paper titled, *When Your Faculty Member is a Person of Color: Relational Cultural Considerations for Social Work Programs* (Jackson, 2020). Three considerations are presented for social work programs to acknowledge, address, and dismantle oppressive practices in the hiring, promotion, evaluation, and treatment of its faculty of color. The concept of relational confidence in role performance is explored through the perspective of being “othered” (Tatum, 2003). Racial identity, white supremacy and bias are critically examined as disconnecting forces in establishing trust and

building authentic relationships. This product directs the conversation toward social work programs.

The second product of this banded dissertation is a qualitative study grounded in an integrated framework which combines relational cultural theory, critical race theory and intersectionality. For RCT, relational connection and disconnection are explored from the perspective of the study participant. In their own words, participants in various roles and institution types, provide insights into their interactions with students, colleagues, and their respective institutions. For critical race theory, racial identity and the power-oppression based paradigm provide context for understanding the relationship between racial identity and encounters in daily living. For intersectionality, the study explores the intersection of identity, status, and the impact of bias.

The title, *Exploring the Relationship Between Racial and Ethnic Identity and Role Experience for Faculty of Color in Social Work Education*” identifies the purpose of the study. Fifteen faculty of color at CSWE Schools of Social Work recall their experiences with relational connection and disconnection in their respective roles. The author makes three recommendations for social work programs which focuses on students, faculty, and the institution. For students, changes to the implicit curriculum to promote those cognitive processes necessary to foster relational learning and cultural sensitivity. For faculty, develop mandatory and ongoing faculty training which addresses anti-racism and other forms of sociopolitical oppression faced by faculty of color in and out the academy. Finally, create and implement policies which hold accountable relational violations outlined in this banded dissertation and identified in literature as biased and unjust actions. These include those unique professional consequences disproportionately experienced by faculty of color.

The third product of this banded dissertation is a workshop presentation for the National Association of Social Workers-PA Chapter. This workshop, titled, “*Identity Matters: Exploring Relational Health with Faculty of Color*” was created with the following learning objectives: 1) to discuss relational health as a concept of well-being, 2) to explore relational connection vs. disconnection, 3) to consider the historical, social, and psychological consequences of relational disconnection for faculty of color. I present my findings through this integrative lens: RCT (connection vs. disconnection), Intersectionality (identity politics, jeopardy) CRT (Race as a critical construct which shapes experiences). Findings from product one was presented. Essentially, relational disconnection impacts self and perceived identity, is a result of chronic empathic failures and is often enacted through bias.

Discussion

The close association between self-identity and perceived identity give meaning to interpersonal exchanges in the environment. Like identity, environmental conditions shape experiences (Ambrosino et al., 2015; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Miller & Stiver, 1978; Rothenberg, 2016). The sum of the external factors presented in this dissertation, as evidenced in literature, show the complexity of identity and role experience for faculty of color. Findings from Products one and two suggest, that for people of color, the complexities surrounding relational disconnection for people of color are historical (DeAngelo, 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Kendi, 2020; Leary, 2005; Jordan, 2017; Wilkerson, 2020), psychological, (Jordan, 2018; Sue et al., 2008; Wong et al., 2014) and relational (Miller & Stiver, 1978; Gunderson et al., 2018; Schwartz, 2019; Walker, 2005) in nature. Bias (Amodio et al., 2018; Haynes, 2020; Kelly & Varghese, 2018), microaggressions (Elias et al., 2017; Wong et al, 2014; Sue et al., 2008), perceived inferiority (Crenshaw, K., 1989; Dutt-Ballerstadt, 2020; Patterson, 2018; Saftner &

Tantillo, 2010;) and mistrust (Haynes et al., 2020; Tatum, 1993; Wilkerson, 2020) are represented in relational research and emerged in the qualitative study as significant contributors to disconnection and poor relational health. Institutions are empowered to create intentional relational strategies, grounded in the profession's core values and ethical duty to its faculty.

When we engage in any relationship, we learn. We learn about the needs of others, but we also learn about ourselves. This banded dissertation offers an opportunity for learning, with the focus centered on the implicit and explicit challenges faculty of color endure in their role as educators. The purpose of this work is to explore how relational cultural theory can provide a context for understanding some of these commonly shared relational experiences. Establishing relational health with minority faculty requires cultural awareness and sensitivity to prevent relational disconnection. Chronic disconnection is the cumulative effect of "repeated failed empathic responses." (Jordan, 2010, p. 23) Levy (2017) explores fears of helping professionals. Shared vulnerability (Jordan, 2017) and mistrust emerged from the qualitative study. Faculty perceptions about self-efficacy and confidence in relationship building (Fletcher, 2017) with students, faculty and within institutions requires additional study.

RCT provides the indicators for good relational health; however, the know-how to achieving that status is less clear. The D.A.T Model for Relational Engagement (Jackson, 2020) is introduced to identify the condition of relationships and transform the relational reality to be growth fostering and empowering. The acronym, D.A.T., refers to a three-step engagement strategy to change and improve relational health between entities. The action phases are: D-Determine the condition of the relationship, A-Assess the relational reality and T-Transform the relationship. While this method has not been tested, it represents the relational experiences presented in the literature and this study.

Implications for Social Work Education

The Code of Ethics coupled with RCT as a framework provides a great foundation for relationship building in educational settings. The mastery of movement toward growth fostering relationships through connection with students, faculty and in universities is yet to be explored from the perspective of those engaged in the relationship. Understanding “good relational health” is paramount, but not without challenge. Challenges include individuals with varied identities, perspectives, experiences, capacities, and confidence levels. As noted, chronic relational disconnection impedes relational confidence. To thrive in role performance, confidence is paramount. In the face of bias, oppressive practices and relational disconnection, faculty of color may struggle to establish good relational health or worse, endure unnecessary psychological pain in the process. This is significant and relevant for social work educators who are providing tools to future social workers whose careers will center on relationships.

The Council for Social Work Education’s EPAS outlines core competencies as a roadmap for preparing future social workers to carry out the tasks associated with the profession in a culturally competent and ethical manner. The goal of this research is to address both cognitive and relational processes associated with generalist social work practice and engagement with vulnerable populations. Relational Cultural theory is on the cusp of being introduced into the social work curriculum (Gunderson-Duluth, 2018) and the impact remains to be seen. Good relational skills are transferrable and can be transformative for students, faculty, and universities.

Implications for Future Research

If institutions want to attract faculty of color, meet their psychological needs, or prevent high turnover rates, it may be time to address institutional culture to ensure its policies and practices are anti-racist, culturally informed, and just. Future research can include the

development of a universal educational model to identify risk for relational cultural disconnection in social work programs. Bias, along with other sociopolitical factors continue to permeate educational settings and disproportionately affect faculty of color. This banded dissertation presents a mere glimpse into the lived experiences for these faculty as evidenced in research and presented in product 2.

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**Exploring the Relationship Between Racial and Ethnic Identity and Role Experience for
Faculty of Color in Social Work Education: A Qualitative Study**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify relevant factors which promote or hinder relational health for faculty of color and its impact on teaching. Two relational-cultural concepts were explored in this qualitative study: connection and disconnection. The study was guided by relational-cultural theory, intersectionality, and critical race theory. Using a 13 item Qualtrics survey, fifteen faculty of color detail their experiences with students, faculty and within their institutions. Personal, historical, and institutional factors are identified. Data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. Findings suggest bias is the primary culprit for relational disconnection. Additional relevant factors include perceived inferiority, racism, and white supremacy. Three aspirational strategies emanating from the study are presented for social work programs to consider in building growth fostering relationships with faculty of color.

Keywords: faculty of color, relational cultural theory, connection, disconnection, relational health, teaching

Exploring the Relationship Between Racial and Ethnic Identity and Role Experience for Faculty of Color in Social Work Education

Faculty of color endure negative relational experiences in the academy. Relational experience is used in this context to describe engagement with other entities through some form of relationship “(i.e., professor, colleague, faculty member).” An example of a negative relational experience which disproportionality impacts faculty of color is perceived intellectual inferiority (Louis, Thompson, Smith, Mohandas, Williams & Watson, 2017; Wong, Derthick & David, 2014). It is often mobilized through implicit bias (Amodio et al., 2018; Sue et al., 2008). White supremacy (Kelly & Varghese, 2018; Hill-Collins, 1993) and systemic oppression (Carter et al., 2007) are two significant historical contributors to negative relational experiences of faculty of color. And as a justice issue, a connection with relational cultural theory (RCT) might aid in addressing the injustice as it recognizes connection, empowerment and mutuality are shaped by environmental conditions and power dynamics (Miller & Stiver, 1978; Jordan, 2010; Schwartz, 2019; Walker, 2005). Similarly, intersectionality provides context for the ways in which identity shapes experiences (Hill-Collins, 1993; Marsiglia & Kulis, 2016). It is through this integrated framework that I explore the psychosocial and professional impact of relational experiences of faculty of color in social work education. The purpose of the study was to explore relational challenges experienced by faculty of color to understand these phenomena. Inductive thematic analysis was utilized to present findings.

Generally, a person is considered faculty of color if the individual holds an academic ranking in a degree granting post-secondary institution. People of color are defined as individuals who identify racially and/or ethnically as a person of color and includes members of African,

Caribbean, Indigenous and Latinx descent. People of color may also include other conceptualizations not indicated but recognized by the individual who identifies as such.

Identity and Experience

We know that oppressive ideologies contribute in shaping experiences for people of color, as social constructs perpetuate further marginalization of people of color. Similarly, other groups and sub-groups such as women, immigrants and refugees, members of the LGBTQ community, those who are differently abled and have learning differences are also vulnerable to marginalization. According to Hill-Collins (1993), this is one way to name the impact of identity and jeopardy construed within intersectionality theory. In her seminal work, Jean Baker Miller (1978) describes a good relationship as one that promotes authenticity, mutual empowerment, a sense of worth, empathy and growth (Miller & Stiver, 1994) and a desire for more connection (Jordan, 2010). These are classified as “5 good things.” From a relational cultural perspective, connection (Miller & Stiver, 1978; Jordan, 2010; Schwartz, 2019) is a desirable and necessary outcome for growth fostering relationships.

Beyond the individual level, for institutions, there is a relational paradox to be recognized. Socialized pain can cause marginalized groups to withdraw from relationships, as it is a negative relational experience that breaks connections. Hence, faculty require connection in the classroom, in assigned programs and within institutions. Disconnection (Jordan, 2010) occurs as a result of misunderstanding and failed empathic responses. Disconnection can lead to mistrust and can significantly impact retention rates for faculty of color.

Given that social work is a profession which values the importance of human relationships, this study is guided by the question: To what extent are negative relational experiences impacting connected teaching? What do faculty of color perceive as meaningful

connection? Which factors when present foster connection and which impede connection? The relationship between relational cultural disconnection and its impact for faculty of color is unclear. In relational cultural theory, relationship is conceptualized as a site and source for learning (Schwartz, 2019) that makes human connection the impetus for change. Framing these phenomena in the context of relationships emphasizes partnership, an elemental requirement for collaboration in learning. For this study, an exploration of power differentials, the condition of the learning environment and historical oppression frame the experiences for faculty of color. This exploration aligns with the Council for Social Work Education's educational and policy accreditation standard's duty to colleagues to establish a culture of human exchange (CSWE, 2015, n.p.) that is congruent with the profession's mission and core values.

Literature Review

Inherent in every human being is the need to be seen, heard, understood and to matter (Jackson, 2020). Across disciplines, connection is recognized as an essential element for relationship building. Autonomy, widely accepted as the primary preceptor for self-efficacy and actualization, is revisited in relational cultural theory through the concept of connection. Erikson (1950) presents social context as a critical indicator and contributor to identity development. Understanding the paradox of relational connection requires both theoretical, psychosocial, and personal conceptualizations of self (Argyle, 2008; Baumeister, 1999;), identity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016; hooks, 1993; Marsiglia & Kulis, 2015) and person-in-situation (Anastas, 2010; Birkenmaier & Berg-Werger, 2017; Gunderson et al., 2018) contexts. The presence or positionality of power gives meaning to relational experiences and becomes the lens through which identity, both self and perceived, are conceptualized.

Relational cultural theory (RCT), Intersectionality, and Critical race theory (CRT) in combination explain the power-oppression based paradigm (Hill-Collins, 1993; Jordan, 2010; Marsiglia) as the culprit for relational disconnection. The close association between self-identity and perceived identity give meaning to interpersonal exchanges in the environment. Like identity, environmental conditions shape experiences (Ambrosino et al., 2015; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Miller & Stiver, 1978; Rothenberg, 2016). For people of color, there are residual effects from relational disconnection which are historical (DeAngelo, 2018; Leary, 2005;), psychological (Jordan, 2018; Sue et al., 2008; Wong et al., 2014) and relational (Schwartz, 2019; Walker, 2005) in nature.

People of Color

The propensity for people of color to experience relational disconnection is disproportionality high, compared to whites (Alexander, 2012; Walker, 2005). As a marginalized group, people of color have historically endured the brunt of racial bias and discrimination in modern society. Implicit associations (bias) against marginalized groups (Amodio et al., 2018; Rothenberg, 2016; Sue et al., 2008) are endemic in the U.S. educational system as a result of intentional oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Freire, 2010; Leary, 2005). Further, it is known that disadvantage and institutional oppression (Collins, 1993; Kelly & Varghese, 2018; Lange, 2018;) are a result of racism.

People of color were not always valued as equal citizens (Ambrosino, 2016) in the United States. Basic civil rights like voting (Reisch & Andrews, 2002), access to education (Freire, 2010; hooks, 1993) and freedom were not guaranteed for people of color. Thus, *Brown v. Board of Education* was passed to ensure equal access to education for all citizens. While this key piece of legislation provides access to educational opportunities, it gave way to a more nuanced,

strategic, transformation of discrimination and oppression which exists in educational curriculum, funding and testing (Louis, et al., 2017; Wong, et al., 2014; Kwok et al., 2003).

Navigating these and other existing barriers has psychosocial consequences for people, students, and faculty of color.

Beyond code switching (Tatum, 1993), people of color must negotiate image presentations (hair, language, dress, diction) in order to quell stereotypes to meet the comfort level of others (DeAngelo, 2018) including intra peer groups (Elias & Morton-Padovano, 2017). Another important concept to consider within this discourse is self-efficacy for people of color. Self-efficacy and role performance are impacted by relational exchanges within the environment. This is the cumulative effect of multiple structures of oppression (Hill-Collins, 2016) which are woven into the fabric of daily living, both consciously and subconsciously for people of color. Repeated, failed empathic responses creates inconsistent connection, broken connection and disconnection (Jordan, 2017). While there is a growing diversity in educational institutions and schools of social work, the historical impact of racism and patriarchy has left a stain on the educational system (Jackson, 2020) and has generational psychological pain for people, students, and faculty of color. The need for anti-racist strategies (Kendi, 2019) continues to be a priority for institutions seeking a justice-oriented existence.

Faculty of Color and the Academy

In 2017, 18% of faculty in degree granting post-secondary institutions with full professor rank were faculty of color (NCES 2019-144). Historically, recruitment for faculty of color has been an intentional and imperative effort. In the early 1970s, The Committee on Minority Groups formed to identify and address the needs of students and faculty of color in social work education. For the social work profession, Carl Scott spearheaded the organizational mission out

of concern for faculty of color recruitment to ensure relevant curriculum for minority students and as a means of support (CSWE, 2017). Faculty of color face the same relational hurdles in the academy as they do in their personal lives. Hence, racial disparities in education come as double jeopardy and must be addressed in order to be reconciled (Carter et al., 2017) and prevent high turnover of minority faculty (Dutt-Ballerstadt, 2020; Haynes et al., 2018). An authentic, empathic, culturally informed response is imperative as representation matters (Kelly & Varghese, 2018; hooks, 1993) for students of color. Yet, care must be taken not to mix these with false empathy.

False empathy (Sleeter, 2017) and colorblindness (Hill-Collins, 1993; Dixson, 2018; Kendi, 2019) are two ineffective yet common experiences faculty of color face in education. These relational exchanges can have a negative impact on institutional climate, (Carter, 2007) can cause depressive symptoms for faculty and students of color (Keels et al, 2007) and have contributed to social justice initiatives in education (Dixson, 2018). Sleeter (2017) addresses resistance (Crowly & Smith, 2015) and fatigue (Flynn, 2015) from talking about race-based issues (p.156). Communication across culture can be difficult. But while conversing about racial injustice can be difficult, it is more difficult for faculty of color to be held to task and perform as educators in the confines of racial discrimination and systemic injustice.

Faculty of Color in Social Work Education

The mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being (Birkenmaier & Berg-Werger, 2016) and to address social injustice (CSWE, 2015). Addressing social injustice is critical for faculty of color who are vulnerable to unjust and discriminatory experiences. Institutions may better serve its faculty of color by creating a climate which fosters ethical behavior, promotes the profession's core values and challenges its community to be socially and

morally conscious (Lishton & Rahimi, 2017) through the scholarship of teaching and learning (p. 7). Boyer (2016) eloquently states, “because the scholarship of teaching and learning focuses on teaching and learning as it unfolds, it can provide authentic assessment of practice and outcomes” (p.17). Radical approaches (Reisch & Andrews, 2002) to promote social justice are not uncommon for the social work profession. The country’s social climate is confronted with a demand for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Hence, a new wave of anti-racist literature (Alexander, 2016; DiAngelo, 2018; Kendi, 2019) has emerged to confront and challenge centuries old biased educational practices that uphold white supremacy (hooks, 1994). Evidence of racial bias in social work education against faculty of color is revealed in course evaluations, promotion, and tenure (Kwok et al., 2003; Patterson, 2018). And while the relationships between relational disconnection and its impact on teaching for faculty of color is unclear, evidence of identity and its ability to shape experiences is clear. So, meeting the growing needs for diversity while honoring individual and institutional identity requires balance. Social work programs can mitigate some of the identified challenges. In this work, I describe relevant historic and systemic factors associated with identity and experience, the psychological, social, and professional impact of these factors, and the ways in which relational disconnection is disproportionality experienced by people of color.

Method

An exploratory methodology was used for this qualitative study. Because qualitative research views meaning in context (Padgett, 2017) a phenomenological approach has been selected to explore lived experiences of faculty of color (p.35) and the conditions surrounding those experiences. This study sought to explore the experiences of 15 faculty of color through an open-ended survey methodology. Due to the COVID 19 global pandemic, the original design of

the study (face to face interview) was changed. In place of interviews, I created a Qualtrics survey. Between January and June 2020, fifteen faculty of color voluntarily completed a 13 item Qualtrics survey. Inductive thematic analysis was utilized to draw parallels between participant responses and RCT's concepts of connection and disconnection. Data analysis followed the thematic analysis procedure (Padgett, 2017). To address ethical concerns the study protocol was approved by the University of St Thomas Institutional Review Board.

Recruitment

This study used purposive sampling for recruiting the participants. Faculty members employed at CSWE schools and programs of social work were invited to participate by recruitment letter. Beginning January 2020, a letter of recruitment was shared via three avenues: CSWE listserv, through my doctoral cohort, and by email invitation to undergraduate and graduate schools and programs of social work in greater Pennsylvania. Faculty were individually invited by exploration of each school's website and those who identify as a person of color. Participants were free to share the survey link with any faculty of color at a CSWE institution that wanted to participate. The invitation to participate was shared by one participant via Facebook in the Philly Social Work Group. Participation was voluntarily. There is minimal personal identifying information to connect participants to survey results. Participants were not provided an incentive to complete the survey. Statements of consent and confidentiality were included in the invitation to participate email and recruitment letter. Participants were also given the opportunity to exit the survey at any time after initial consent.

Data Collection

The 13 item Qualtrics survey consists of 10 opened ended questions about relational experiences with connection and disconnection (See Appendix B, Interview Questions). The

definition for connection and disconnection were listed at the beginning of the survey. The open-ended questions inquired about faculty of color's relational interactions with students, other faculty and within their institutions. Questions one through nine focused on the following: interactions with students, other faculty and within their respective institutions. In questions one through nine, participants were also asked to provide examples of experiences where they felt connected or disconnected and to write what they believe a good relational experience would be within each category. Question 10 inquired about the impact of their experiences on teaching. Responses were not timed, and participants were free to write as much or as little as they pleased. There were also three demographic questions which inquired about gender, teaching role and institution type. Participants were able to select multiple choices for questions about teaching role and institution type.

The total number of participants for this study is 15 (n=15) (See Appendix C, Participant Demographics). Of the 15 responses, 12 (80%) responded to every question in the survey. When evaluating the gender of participants, 13 (87%) identified as female and two (13%) identified as male. A little over half the participants were full time faculty members, 9 (60%). Two (13%) were part time faculty members and one (6%) was an adjunct. Eight participants (53%) were non-tenure track. On the type of institution participants were affiliated with, two participants (11%) identified their institutions as either R1 (Very high research activity doctoral program), R2, (High research activity doctoral program) M1 (Masters Colleges and Universities-larger programs), liberal arts or faith based. One participant (6%) identified their institution as tribal. Four (27%) participants were from private institutions while six (40%) were from public institutions.

Data Analysis

Participant data were exported from Qualtrics and imported into NVivo, a qualitative research software program (cite). Data were then transcribed utilizing NVivo's transcription service. To ensure accuracy of data transcription, I compared data from Qualtrics to the transcribed data in NVivo, line by line, participant by participant. Once it was confirmed that the data were transferred without error, I began the coding process. I created codes within NVivo and within an Excel spreadsheet on my password protected laptop. Using second level coding, I created categories with RCT's growth fostering relationship's primary concept of connection. Because this study sought to explore the impact of relational experiences on teaching, identifying overarching themes in line with connected teaching felt like the natural approach to engage the data. Using inductive analysis, emerging themes were coded. A semantic approach was used, and emerging themes were placed into one of three categories: connection, disconnection, or other. Within each category, I looked for repetition of phrasing and descriptors in participants' responses. Qualitative researchers must examine and address the validity and reliability of data. To do so, I incorporated the principles of credibility and trustworthiness by employing two strategies.

A second coder was used for two purposes: to identify emerging themes and to check for researcher bias. The second coder holds a Doctor of Social Work degree and is a current Assistant Professor at faith-based institution. Two data analysis meetings were conducted and identified themes were discussed and compared. The second coder and I conducted an independent review of the data. We individually identified the themes reported in this study. After creating themes and categories, we met for a 2-hour data review session. Our results were almost identical with the exception of one theme was labeled under a different descriptor but fit within the category identified in the results section. The second coder identified institutional

policy as a challenge for faculty of color but did not identify a relationship to the relational cultural themes of connection and disconnection.

A second strategy employed to address credibility and trustworthiness involved rereading transcripts, line by line, to check for researcher bias and allow the themes to emerge (or not). This process of rereading was conducted on three separate occasions. Notes were recorded in a data journal. I followed the data. I was not rigid in my analysis and allowed themes to emerge organically. I took an iterative, non-linear approach (Padgett, 2008) as I engaged and reengaged the data. This helped with the identification of the following emerging themes.

Results

Themes of Connection

There are three prominent themes of connection which emerge from the data: trust, shared heritage/identity, and openness. Four participants identified trust as a primary factor. Four participants identify shared heritage/identity as a primary factor. Two participants identify openness (to learning, engaging across difference) as a primary factor. Each theme is outlined below. Pseudonyms were used to present participant responses (See Appendix C, Participant Demographics).

Trust

When asked to share an experience where the participant felt connection with a student, three full time faculty (Theresa, Michael, and Tracy) and one adjunct faculty (Luz) identify trust as a connecting factor. Theresa wrote, “I felt connection to this student that they trusted me enough to reach out” and similarly, “when I see their trust in me by what they are willing to share.” Tracy shared, “She was able to find comfort in visiting with me and sharing her pregnancy” (trust implied). Michael replied by offering an example. He said, “the student shared

that her personal life has been unstable...the student felt connected and supported.” Theresa, Tracy and Michael framed their responses around honesty and shared vulnerability in the classroom as ways to create trust (and ultimately connection.) Allowing for honest feedback from both student and professor and working together to help students thrive, particularly in areas of struggle, helped build connection for this participant group.

Shared Heritage/Identity

The second most prominent theme is shared heritage/identity. Four participants identify connection through a shared heritage or cultural identity. Communication across culture can be difficult and four faculty describe connection as “shared heritage”, “shared identity”, “similar ethnic background” and “shared cultural experience.” Melissa, a full-time professor at a Carnegie designated research institution (R1) describes her experience in this way. She states, “The student and I shared a similar ethnic background and shared language, shared cultural understanding.” Shared identity was also expressed by Luz who wrote, “She was a non-traditional student given her age (over 50). So, our relationship felt reciprocal where we both learned from each other and shared a cultural identity that elevated our relationship.” Autumn, a full-time faculty member at a tribal college explains connection as “always present” given shared cultural values, language and identity. Ebony also indicated shared cultural as a connecting factor. Identity was a prominent connecting factor for this participant group.

Openness

Two participants, Risa and Dianna, describe openness as an open to learning and the presence of “aha” moments in the classroom. While they explicitly wrote about being open to learning, being open to receive feedback from a faculty of color or experiencing “aha” moments,

each capture the essence of mutuality in the classroom. Diana indicated, “The student was open to learning and wanted more than the minimum engagement.” Risa explained it this way, “I feel connected to students when they have their “aha moments” from the lessons I’ve taught.” Like trust and shared identity, openness creates space for authentic connection. Without it, the student teacher relationship can be challenging. To further elaborate on her statement, Risa also said, “In the case where either a student or teacher are not invested in learning, it is a recipe for a long and challenging academic relationship.” Openness as a connecting factor emerged from the data as a third primary theme.

Themes of Disconnection

There are three prominent themes of disconnection which emerge from the data: lack of engagement/communication, bias, and personal life challenges. Six of the 15 survey participants identify the presence of bias as the most significant factor which impedes initial or continued relational connection. Participant responses have been outlined to present their experiences of disconnection with students, colleagues and within their institutions.

The presence of Bias

Bias was overwhelmingly identified as a source of disconnection. The six faculty members who shared their experiences on this theme were diverse in their teaching role and institution type. In response to the question, “What do you believe hinders the development of good relationships with students?” Kimberly wrote, “Isms can effect relationships. This can be isms experienced or perpetuated by the faculty member, the student or the institution.” Diana addressed the question in a general manner by replying, “Assumptions and biases we make about each other.” Other responses identify judgment, attitude about intellectual capacity and racism as significant culprits. Chase, a faculty member at a public institution wrote, “having to prove or

defend my intelligence or abilities.” Additionally, Lisa and Ebony provided the following responses: “She questioned my knowledge” and “I felt discredited simply by my ethnicity upon first encounters with students.” Tina, a faculty member at a HBCU, Historically Black College or University, expressed it this way, “I felt disconnected with a student that believed she knew more than I did. I’m sure that came out of trauma and fear; however, it was very challenging to give her respect and not make her feel otherwise.” As identified by participants, microaggressions impact communication.

Lack of Engagement/Communication

Communication and engagement, or the lack thereof, emerged from three participant responses. For Michael, Tracy and Risa, a lack of engagement was framed as an issue for both the student and faculty member. Their responses varied. Each list “poor communication”, “lack of respect” and “lack of investment” as hindrances to developing good relationships; however, Tracy and Risa emphasized a lack of communication as the primary culprit. The participants identified communication is identified as a shared responsibility. Risa provided an example for lack of engagement by describing a student “who was disengaged from the course.” Tracy explicitly identifies poor communication as a disconnecting factor. Michael identifies shared responsibility for disconnection. He wrote, “when an instructor ignores a student’s needs.” He challenged the notion that relational engagement is primarily the responsibility of one party. Mutuality, a relational cultural concept, emerges from the data.

Personal Challenges

Personal challenges also emerged from three participant responses. For Luz, Ebony and Jessica, mental health challenges, the presence of trauma, illness or family challenges were identified as factors which hinder connection between student and faculty. Challenges of this

nature take the student out of the opportunity for mutuality. Luz, an adjunct professor wrote, “a student dropped a class without discussion once I discussed her absences with the advisor. She didn’t speak up out of embarrassment.” Jessica wrote about a student withdrawing for “personal reasons” and Ebony identified a student had “issues” with her. No additional information was provided. The data explores experiences that would likely fall under an extenuating circumstances category. Through Luz, Ebony and Jessica’s responses, personal challenges were identified as a relevant relational factor. There was no discussion of will, judgement or ability, as it relates to challenges experienced by students or faculty.

Other Emerging Themes

Three additional themes emerged from participant responses. The first theme is directly related to collegial relationships. Ebony described the way she is talked about by their peers impacts the relationship building process with students. It can help or hinder. In response to the question, “What hinders the development of good relationships with students?”, Debra said, “when other faculty in the department say disparaging comments to students about other faculty of color.” It is framed as “bias” and “unhealthy competition among colleagues” by both participants.

When faculty of color are placed in a position or role to challenge or be the authoritarian, this third theme emerged. I include it in the “Other Emerging Themes” section and not “Themes of Disconnection” because they appear to be general disconnecting factors and not specific to the race, ethnicity, or identity to the faculty member. Two participants explained scenarios where they caught a student cheating. Chase, a full professor at a public institution wrote, “I felt disconnection after the cheating/plagiarism incident. They refused to take responsibility and be honest about their behavior. Examples given from NASW Code of ethics did not resonate with

the student and I became the enemy.” Risa, an adjunct professor at a private Christian university used brevity in her response. She wrote, “when a student committed academic dishonesty by cheating on multiple assignments.” Risa did not disclose specifically the ways in which the student teacher relationship was impacted, simply that it created disconnection.

Institutional Themes

When asked what fosters connection within institutions, participants shared personal experiences. Being recognized/respected was the prominent theme with four participants citing examples from their institutions. Lisa, a full-time non-tenure track faculty member at a private institution states, “During a faculty meeting I was acknowledged by my colleagues regarding my work with students, field instructors and community agencies. Prior to this I was feeling like my work was not being valued or recognized in the same ways others were.” There appears to be an element of waiting to be recognized in the responses. Additionally, participants highlight being recognized for teaching style, being stood up for by superiors, and being intentionally sought out as examples of good relational connection.

Nine of the 15 participants provided examples of disconnecting experiences at their institution. Disconnecting factors include bias, feeling invisible, “policed” and cultural misunderstanding. Jessica wrote, “I felt disconnected with my institution when I experienced prejudice writings or actions from students and members of the institution were surprised.” Luz explained her experience being Latina and working in a predominantly White institution. She said, “being Latina, I am often the minority. I have felt disconnection when the invitation for committee participation and panels have been outright tokenizing....they want diversity not necessarily your expertise or diverse perspective. It’s more of the concern of showing off that the committee is diverse.” In this section I described four important themes. Each theme presents a

subtheme as participants describe their experiences. In the next section, I will provide an overview of findings.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore factors which foster or impede connection for faculty of color. Factors related to race, ethnicity or identity are evident in this study. They confirm much of what has been concluded by the literature. Grounding the study in relational cultural, critical race and intersectionality theories helped conceptualize the oppression-power based paradigm encountered by faculty of color in the academy. In this case, we consider the environmental consequence in the academy. Faculty of color are not exempt from experiencing challenges related to identity in the academy (Jackson, 2020). With each theme, except those which explicitly identify race, ethnicity, or identity as a factor, it can be argued that connection and disconnection as outlined in the data can be universally applied to student relationships with all faculty. Relational disconnection can occur naturally (Jordan, 2010), for a variety of reasons, and not solely because of a lack of desire for connection. The data supports this reality.

Hooks (1994) cautioned about biased educational practices. Bias, microaggressions, perceived inferiority and mistrust are represented in relational research and emerged in this study. The social implications are rooted in history. Historically, these factors have been mobilized by white supremacy, as evidenced in the writings of Elias et al., (2017); Freire, (1993); Hill-Collins (2016); Kelly et al., (2018) and hooks (1994) and continue to permeate relationships (Haynes et al., 2020) in the academy. Institutions would better themselves by examining the culture of their organizations. When an institution's identity, policies and practice are grounded in mutuality (mutual empathy, mutual engagement, and mutual empowerment) it creates space to mitigate relational challenges associated with cultural bias. This study's findings

fill a gap in the literature. It addresses those invisible relational processes which disproportionately inhibit authentic connection for faculty of color. There are two important reasons for institutions to consider a relational approach in its practice: the impact on relationships (productivity) and the impact on teaching.

Because social work is a profession committed to enhancing the overall well-being of others, (CSWE, 2016) it is uniquely positioned to promote relational connection as engaged pedagogy. It is evidenced in this study that the presence of bias, the primary disconnecting factor, arrests relational development (Jordan, 2010) and disproportionately impacts faculty of color across teaching role and institution type. In this discussion section, I describe the impact on teaching, strengths and limitations and implication for Social Work education.

Impact on Teaching

After data analysis was complete, one significant theme emerges in the participants' responses about an impact on teaching. An increased level of awareness of privilege and barriers present appear to be the primary relational factor. Bias was identified as the major barrier. Bias was presented as a barrier for both students and faculty. Bias was also presented as a problematic institutional dynamic.

One important finding in this exploratory study was that the participants identified bias as a major barrier. These findings are similar to the findings in Patterson (2018) study which examined racial disproportionality as experienced by faculty of color. These findings further support Kelly & Varghese's (2018) four contexts of institutional oppression as experienced by blacks in education. As I conceptualized the study, I was looking for classroom and relational impact on teaching. While the direct impact on teaching is unclear, findings showed that the impact on relationships was clear. Relational dynamics were more explicitly identified than

teaching. That makes sense given the nature of the research questions presented and the personal experiences of the study's participant group. Could it be that the direct impact on teaching is not fully realized as it is overshadowed by an overwhelming relational experience? How can I think about how my classroom instruction may be impacted if I am more concerned about being accepted, feeling judged or having to prove myself? These questions were derived from a combination of participant's responses.

Strengths & Limitations of the Study

A primary strength of the study is that it gives voice to shared experiences for faculty of color in their varied roles in the academy. The findings confirm phenomena related to identity and environmental conditions for marginalized groups. It supports the historical and theoretical concepts identified in the literature review. It supports the ongoing conversation about relational dynamics. Two limitations of the study include the sample size and inclusion criteria. It is also important to note that the study is not generalizable beyond the participant sample, due to its nature and design (Padgett, 2017). The global pandemic presented significant barriers for recruitment for this study. It would be beneficial to repeat the study and expand the inclusion criteria to engage a larger pool of faculty of color. A final limitation may be researcher bias. While credibility and trustworthiness were addressed in the methods section, it is important to consider my own implicit bias as I engaged in data analysis a female faculty of color in social work education.

Implications

The social work profession has a complicated history of upholding white supremacy, yet its core value system is justice forward. Educational Policy Accreditation Standard C2 mandates an orientation to social justice (CSWE, 2016). Social work programs are ethically responsible for

the culture of their environments and to intentionally prevent and mitigate oppressive practices. They are also in good position to model growth fostering relationships by caring for its most vulnerable faculty members (Jackson, 2020). Addressing bias in the educational environment requires authenticity, transparency, and courage. Despite conflicting messages from the current Presidential administration to dismantle anti-racist training, social work is built upon a mission to eradicate the grand challenges in society. Bias is a grand challenge that has historically existed and continues to permeate educational settings. Anti-racist discussion has gained momentum across disciplines. Future research can include the development of a universal educational model to identify risk for relational cultural disconnection in social work programs and other disciplines.

Aspirational Strategies for Social Work Programs

Lessons learned from this study invite a reevaluation of the way faculty of color in social work education are engaged in their respective roles. Relational injuries occur often. It is important to note that not all relational disconnection is intentional. Implicit bias is simply that, implicit. I propose three strategies which social work programs can employ to address negative relational experiences for its faculty. The first strategy involves the retelling of the profession's history. Identify social work education and practice pioneers of color in social work textbooks. Identify contributors of color to celebrate the diversity and to present an accurate retelling of the profession's history. History telling is one of the cumulative effects of the multiple structures of oppression (Hill-Collins, 1993), often favoring White supremacy. By retelling the profession's history in a more inclusive way, it communicates to faculty and students of color an authentic commitment to social justice. It shows transparency. Connected teaching and relational engagement requires truth and transparency.

The second strategy includes a redeveloped curriculum with a clear antiracist voice. This can be viewed as a fresh attempt to address grand challenges. For students and faculty of color alike, a curriculum focused on addressing racial injustice is a justice forward curriculum. A justice forward curriculum empowers students and faculty to confront and dismantle oppressive structures within the institution and beyond. The justice forward curriculum equips, immerses, and empowers faculty and students to engage in social change efforts. Immersion is intentional and built into faculty development and student development models. As noted, there are two important reasons for institutions to consider a relational approach in its practice: the impact on relationships and the impact on teaching. Marginalized members of the academy depend on practices that are equitable, fair, and just. Social work programs can demonstrate a social and moral consciousness (Lishton & Rahimi, 2017) in its practice by centering its curriculum on antiracism in practice, policy, and research.

The third strategy includes an active pursuit to diversify personnel in institutions. This includes diversity in every area of identity, from the boardroom to the classroom. To be clear, this is not a suggestion to identify one person of color to fulfill a diversity quota. As identified by one of the study's participant, this creates relational disconnection as the faculty of color is not seen as an equal and worse, may consistently have to defend their intellectual ability and sense of belonging. This not only creates psychological fatigue but also leads to increased turnover rates for faculty of color (Dutt-Ballerstadt, 2020). *Re-present* history, inclusive of all people's efforts to advance the profession. Representation allows aesthetics to change. Social work programs can consider these efforts to ensure representation of people of color in curriculum development. Creating courses which represent voices of every race, gender, ethnicity, orientation, level of

ability is one method. The profession can evaluate the telling of the origins of the profession and acknowledging pioneers of color not represented in the profession's history.

Conclusion

Faculty of color navigate invisible processes which impede connection in relationships. The aim of this study was to explore how relational cultural theory can provide a context for understanding some of these commonly shared relational experiences. Psychosocial theories, environmental theories and the social work value base identify relationship as critical to human development. Clear challenges have been identified and are experienced through symbolic interactions with students, faculty and within institutions (Jackson, 2020). Navigating bias to attempt connection is burdensome. Discrimination in various forms have historical roots for people of color. Faculty of color require empathy across difference and support from institutions. Critical analysis of an institution's ideology and history is essential, yet complex. Dismantling oppressive practices in faculty evaluations, promotion and opportunity requires acknowledgment of implicit bias. Intentional movement toward critical consciousness and growth fostering relationships involves culturally informed processes that are equitable, fair, and just. It is within this environment that faculty of color can thrive in their roles as educators and gatekeepers for the social work profession.

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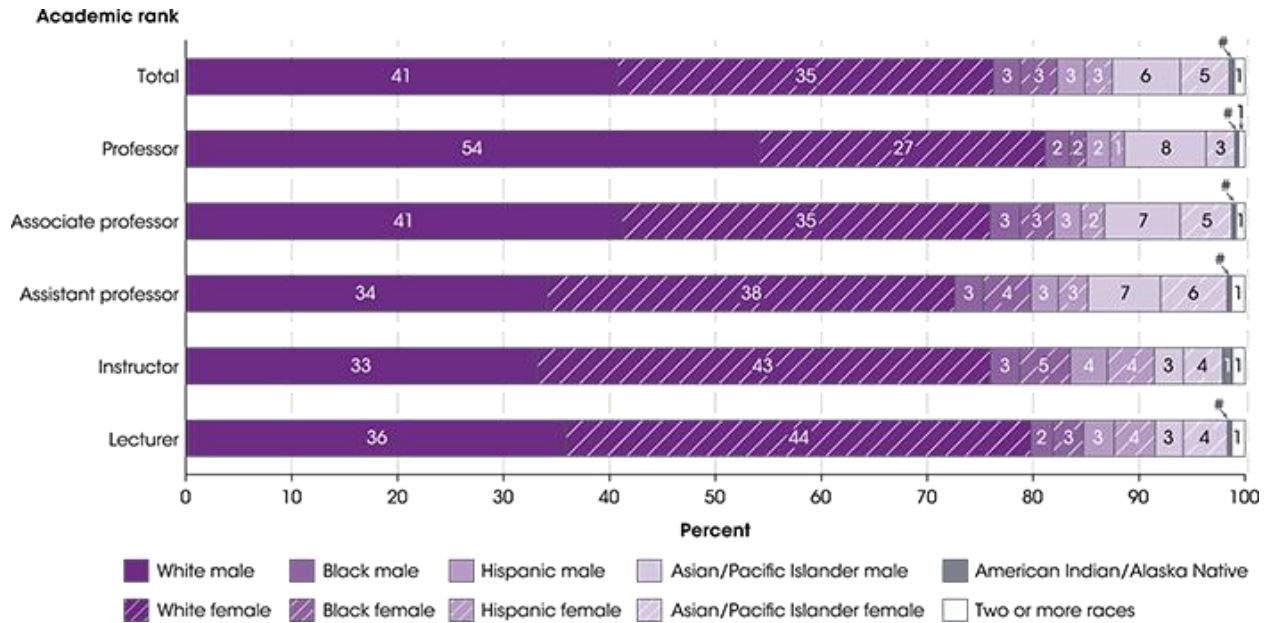
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Appendix A

For each academic rank, the percentage distribution of full-time faculty in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and sex: Fall 2017



Percentages are based on full-time faculty whose race/ethnicity was known.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). *The Condition of Education 2019* (NCES 2019-144)

Appendix B

Exploring the Relationship Between Racial and Ethnic Identity and Role Experience for**Faculty of Color in Social Work Education: A Qualitative Study**

Interview Questions

Relational health describes the condition through which relationships thrive or become stagnant. For this study, relational health refers to the condition and health of the relationship between faculty, students and institutions. It can be defined as connected and growth fostering (healthy) or disconnected and stagnant (unhealthy).

Part I. Questions related to interactions with students

1. As a faculty member, what do you believe impacts good relationships with students?
2. Please share an experience where you felt connection with a student.
3. Please share an experience where you felt disconnection from a student.
4. What do you believe hinders good relationships with students?

Part II. Questions related to interactions with faculty and university administrators

5. What do you believe impacts good relationships with universities?
6. Please share an experience, if any, where you felt connection within your institution.
7. Please share an experience, if any, where you felt disconnection from your institution.
8. What do you believe hinders good relationships within universities?

Part III. Question related to perception of connected teaching

9. What makes one a connected faculty member?
10. In what ways, if any, has your relational experiences impacted your teaching?

Part IV. Demographic Information

11. Gender Identification:
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Prefer not to answer
12. Teaching Role- check all that apply
 - a. Full time Faculty

- b. Part time Faculty
- c. Adjunct
- d. Visiting
- e. Tenured
- f. Tenure-Track
- g. Non-tenured

13. Institution Type-check all that apply

- a. R1
- b. R2
- c. R3
- d. M1
- e. M2
- f. M3
- g. Faith-based
- h. HBCU
- i. Liberal Arts
- j. Private
- k. Public
- l. Tribal
- m. Other

Appendix C

Table 1*Participant Demographics(n=15)*

Participant Assigned Pseudonym	Gender	Role/Title	Institution Type
Ebony	Female	Adjunct	R1, Public
Melissa	Female	FTF	R1, Public
Theresa	Female	FTF, NTT	NS
Debra	Female	NS	NS
Kimberly	Female	FTF, NTT	M1, Private
Luz	Female	Adjunct	R2, Public
Tina	Female	PTF	HBCU
Diana	Female	FTF, NTT	Faith Based, Private
Tracy	Female	FTF, NTT	Public
Michael	Male	PTT, NTT	R2, Public
Risa	Female	FTT, NTT	Faith Based, Private
Chase	Male	FTT, NTT	Public, Liberal Arts
Autumn	Female	FTF	Tribal
Lisa	Female	FTF, NTT	M1, Private
Jessica	Female	NS	Private, Liberal Arts

Note: All participants identify as faculty of color; Role/Title descriptors: FTF=Full time faculty, PTF=Part time faculty, TT=Tenure Track, NTT=Non-tenure Track, NS=Not Specified

**When Your Faculty Member is a Person of Color: Relational-Cultural
Considerations for Social Work Programs**

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Abstract

From a relational cultural lens, this conceptual paper explores the concept of relational disconnection for faculty of color in social work education. The primary focus of this manuscript is to provide an explicit look into the historical, psychosocial, and environmental factors which impact relationships and role experience. These are presented as considerations for institutions to reevaluate its relational exchanges with its community of color. Issues of justice are presented to ground these concepts in social work's mission and purpose to enhance the overall well-being of individuals and to alleviate suffering. A transformative model of relational engagement is presented for social work programs.

Keywords: relational health, faculty of color, RCT

When Your Faculty Member is a Person of Color: Relational-Cultural Considerations for Social Work Programs

Social work faculty of color may experience unique challenges establishing and maintaining good relational health. Those challenges are often related to identity politics (Hill-Collins, 1994). Exploring the ways identity affects relationships with students, faculty and universities are important for the future of social work education. The National Association for Social Workers Culturally Competent manual (2003) identifies nine standards for culturally competent practice which include ethics and values, self-awareness, cross-cultural knowledge and skills, service delivery, empowerment and advocacy, diverse workforce, professional education, language and communication and leadership to advance cultural competence. Faculty require support to thrive in their roles (Gunderson et al., 2018). It is relevant for the future of social work education to understand the complexities surrounding identity and its impact on faculty of color.

Relational health as a concept is grounded in relational cultural theory. It challenges the notion that autonomy alone is necessary for self-efficacy and actualization. Relational-Cultural theory (RCT) posits the condition of relationships with others is as important as autonomy given a natural human desire for connection. Connection for students, educators and universities is vital to establish relational health. Schwartz (2019) identifies empowerment, mattering, and mutuality as significant indicators for movement toward connection. Barriers to connection include lack of empathy, shame and failed empathic responses to lived experience (Jordan, 2010, p.5). Broken connection creates disconnection. Faculty of color, a marginalized population, are vulnerable to chronic disconnection. Walker (2005) notes connections and disconnections in relationships occur in a context that has been “raced, engendered, sexualized and stratified within

the context of culture.” While experiences of disconnections are natural and unavoidable, implicit cultural bias, can negatively impact faculty of color (hooks, 1984). There is significant correlation between identity, culture, and ability to make and maintain growth fostering relationships.

RCT and intersectionality as an applied concept were developed from a feminist perspective (Hill Collins, 1994; Miller & Stiver, 1976). Both theories recognize sociopolitical structures which create power imbalance based on race and gender. Marsiglia and Kulis (2015) define intersectionality as the intersection of race, class, gender, and multiple oppressions affect the individual. Acknowledging a person’s identity and its ability to shape experience is critical. Like the social work value base, RCT promotes ethical and culturally competent practice. In this conceptual paper, the author argues that faculty of color are more likely to experience disconnection in relationships because of their racial identity. The author will further examine a conceptual framework grounded in relational-cultural theory and intersectionality theory to provide considerations for social work programs.

Conceptual Framework

Relational connection as a concept has been explored across disciplines. In social work, relational connection has been utilized to explore faith integration, (Jackson, 2021) mentoring (Beyene et al., 2002), teaching (Schwartz et al., 2019) and the social work curriculum (Gunderson, 2018). Each literary work represents an understanding of the critical nature of connection in role performance. In her career changing TEDTalk, *The Power of Vulnerability*, Brene Brown, PhD, MSW captivated her audience with this statement, “We are hard wired for connection.” Connection is desirable. Inherent in every human being is the need to be seen, heard, understood and to matter (Jackson, 2021). As previously noted, when there is no

connection, or broken, inconsistent connection exists, there are psychological and social consequences (disconnection). Psychological and social development are impacted by connection in relationships. This is evidenced by Bowlby's attachment theory, Freud's psychoanalytic theory, and the ecological/systems perspective (Birkenmaier & Berg-Werger, 2017). Each theory represents the significance of relationship and its impact on development and the influence of one's interactions with their environment. Naturally, one's ability to be seen, heard, and understood impacts communication skills, self-esteem, and relationships. Hence, connection breeds safety, security, and a sense of worth. Teaching requires connection and a good relationship is one that promotes authenticity, mutual empowerment, a sense of worth, empathy and growth (Miller & Stiver, 1994) a desire for more connection, (Jordan, 2010) and builds relational confidence.

Relational Confidence in Social Interactions

Interactions have meaning. Marsiglia & Kulis (2015) defines symbolic interactionism as the idea that individuals form a sense of self through interactions with others (p.103). Those interactions have the power to create doubt about the way one sees herself versus the ways she believes others see her. Hence, this impacts connection. Think about the first time you were playing on the schoolyard with your peers. Many of us could likely draw from memory a time we felt connected as a solidified member of the group. Others may recall painful experiences of being "left out" or considered "different". Whether it was being the last kid picked for a game or not being picked at all, the feeling of disconnection is very real. Those interactions may cause a person to question the way she sees herself based on interactions with her peers. It may have been the glasses worn, the texture of her hair, freckles on the face, body type or perceived ability to be successful at the task at hand. Whatever it was, it may have or had a lasting effect on one's

sense of belonging and engagement with others. Experiences with others shape worldview and affects behavior and/or performance across contexts. Naturally, repeated encounters of misunderstanding may render an individual defensive or withdrawn. This historical perspective provides critical insight into the shared experiences of people of color. Hill-Collins (1993) summarizes these experiences as the cumulative effect of living within multiple structures of oppression.

Keith-Lucas (1985) challenges readers to consider the reality that what we think about people impacts the way we treat them (p.10). It is imperative that social work students, faculty, and institutions to begin to develop critical awareness to understand the unique experiences faculty of color face in their relationships with students, faculty, and their respective institutions. Quite frankly, disconnection because of language, orientation, skin color, gender or implicit bias can be detrimental for success in the academy. Identifying sources of disconnection is important. While culture and identity may hold a sense of pride, it could also be the source of disconnection. Think back to the kid on the schoolyard. The kid has no control over the way others see her. Disconnection in relationships occur quite often. The suggestion is not that other faculty automatically foster good relational health with students. The point for consideration is the role identity plays and the degree to which faculty of color disproportionality experience disconnection in their roles in social work education. To understand requires empathy and a culturally informed perspective. Mutual empathy, a desired presence for connection, can be difficult across difference (Jordan, 2010, p. 60).

Literature Review

Relational Challenges

Relational disconnection occurs for several reasons. Isolation (Louis et al., 2017; Spafford et al., 2006), perceived inferiority status (Hill-Collins, 1993; Sue et al., 2008) and microaggressions (Kelly & Varghese, 2018; Sue et al., 2008) are three significant causes and results of disconnection. Differences in power and privilege (Miller & Stiver, 1976) contribute to feelings of isolation. Thus, they constrain one's ability to connect with one another even when we think we are engaged in dialogue across difference (Hill-Collins, 1993). Perceived intellectual inferiority status coupled with failed empathic responses (Jordan, 2010) to experiences of oppression and implicit bias impede relational connection. Microaggressions (Sue et al., 2008) disproportionality experienced by people of color, can cause harm in relationship building. Identified as more damaging than overt racism (Wong et al., 2014) these subtle and implicit aggressions are hidden in the consciousness (Sue et al., 2008) making it more difficult to address. Highlighting the complexity of experiences for faculty of color and specific relational challenges is no easy feat. Navigating relational challenges burdens minorities in the relationship building process because they must somehow overcome implicit bias to attempt connection. This is an impossible feat and an unfair, unjust expectation rooted in this nation's history of discrimination and marginalization.

Historical Considerations

When considering the collective experiences of people of color, one must look back through history. Hill-Collins (1993) challenges patriarchy to recognize the cumulative effect of multiple structures of oppression. For example, people of color carry those experiences consciously or subconsciously. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume they are defenseless to the ideological constructs which were created to marginalize them. The Council on Social Work Education Commission for Diversity and Social and Economic Justice has established affiliate

groups to address the collective needs of historically marginalized students and faculty. The affiliate groups include the: Asian and Pacific Islander Social Work Educators Association, Association of Latino Social Work Educators, Black Social Work Educations Association, Indigenous & Tribal Social Work Educators, Korean American Social Work Educators Association, and the Asian Faculty & Doctoral Students Group (CSWE, n.d.).

Carl A. Scott, a pioneer for justice in education, created the Committee on Minority Groups in the early 1970s. The committee first sought to discuss the differences between ethnic minority and educationally disadvantaged students. Carl Scott was instrumental in identifying and addressing the needs of minority groups to mitigate the challenges faced with access to and success in education. Understanding economic and social justice, Carl Scott was intentional in faculty recruitment efforts, representation, relevant curriculum and support for minority students and faculty (CSWE, 2017). Facing disadvantage within the educational system is not new. What continues to be a justice issue is the degree to which oppressive ideology shapes the experience of faculty of color in social work education.

Kelly & Varghese (2018) propose a social justice approach to education as one which acknowledges the impact of white supremacy for people of color (p. 882). While there is growing diversity in educational institutions and schools of social work, the historical impact of patriarchy has left a stain on the educational system. The United States has a history deeply rooted in racial tension. Expressions of weapon bias (Amodio & Swencionis, 2018), prejudice and stereotyping have surfaced in educational assessments, often to the detriment of minorities. The presence of bias negatively impacts the educator-student relationship.

The historic supreme court ruling of *Brown vs. Board of Education* was intended to counteract systemic old patterns of bias, prejudice, and micro-aggressions by integrating

education, thus providing equal opportunity for students independent of race, ethnicity and gender (Carter, Skiba, Arredondo & Pollock, 2017). Recognizing the need to dismantle the oppressive structure, the ruling sought to provide equal access to education for minorities. There remains a gap in literature which explores the shared experiences of faculty of color in educational institutions. Identifying the ways in which systemic patterns of bias, prejudice and microaggressions impede connection is critical for relationship building in social work education.

Oppression and microaggressions, by way of microinsults and microinvalidations, impede connection and have a significant psychosocial impact for minorities. Sue et al. (2008) describe these subtle psychological assaults as the new face of racism. Invisible in nature, microinsults are demeaning and often convey insensitivity. Microinvalidations are actions that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiences of people of color (Sue et al., 2008). They can be verbal, nonverbal, or environmental. Telling the kid in the schoolyard that she is being too sensitive about frequently being the last chosen, or that she should be lucky to be chosen at all are forms of microassaults. Both invalidate her feelings and the reality of her experience. Neither have anything to do with her ability or performance. Being minority, or female, or queer impacts perception and treatment received. Understanding the connection between implicit bias because of identity and the psychological impact on relationship building for faculty of color is paramount for schools of social work.

Dismantling oppression requires acknowledgment of its existence. The impact of other forms of implicit bias disproportionately affects faculty of color in course evaluations, tenure, and promotion (Louis et al., 2017; Spafford et al., 2006). As a newly appointed Lecturer, this author was forewarned about taking course evaluations to heart because faculty of color at her

newly appointed institution are evaluated more harshly than other faculty teaching a Human Diversity course. The revelation was a jarring and painful realization that implicit bias is omnipresent. Hence, lack of support and failed empathic responses to this reality can affect confidence and performance.

Psychosocial Considerations

To promote connection and academic success, it is important to bridge the gap between education and psychosocial well-being of educators (Kelly & Varghese, 2018). For faculty of color, that means understanding the link between environmental conditions and its impact on role performance. Naturally, repeated experiences of disconnection create tension and arrests authenticity. Failed empathic responses weighs on the mind of the person who experiences them, and a common coping strategy is to ignore or not acknowledge injustice to protect well-being (Spafford et al., 2006). Social work institutions want faculty to be well to build relationships with students, administrators, and constituents. Building empathy is a necessary step for movement toward connection.

Hill-Collins (1993) presents a profound question when discussing empathy. “How can you hope to assess my character without knowing the details of the circumstances I face?” (p.43). The exchange of empathy is a two-way street. When coming from the subordinate place of privilege, it can be more challenging. Recall from the previous narrative described earlier, the kid in the schoolyard. Because she’s chosen last, she may struggle to empathize with those who decide her place on the team. She must try to reconcile the way she is seen by others, through no fault or control of her own. Microassaults and oppression have profound lasting effects and impacts trust. Trust is necessary for relationship building. Connection requires trust. Fostering

good relational health is produced through trust, mutual empathy, and safety (Jordan, 2010). Each element is dependent upon the other to build relationship.

Environmental Considerations

Institutional culture has the power to promote or impede good relational health. An assessment of workplace conditions, ideology and practice for its faculty and student body equips an institution for critical analysis. Praxis, the transformative cyclical process of action, reflection, and action (Marsiglia & Kulis, 2016) is necessary for social work institutions. Identifying the presence of academic colonialism, (Hill-Collins, 1993), unequal power which can be exploitative in nature, is a great starting point. Selecting the kid because she's a girl, or the kid with a disability for diversity can be exploitive. Meeting the growing needs for diversity while honoring the individual and collective cultural identities of its faculty of color requires balance. This culturally informed approach was demonstrated throughout the history and growth of the social work profession's core value system.

Relevance for the Social Work Profession

Social Work Pioneer Jane Addams cautions against developing insensibility and hardness in the world (Addams, 2002). She asserts hardness as a lack of imagination which impedes empathy for the experiences of others. Understanding collective experiences and the nature of implicit bias is a social responsibility and ethical obligation for the profession. Consciousness of an institution's culture is essential when entering relationships with vulnerable and historically oppressed populations. In this case, faculty of color is the identified population.

Social work core values and humanistic values require social work professionals and educators to recognize the inherent dignity and worth of all individuals. Critical Race theory recognizes the experiences of others in relation to their social position (Delgado & Stefancic,

2017). People of color endure jeopardy, a result of intersectionality, that makes them vulnerable to experiences of prejudice, racism, and stereotyping. The call for social work professionals to eradicate the grand challenges of society requires educators to operate through a lens of social equity and justice. A necessary step toward equity and justice for faculty of color includes the exploration and identification of implicit conditions in educational settings.

Implications for Social Work Education

Given the nature of the social work profession, its institutions of higher learning are in a prime position to foster connection between students and faculty. Connection can be achieved through a just promotion and celebration of diversity. Celebrating diversity can be demonstrated through a historical review of the diverse voices of the social work profession, particularly those not frequently mentioned in the telling of the development of social work. Including diverse voices in syllabi, recruiting diverse faculty, and scheduling guest speakers to discuss emergence of cultural theories or best practice are additional ways institutions can promote and celebrate diversity.

Recruiting and supporting faculty of color requires a culturally informed and sensitive environment. Social work schools must assess the condition of relational health between students and faculty, as well as faculty and the institution. Climate surveys, cultural competence trainings, faculty and student workshops, and candid discussions with administration are frequently used means of institutional assessment. Action cannot precede assessment. A critical assessment of diverse experiences, challenges and reality require a healthy measure of institutional introspection and analysis. Social work schools must explore, identify, and address its culture and the conditions of its environment which impede good relational health.

Movement toward growth fostering relationships can be challenging. Fostering connection across difference can be difficult. Relationship building requires skills on the individual and institutional level. Hope for diversity, equity and inclusion in social work institutions is made possible through action. Affirmative Action is a means to achieve equal opportunity (Kwok and Tam, 2003). There are misconceptions about affirmative action. Understanding misconceptions could aid in mobilizing a culturally informed process of hiring, promotion and support of faculty of color.

There are two common misconceptions. The first is the idea that affirmative action is a form of reverse discrimination and the second misconception is that it lowers or changes standards. To eliminate systemic discrimination in educational settings, myths about affirmative action must be refuted (Kwok and Tam, 2003). Discrimination is historical, systemic, and ingrained in the fabric of modern society. It is mobilized explicitly and implicitly. Whether affirmative action is effective remains a debate. There is hope for social work. With a mission to enhance the overall well-being of individuals and institutions, social work is committed to the promotion of social justice. In this commitment lies the opportunity for change. Faculty thrive with institutional support. Support can be a “safe space” for reporting incidents, candid faculty conversations or committees for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Acknowledgment is communicated through action. When acknowledgement, exploration, empathy, and action are present within the institution, growth fostering relationships are produced. Faculty of color thrive in their roles in supportive environments. Hope can create change and propel movement toward growth fostering relationships in social work education.

Movement toward growth fostering relationships requires five good things (Jordan, 2010). They are zest, clarity, a sense of worth, productivity and a desire for more connection.

Zest could be conceptualized as the special something that causes each party in the relationship to thrive together. Clarity can be conceptualized as mutually identified purpose. A sense of worth includes respect and upholding the inherent dignity and worth of each party in the relationship. Worth can be demonstrated between faculty and student or faculty and institution. The presence of these first three concepts creates productivity, thriving in role performance. The culmination of the five good things equals a desire for more connection. It is the essence and outcome (Schwartz et al., 2019) of a healthy relationship. Hope lies in the desire for more connection and can be an anchor for establishing good relational health for faculty of color in social work education.

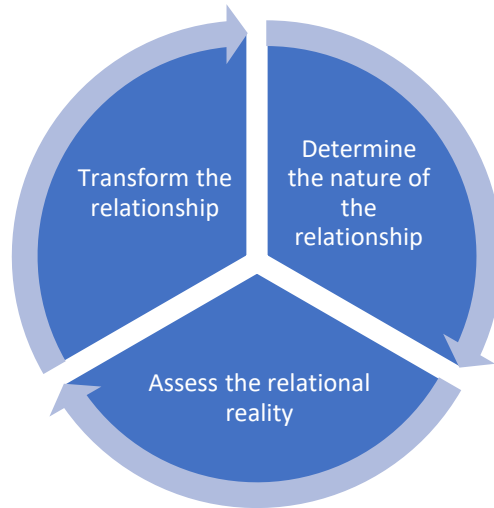
A Transformative Model

While relationship building remains a complex process, movement and growth are evidenced when mutuality exists. Transformational change can take place on the personal and environmental level when institutions create safe spaces (Gunderson et al., 2020) for its faculty to address perceived and lived reality. Relational disconnection is common for people of color. Attitude, code switching, image negotiation nor performance can prevent biased interactions for minorities in the workplace. There remains hope. The D.A.T model of relational engagement provides institutions with a tool to evaluate faculty, staff and student concerns and explore the nature of these relationships.

The D.A.T model makes three assumptions: connection is desired, each entity in the relationship possesses relational skills, and there is environmental support for change. This transformational model acknowledges that relational disconnection is a natural occurrence (Jordan, 2010) and implicit bias is always present (Sue et al., 2018; Walker, 2008; Wong et al, 2014). Despite these two realities, transformative engagement is possible.

Figure 1.

D.A.T Transformational Model of Relational Engagement



Action Steps	Concepts	Questions
Determine	“The relationship” 5 Good things Connection Disconnection	What is the nature of the relationship? Are the 5 good things present? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes? =connection • No? =disconnection
Assess	Reality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived • Experienced 	What is the perceived reality of each party? What is the relationship producing for each party? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examining the impact of the relationship
Transform	Safety Mattering Community	How can safety be created between entities? How can both entities demonstrate mattering of the other? How can both entities create and transform the environment (community)?

Summary

Highlighting the complexity of experiences for faculty of color is challenging. Faculty of color navigate invisible processes which unfairly impede connection in relationships. Exploring conditions and identifying challenges in educational settings is a necessary step for movement toward relational health. Facing disadvantage within the educational system is not new. What continues to be a justice issue is the degree to which oppressive ideology shapes the experience of faculty of color in social work education. Having to mitigate unfair assumptions based on intersecting components of identity is unjust and unfair. Educational institutions have the power to create a growth fostering, culturally sensitive environment for faculty of color. Understanding the connection between implicit bias because of identity and the psychological impact on relationship building for faculty of color is paramount for schools of social work and beneficial for the social work profession.

Discussion

Bias is an oppressive factor which negatively impacts people of color, personally and professionally. Mobilized through microaggression, microassaults and microinvalidations (Sue et al., 2008) bias disproportionately creates relational disconnection for faculty of color in comparison to white faculty. In educational settings, bias can produce unjust consequences including unfair performance evaluation, obstacles to promotion, and misunderstanding (Haynes et al., 2020; Patterson, 2018). Bias also impedes connection in relationships (Jordan, 2017; Schwartz et al., 2019). Consequently, the psychosocial impact of chronic disconnection is lasting. Social work programs can mitigate some of the challenges. Faculty development and institutional transparency is critical. Creating a just and equitable environment fosters connection and models relational health for social work faculty of color and future social work professionals.

Social work core values and the established Code of Ethics provide guidelines for best practice; however, there is a gap in the literature in addressing the relational consequences as a result of historical, environmental, psychological and social factors for faculty of color in their role as educators. To explore the relationship between identity and role experience for faculty of color is critical. To offer strategies for institutions to address the identified challenges can be transformational.

Implications for Social Work Education

Schools of social work are responsible for the culture of their environments. While climate surveys and faculty trainings are not new methods for exploring faculty experiences, they are concrete actions to implement. Cultural competence must be reinforced through transparent policies and practice. Intentional movement toward diversity and inclusion fosters connection in relationships. Reinforcement communicates authenticity in an institution's approach to care for its faculty. Implementing zero tolerance policies and mandating discussions and trainings to educate and address biased behavior is critical to the growth of social work faculty and the development of future social work practitioners. Social work programs model growth fostering relationships by caring for its most vulnerable faculty members.

Intentionality and transparency communicate institutional values. Exploring unique challenges and implementing strategies which address, mitigate, and prevent disconnection is reflection in action. The future of social work education is diverse. Failing to understand the role intersectionality plays in the lived experiences for faculty of color is detrimental to the growth of social work programs who engage students of color and are responsible to prepare future social work professionals. For students of color, representation matters. For faculty of color, identity

matters. A relational-cultural school of social work is one which establishes and maintain good relational health for its marginalized students and faculty.

Recommendations for Higher Education

Unconscious bias trainings are a common approach. Cultural competence training can be proactive, interactive, or reactive. These types of trainings are beneficial for institutions as it can communicate institutional values, culture, and expectations. It can be an effective proactive pursuit toward equitable and fair treatment. Climate surveys are an interactive approach. Social work institutions can assess and identify challenges related to negative faculty experiences through the use of climate surveys. The power to shift the culture of the institution can be initiated as a result of climate surveys. Each of these approaches can mitigate relational-cultural challenges within the environment.

Faculty development, during the hiring process and upon hire, provides a prime opportunity for assessment and training. Bias training, online or on ground, can be initiated during the hiring process. By having applicants complete training, institutions can review results with candidates and communicate the institutions mission and environmental culture. Results can be utilized for personalized faculty development. This is a proactive approach to create a growth fostering environment. Candid faculty conversations, formally and informally, can promote a space for “being heard” and nurturing empathy across difference. Inviting faculty of color to lead annual workshops or trainings in their respective areas of expertise can also translate a culturally inclusive environment. Celebrating diversity extends beyond words and single events. It must be an intentional and continual process.

Future Studies and Research

Combining intersectionality theory and RCT as a conceptual framework is relevant to examine the interrelatedness of factors which foster or impede connection. Psychosocial theories, environmental theories and the social work value base identify relationship as critical to human development. Clear challenges have been identified and are experienced through symbolic interactions with students, other faculty and within institutions. Navigating bias to attempt connection is burdensome. Discrimination in various forms have historical roots for people of color. Critical analysis of an institutions' ideology and history is essential, yet complex. Dismantling oppressive practices in faculty evaluations, promotion and opportunity requires acknowledgment of implicit bias and unjust practice. Arguably, this could be viewed as an easy feat for the social work profession. Yet, the profession has grappled with tensions surrounding its own identity. Faculty of color require empathy across difference and support from social work institutions. In educational settings, that includes a clear institutional identity with culturally informed processes.

This conceptual paper does not intend to pontify that faculty of color are unable to establish authentic relationships with students, faculty, and institutions. It does not further suggest faculty of color are undervalued, powerless members of the academy. What it highlights are real experiences rooted in history which may or may not contribute to experiences of disconnection. The psychosocial impact is real. Social work programs can exercise educational sovereignty by adjusting its approach and care for faculty of color in tangible ways. Social work educators and programs can conduct climate surveys and train its faculty, staff, and students on cultural competence. By anticipating needs, social work programs equip themselves to address the aforementioned challenges faculty of face may face in their roles in the academy. The

approach can be proactive or reactive. The inclusion of the transformational model in social work can change institutional culture and consequently, role experience.

Conclusion

Bias, discrimination, and oppression are associated with identity. Jeopardy, a concept of intersectionality, is ever present in the lives of marginalized people. There is no difference in the academy. Social Work faculty of color may experience similar challenges in their roles as educators as they experience in the world. Environmental challenges related to identity are given. There is sufficient evidence which addresses the psychosocial impact of disconnection. What did not emerge in the literature is the direct impact on teaching. Despite commonly identified challenges, evidence does not show a lack of motivation, stifled creativity, or a diminished sense of self-efficacy. The relationship between relational-cultural disconnection and its impact on teaching for faculty of color is unclear. The evidence is clear that identity matters. It impacts the relationship building process and shapes experiences. Relational health is indicated through growth fostering relationships. Implications for social work education and institutions include clear evaluative processes of professional and organizational culture, and its relationship to the profession's mission and core values.

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**Identity Matters: Exploring Relational Health with Faculty of Color in Social Work
Education**

Shelita Lynn Jackson

School of Social Work, University of St. Thomas

Annual Conference Presentation for the National Association of Social Workers-PA Chapter

Conference Dates: October 25-27, 2020

Author Note

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Abstract

Faculty of color experience unique challenges in the academy associated with their racial identity. Relational-Cultural theory (RCT) offers a way of understanding interactions within the context of relationships and provides a critical lens for identifying good relational health. It is through connection with others that relational capacity thrives. Integrating the concepts of intersectionality (identity politics and jeopardy) with critical race theory (race as a critical construct that impacts lived experience) encapsulates the conceptual framework for this presentation. This workshop explores relational health as a concept of well-being. From a culturally grounded perspective, historical, psychosocial, and environmental implications of relational disconnection for faculty of color are presented.

Keywords: identity, faculty of color, relational health

Presentation Abstract

The conference presentation, *Identity Matters: Exploring Relational Health with Faculty of Color*, was presented at the National Association of Social Workers PA annual conference on October 26, 2020. This 30-minute workshop focused on relational health as a concept of well-being. From a culturally grounded perspective, I presented the historical, psychosocial, and environmental implications of relational disconnection for faculty of color. I also explored self and perceived identity as contributors to well-being. The general feedback was overwhelmingly positive and encouraging. There continues to be space for relational health as a concept of well-being, particularly for faculty of color in their roles as educators. I feel affirmed in choosing this topic to study and to add to the growing conversation surrounding relational health.

I presented this research at three professional conferences: the LILY Teaching Conference in May 2020, the NASW-PA annual conference in October 2020, and the NACSW annual conference in November 2020. While each conference offered its own focus, presenting my research felt seamless and relevant for all three. I received similar feedback from each, all overwhelmingly positive. The study of relational health is being incorporated into the social work curriculum as a way to transform community (Gunderson, Graff & Craddock, 2018). I view these critical conversations about relational health for marginalized faculty as an intentional way to be antiracist, (Kendi, 2020) ethical, and culturally aware.

Slide 1

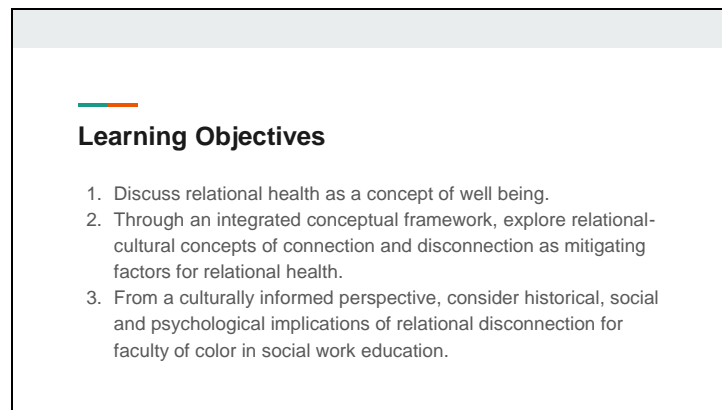


**Identity Matters:
Exploring Relational Health
with Faculty of Color**

Shelita L. Jackson, MSW, DSW Candidate
NASW-PA Annual Conference 2020



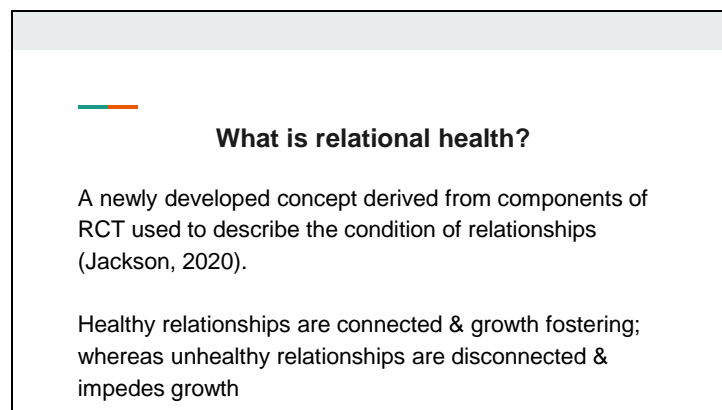
Slide 2



Learning Objectives

1. Discuss relational health as a concept of well being.
2. Through an integrated conceptual framework, explore relational-cultural concepts of connection and disconnection as mitigating factors for relational health.
3. From a culturally informed perspective, consider historical, social and psychological implications of relational disconnection for faculty of color in social work education.

Slide 3




What is relational health?

A newly developed concept derived from components of RCT used to describe the condition of relationships (Jackson, 2020).


Healthy relationships are connected & growth fostering;
whereas unhealthy relationships are disconnected & impedes growth

Slide 4




Relational Concepts

Connection Disconnection



Slide 5




Connection

the presence of "five good things" (Miller & Stiver, 1978) that characterize a growth-fostering relationship:

- 1) increased zest (vitality),
- 2) increased ability to take action (empowerment),
- 3) increased clarity (a clearer picture of one's self, the other, and the relationship),
- 4) increased sense of worth, and
- 5) a desire for relationships beyond that particular relationship

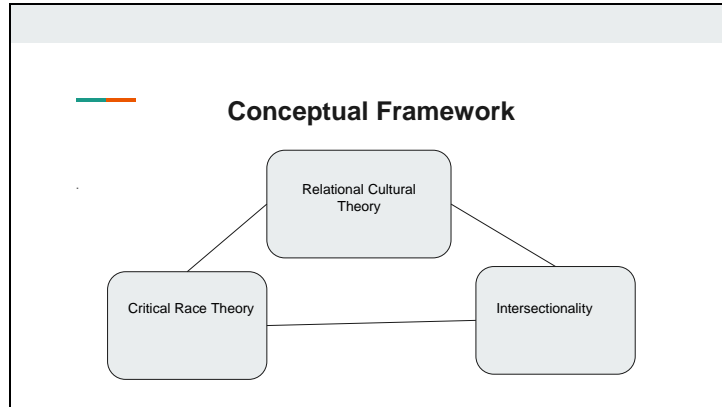
Slide 6



Disconnection

- an inevitable part of being in relationship
- caused by empathic failures and relational violations (Jordan, 2010)

Slide 7

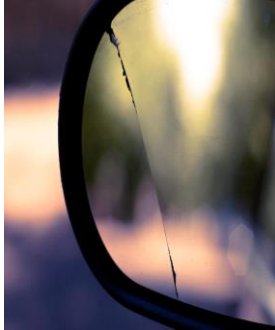


Slide 8

Identity

Self

Self with Others



The slide features the text "Identity", "Self", and "Self with Others" on the left. On the right is a photograph of a cracked mirror. The mirror's surface is split vertically, and the reflection shows a bright, hazy light, possibly a sunset or sunrise, with colors of orange, yellow, and blue.

Slide 9


Identity & Faculty of Color

Beyond code switching (Tatum, 1993), people of color must negotiate image presentations (hair, language, dress, diction) in order to quell stereotypes to meet the comfort level of others (DeAngelo, 2018) including intra peer groups (Elias & Morton-Padovano, 2017). Self-efficacy and role performance are impacted by relational exchanges within the environment. This is the cumulative effect of multiple structures of oppression (Hill-Collins, 1993) which are woven into the fabric of daily living, both consciously and subconsciously for people of color. Repeated, failed empathic responses creates inconsistent connection, broken connection and disconnection (Jordan, 2010). While there is a growing diversity in educational institutions and schools of social work, the historical impact of racism and patriarchy has left a stain on the educational system (Jackson, 2020) and has generational psychological pain for people, students and faculty of color. The

Slide 10

Factors which foster connection are....


1. EMPATHY
2. EMPOWERMENT
3. MATTERING
4. MUTUALITY
5. RESPECT



Slide 11

Factors which impede connection are....

1. BIAS
2. LACK OF EMPATHY/FAILED EMPATHIC RESPONSES
3. MISUNDERSTANDING
4. SHAME
5. RACISM




Slide 12

Institutional Recommendations

- Bias Assessment & Training
- Climate Surveys
- Faculty Development
- Institutional Transparency
- *Proactive vs. Reactive Engagement

Slide 13



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Slide 14



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